Women Find Their Way Back
Thanks to a Shining Light

Substance abuse recovery program
in McDonough helps women
in Henry County defeat their addictions.

by Michael Boylan
Editor

Shining Light Ministries, based in McDonough, opened its doors in November 2007. Since then, founder Teresa Bestwick, her staff and countless others have helped women deal with substance abuse and find a path to recovery and redemption.

Bestwick’s testimony begins with a tragic tale of physical abuse and substance abuse from some of her family members. She started drinking when she was 14 and soon started using drugs. Although she began to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings later, it wasn’t until she was 41 that she had had enough.

“One day I looked at my little 4-year-old angel; she looked so scared and so lost,” Bestwick said. "She drew me a picture, and with tears rolling down her face, she said, ‘Mama, where have you gone? Please come back.’ That was it for me. I decided that I couldn’t do this anymore.

“I wanted to be happy, to be free from my past. I wanted my children to have a happy childhood. ... And I wanted to get the hate out of my heart. It was midnight and I found I couldn’t sleep. The great agony of defeat once again brought me to my knees. That is where (God) whispered softly, ‘I will heal your broken heart and bind up your wounds; by my stripes you are healed.’"

Bestwick began speaking to women in the Henry County jail about her experiences, encouraging them to stop taking drugs and find their way to a sober life.

“One evening, I saw a frail young woman that had nothing to live for, no place to go and left on a curb,” she said. “I went home and sobbed, thinking, ‘How dare I leave her to die.’ It was then that I had a vision to establish Shining Light Ministries Inc.”

Shining Light is a nonprofit organization that works to help women in the Henry County jail change their lives. The drug and alcohol program is a comprehensive rehabilitation using moral recognition therapy, behavior modification, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups, and positive support as well as individual and group counseling and life skills training.

Residents enter the program in Phase I, which is a lockdown, highly structured and disciplined. Through performance-driven incentives, residents are then able to advance to Phase II, which is a transitional home that provides a sober environment to continue long-term sobriety. The average length of stay in Phase I and Phase II is approximately 12 months.

Phase I of the recovery program is completed in a lock-in facility. It features a structured home environment, Bible study, counseling from licensed professionals, community service projects, nutrition workshops and more. Phase II is completed in the transitional house. The women take classes about domes-

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In April, the local Rotary Club helped Shining Light Ministries paint the main house.
Photo courtesy of Shining Light Ministries

Teresa Bestwick has walked the path of recovery and helps lead other women on their way.
Photo courtesy of Shining Light Ministries
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tic violence, anger management, GED preparation, financial budgeting, life skills, parenting and job-readiness, among other subjects.

There are 16 beds at Shining Light, and the $10,000 a month needed to keep the facility running is raised through donations, grants and fundraisers.

There is always a need, though, and Bestwick and many others know that a program such as Shining Light often can make a bigger impact for an individual than jail time can. It costs approximately $12,000 to care for an in-patient resident at Shining Light, less than half of what it costs to care for an inmate in the county jail for a year.

A recent graduate of Shining Light, Mindy Shellnut, said going into the program from jail made a significant difference in her life. Bestwick met Shellnut on one of her visits to jail, had her case re-opened and asked for Shellnut to be mandated to Shining Light.

“We love the judges,” said Bestwick. “They know we have an 80 percent success rate for people to stay clean and sober.”

Shellnut’s experience with Shining Light sparked a passion to help others. She now is a senior at Point University, on her way to a degree in counseling. She also has been reunited with her family, including her teenage daughter, and is off probation.

“I have a passion for helping people,” Shellnut said. “I want to save someone’s life like someone saved mine.”

Bestwick finds that the probation office is supportive of the program as well. The patients can contact the probation office through fax while they are at Shining Light and don’t have to report for the year they are in the program.

Shellnut stated one of the biggest assets that the Shining Light program gave her was separation from society in a place she knew she was safe.

“I had been on drugs for 15 years. This gave me a chance to learn who I was without the chemical,” Shellnut said.

Bestwick agreed, adding that Shining Light removes the distractions that people may find in outpatient programs.

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Women in the recovery program pray with Lt. G.D. Brownlee of the Henry County Sheriff’s Department, a Shining Light Ministries board member.

Photo courtesy of Shining Light Ministries

Six Years of Helping Women Recover

2007

The year Shining Light was founded. Since then, it has helped dozens reclaim their sobriety and their lives.

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The pantry at Shining Light is stocked but always could use more to take care of the residents.

The Shining Light Ministries program allows residents to transition through the phases of their recoveries.

- **Residential Recovery Phase I**, the intensive, faith-based recovery program for alcohol and drug abuse usually last six to seven months, depending on the needs of the resident. This structured, home environment has 24-hour supervision and constant monitoring. Behavioral stabilization, criminal thinking, group therapy and principle-based, 12-step workshops help residents learn to enjoy life without substance use, and learn to develop true and healthy relationships.

- **Residents then move to Transitional Living Phase II.** The main advantage of transitional living is that the resident can share any obstacles they may encounter in the real world that normally might trigger them to relapse. Being able to return to a safe transitional housing environment where the resident gets love and support can guide them on how to work through life without alcohol or substance abuse.

- **Shining Light Ministries** has been approved by the Georgia Association of Recovery Residences and the Pardon and Parole Board. “This is very important to us,” founder Teresa Bestwick said.

- **The organization also** has been active with the Chamber of Commerce, serving for six years in a row.

There are usually about six or seven graduates of the Shining Light program each year, although one year 14 women made it through. It isn’t easy, but it does work.

“This is the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” Shellnut said. “It took every piece of the program to get me where I am.”

Bestwick agreed, adding that the program forced the women to grow up.

“This is a place where you get gut-wrenching honest,” she said. “It isn’t easy. If it were easy, everyone would do it.”

Shellnut, like many women in the program, stayed in the transitional house for a few months after the program to find a job and housing. Bestwick said this is a way to keep them on track and make sure they can enact their plans for what is next.

Shining Light is in desperate need of financial support. Donations help pay for five staff members, utilities, office supplies, cleaning supplies, gas for transportation, medical, dental, 16 warm beds, material for workshops, purchasing Bibles for the Shining Light jail ministry, and purchasing 28 gallons of milk, cheese and eggs along with 1,200 meals a month.

For more information, visit shininglighthouse.com or call 678-325-9025 or 770-954-9496.

This house is full of healing and healthy spirits as women complete the recovery program and transition to a clean and sober lifestyle.

Photo courtesy of Shining Light Ministries.