

SPOTLIGHT ON MISSION

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House of Hesed restores hope through love

Residence provides a home for those with HIV/AIDS

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Manitoba Correspondent

WINNIPEG, MB—When Maureen “Moe” Feakes’ best friend died of AIDS in 1991, she was devastated. Determined to make a difference, she began volunteering with an HIV/AIDS service organization.

She was shocked to witness first hand the conditions some people living with the disease live in.

“When I saw some of those rooming houses that people were living in, I wouldn’t let my dogs stay in some of those places,” Feakes says.

“They were deplorable. Also, a lot of people were staying in the hospital for a really long time because they had nowhere else to go. I guess I was really shocked to see that people in Winnipeg were living that way. It was really upsetting.”

Feakes prayed about what she could do to help. She says that in 1997, God clearly spoke to her about starting a home for men and women living with HIV/AIDS.

As a result, Feakes opened House of Hesed in 1998.

Taking its name from a Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to describe “the eternally loyal, compassionate, extravagant, non-judgemental love” of God, the house provides a home for persons living with HIV/AIDS, regardless of their race, creed, gender or sexual orientation.

The home-like setting promotes the physical, emotional, social and spiritual quality of life of persons affected by HIV/AIDS.

Located on Edmonton Street, the house is three storeys and roughly 4,000 square feet. There are 11 bedrooms, six bathrooms, two laundry rooms, a kitchen, a medicine room, a visitor’s room, a screened-in porch and two rec rooms.

Over the years, more than 80 people have stayed at the house, which can accommodate 10 individuals at a time.

Feakes says the people living in the house are various ages and in various stages of health. House of Hesed staff help by liaising with doctors, giving residents medication, cooking for them and doing laundry for them.

“We try to meet their needs, whatever that looks like,” Feakes says, adding that none of the staff are health care professionals, but that House of Hesed relies heavily on a network of support it has established with health organizations in the city.

“We’re not a hospice; we’re a transition house,” Feakes adds. “We help people transitioning from the hospital to the community, from another province to this one, or transitioning from supportive living to independent living or transitioning from life to death.”

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 2,300 to 4,500 new HIV infections in Canada in 2005. That year, 58,000 people were estimated to have HIV/AIDS, with 27 per cent of those people being undiagnosed.

“The disease isn’t going away,” Feakes says. “It has become manageable—there’s less people dying—but it’s still a very serious, lethal disease.”

She adds that there is still a stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, and many people think of it as something that happens only in Africa. In reality, it affects numerous Manitobans.

“Just because you know someone has HIV/AIDS, doesn’t mean you should treat them any differently,” Feakes says.



House of Hesed director Moe Feakes and outgoing staff member Tami Duff are part of a team dedicated to bringing hope to people living with HIV/AIDS.

Feakes and the House of Hesed staff, who are all Christian, never ask residents how they acquired the disease. They simply try to show the residents the love of Christ.

“Our tagline is, ‘restoring hope through love,’ because that’s what we hope to do here,” she says. “We want to let them know that they are valuable, they are precious. God sees them as invaluable.”

More information can be found at www.houseofhesed.ca.

Spots

- House of Hesed’s mission is to provide a home for persons living with HIV/AIDS, sharing mercy, hope, dignity and peace.
- The house depends on donations from individuals, churches and businesses for 70 per cent of its funding.
- House of Hesed is holding its annual dessert reception fundraiser on Wednesday, September 21 at 7 p.m. at the Winnipeg Convention Centre. Tickets are \$15 each and can be purchased by calling Rebecca at 772-4793.
- Proceeds from the annual Run for Aids, which is hosted by Going Beyond, a group from Grant Memorial Baptist Church, will go toward House of Hesed and Beacon of Hope. Anyone can register for the run, which takes place on Saturday, September 24 at 10 a.m. at St. Vital Park. Visit www.runningroom.com to register for the five-kilometre run or for the three and five-kilometre walks.
- Feakes’ vision includes eventually expanding House of Hesed. She is hoping to acquire an apartment block for residents who are independent but who are still looking for clean, safe, affordable housing as well as some support.

House of Hesed Annual Dessert Reception Fundraiser

Wednesday, September 21, 2011
7:00pm (doors open at 6:30)
Tickets \$15 silent auction
Convention Centre - Main floor
375 York Avenue

Call Moe for tickets (204) 415-1459
(please phone to reserve a dietary option)



OUR MISSION IS TO PROVIDE A HOME FOR PERSONS LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS, SHARING MERCY, HOPE, DIGNITY, AND PEACE.