

131 YEARS OF SERVICE



## WHAT IS A PEER NAVIGATOR?



# A Walk in Their Shoes



Dear Friends,

I continue to be amazed at God's work at Denver Rescue Mission. This month, we want to introduce you to a group of people who serve our guests in a very personal way that has a tremendous impact—our peer navigators.

Peer navigators have their own lived experience with homelessness and have successfully transitioned into housing. These staff members have walked in the shoes of those we serve. But as exciting as their own successful transition is, the really incredible thing about our peer navigators is their huge hearts for others. How do I know this about them? Because they choose to give back by coming to work here to help our guests. They know what it takes to get out of homelessness and how to gently navigate others through what is often a complicated and slow-moving system.

We hope you enjoy reading about these staff members and their commitment to service. I think you will feel as thankful as I am for them and the example they set. This work requires a compassionate heart and willingness to be patient and kind, even if it is incredibly hard at times. As you read their stories, you will see the goodness of their hearts at work. We are honored to have them at the Mission.

We are thankful for you, as well, and your continued commitment to our work as we share the love of Jesus in our hearts with all who come through our doors.

God Bless,

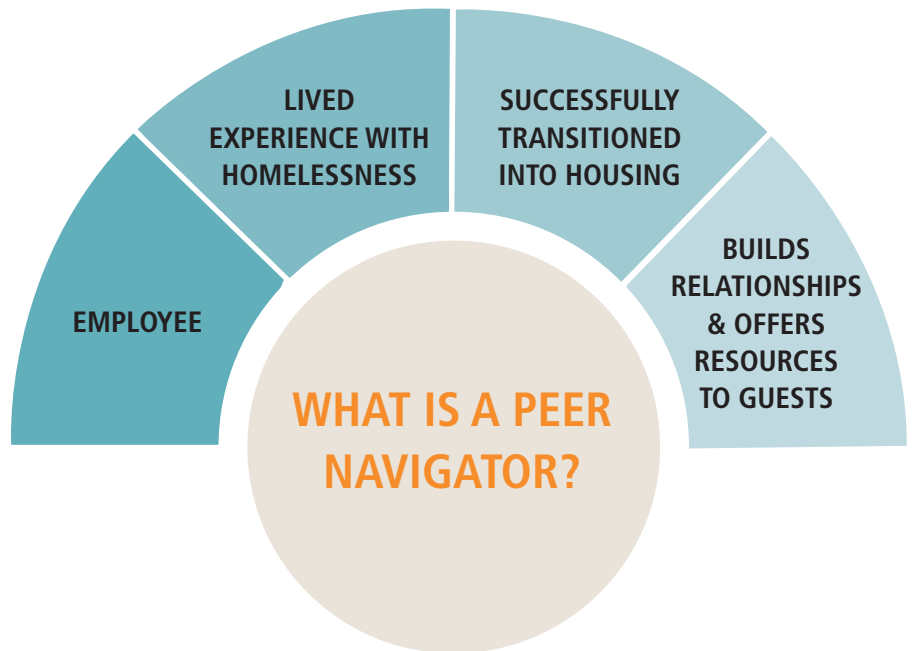


Brad Meuli  
President/CEO



# Meet Our Peer Navigators

OUR PEER NAVIGATORS EACH HAVE THEIR OWN STRENGTHS, SKILLS AND WAYS TO RELATE WHEN ENGAGING WITH OUR 48TH AVENUE CENTER SHELTER GUESTS. WITH THEIR OWN STORIES OF TRANSFORMATION, THEY ARE INSPIRING THOSE AROUND THEM TO GET THROUGH THEIR OWN HARDSHIPS.





**DANIELLE**

## HUMBLE LEADER

"Before I came to the Mission, I'd been through some of the system and was getting off drugs. I was a heroin and meth addict. I got sober in March 2019 and through that I had a peer coach. Just the way they connected with people was a whole different thing than I had ever experienced. They saved my life. I would go to groups three times a week facilitated by a peer who had lived experience like we did. It was more of an equal ground, and to me, I never had anybody really listen to me before. I felt very welcomed through that, accepted and I found self-worth again."

### MAKING AN IMPACT

"We try to get guests to really think about some of the emotions they are feeling and how to process those. We are not counselors or therapists, but we've had our own treatment programs that we've gone through because of our own addictions or mental health. So, we use that skill to help the guys explore what they're dealing with."

**"We're not giving them a handout. this is giving them a hand up."**

**-Danielle**



**ANGEL**

## PRAYER WARRIOR

"I was in addiction for 32 years and went through bouts of homelessness. I'm five years sober, praise God. I ended up staying at Samaritan House and then went to sober living. They helped me get on my feet. God always told me, 'Nothing is wasted. Everything that you're going to experience is going to be something that I'm going to use greatly in your life.'"

I started doing street outreach, and I just remember praying on my knees one day, 'Lord, I just want to understand and have knowledge of the people that I go and outreach every day. I want to reach them. I want to understand them and know who they are.' I started seeing people with Denver Rescue Mission outfits, and literally I just kept hearing, 'peer navigator.' I had no idea what peer navigators do. So, I applied for peer navigator and there is no denying that this was God, and this is what I've been called to do."

### MAKING AN IMPACT

"I share with the guys that I'm in the same place as them, still rebuilding my life, and that I can understand everything. I think that's the whole prayer being answered, of really understanding the people and what the Lord is going to do with all of this."



**KEONI**

## SUPPORTIVE FRIEND

"I was in active drug addiction for about 30 years, which led me to homelessness. It is just a dark, dark time in my life. I had overdosed and I just said, 'My body and

my mind can't handle it anymore.' I was just living in this prison cell, even if I wasn't locked up. I knew that there was more to life. My mom is a strong Christian, and she would speak life into me. She would tell me, 'Son, this is not what you are. Your identity is not in drugs.' So, I asked for help from The Harbor Light Center. It really

changed my life and taught me a new way to live. I brought God back into my life, which was the main thing to get me clean. The shame and the guilt just all started to melt away because I was looking at God."

### MAKING AN IMPACT

"That's why I wanted to become a peer navigator—to give back, to connect, to use 30 years of drug addiction for the good, and to advance people into God's Kingdom. I was addicted, homeless and in the Marines. We have a lot of homeless veterans who are addicted, so they can see that I've been through what they're trying to get through. They can all get through homelessness, but they just have to try and know that they can. I'm just really thankful for what God has done in my life so far and that He has allowed me to start to give back."

**"I became a peer navigator to help the people and for myself, because I knew I needed a sense of community."**

**-Keoni**

**"We want everybody to succeed in life and for us to have a strong community. It's a whole community effort. If it wasn't for the donors, we wouldn't be able to help them. I'm really grateful for that." -Danielle, Supervisor**



# A Day in the Life



CINDY

## PEACEFUL SPIRIT

"I am recovered from drug abuse. I was in trouble and on probation, but going through what I had to go through is a blessing in disguise and led me all the way to this moment. I think God has really been preparing me for it because I've seen many dark things and dark places in my life.

I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, and I was actively using up until that day. I had all these worries, but that little girl saved my life. I found my recovery from that moment, and God was just really working in my life."

### MAKING AN IMPACT

"Peer navigators have experienced the feelings that are hard to explain. When I was first going through classes and treatment, I learned it's a lot easier to open up to people who can relate.

I love providing guests with hope and being that light in the darkness. I feel like it's more of a peer-friend thing. Relating to them and them hearing a little bit of my story, I feel like it does inspire them.

My goal is to reopen some people's eyes because life can bring you down quickly and it can get easy to live there in those emotions, thoughts, sadness, and guilt. I know what it's like to just keep beating yourself up and not give yourself a chance."

GIVE TODAY AT  
[DENVERRESCUEMISSION.ORG/CHANGINGLIVES](https://DENVERRESCUEMISSION.ORG/CHANGINGLIVES).



SARAH

## CARING MOTHER

"My aunt was homeless for most of her life. She came to Denver Rescue Mission a lot. She passed on from COVID, but I hope that she came across people like us, who really were genuine, helped her out and really care.

When she was alive, I was thinking, 'If only I could work at Denver Rescue Mission just to watch over her.' But there's a lot more people like her out there who need to be made sure no harm comes to them, that they'll be able to eat and that they'll have a warm bed to sleep in. That was a turning point where I wanted to help people."

### MAKING AN IMPACT

"Some of the guests say, 'Hey, I'm just depressed today,' and I'll tell them, 'You want to talk about it, because I am sure I can relate to what you're going through.' I just want them to know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's not always going to be dark.

It means a lot when they have done everything you've pushed them to do to get housing, and come to you and say, 'Hey, thank you for pushing me. Thank you for doing this.' I feel like a proud mommy, and it just tugs at your heartstrings." ■

**"The most valuable thing about our team is that we all bring this experience of darkness that we've lived through, mixed together with the love of God."**

**-Cindy**



PRAY

By starting their day off with team devotionals and prayer, the peer navigators become closer as a team, stronger in their faith and encouraged to do the work they have been called to do.



INFORM

Every Wednesday the peers hold an orientation for the men new to the shelter, informing them of the Mission's services and programs and other tangible steps they can take to get out of homelessness.



CONNECT

Peers connect guests to community providers—many of whom come directly into the shelter—and facilitate these appointments to help guests obtain their vital documents or other benefits and services (such as a birth certificate, ID or Medicaid).



OUTREACH

Each day the peers outreach to specific guests, many of whom haven't connected with case management at all or in a while. They inform them of resources with the goal of getting them an appointment with case management.



SPREAD JOY

Twice a week the peers host game night (a favorite being Family Feud). The goal is to let them know it's okay to have fun even though they are going through a hard time.

Scan to Give!



# Peers Make a Difference

MARLVIN AND JOSEPH HAVE BEEN THROUGH A LOT. THANKS TO SUPPORT FROM PEER NAVIGATORS AND FOR PUTTING IN THE HARD WORK, THEY TRANSITIONED INTO STABLE HOUSING IN DECEMBER 2022.



**MARLVIN**

**M**arvin has experienced a lot of loss in his life—his parents, oldest child and then his wife. Heartbroken and grieving, Marvin came to Denver to escape the trauma back home.

He heard about the effective resources at Denver Rescue Mission and ever since arriving, has transformed his life for the better. "I've been using the resources available to me as far as mental health. I've never thought about talking to counselors and being connected with peer navigators. They have been a blessing to me," he said. "They helped me get SNAP benefits, my birth certificate, my Social Security card, a dentist, and a Section 8 voucher."

Through working with the peer navigators and lots of prayer, Marvin transitioned into stable housing.

Now, Marvin looks forward to giving back to others, just like the peer navigators gave back to him.

"I respect them the utmost. It's got to be straight from the heart as far as them working here and doing these things for these guys," he said. "Being here just taught me a lot about how to be patient, humble and mature enough to understand what people go through."

"One thing that always inspired me with him is that he was really patient. As much as he wanted to give up, he didn't. He would say, 'I want my kids to see something different in me than they did. I want to be okay for them and for myself.' I think he inspired me a lot more than I did anything for him because he showed his strength so much every day." - Angel, Peer Navigator



**JOSEPH**

**I**n February 2022, Joseph was sleeping outside and almost froze to death. Since then, he stayed at the Mission where he got the support he needed to get back on his feet and into stable housing.

"The peer navigators here have really helped me out," he said. "They helped me get on Medicaid, get food stamps, update my information, and get me into housing."

Although he received support, Joseph had to put in the work to truly get him out of the situation he was in. Danielle, peer navigator supervisor, made sure she told Joseph how proud she was of him, and how he should be proud of himself.

"You're an example because of the hard work you put forward," she said. "We were just here to walk alongside you and help you with paperwork. You did the rest."

Joseph responded with, "When I fell, you're the ones that picked me up and just kept me going along the way."

As he was getting ready to move out of the shelter, Joseph gave some advice to Greg (another shelter guest), giving back just like the peer navigators did for him.

"There is a light at the end of the tunnel. There are going to be challenges and there are going to be days when you're not going to want to do it, but if you just keep it up, you'll see that it does get better. It does get easier. It makes you stronger in the end and molds you into a better person. You actually start seeing life more in a positive note."

# THE MISSION in my words



## KAREN LEIGH

Karen has been the evening anchor for CBS4 since 2008 and has been involved with Denver Rescue Mission on and off for a decade. She is married with one daughter and feels beyond fortunate to call Colorado home.

### Why is it important to you to work alongside the Mission, whether through volunteering or through your work at CBS4?

I believe in what Denver Rescue Mission is doing—where its heart and head are. Serving people the necessities is just the foundation. Once you build trust and relationships with people, you can help guide and encourage them into better days ahead.

You've been involved in CBS4's annual Spread the Warmth campaign to raise awareness and funds for the Mission. Why is it beneficial that we work together to help "spread the warmth" to our neighbors experiencing homelessness? It takes donations to make real life changes, and that's where our campaign can help. None of us can get much done alone. We are always better working in community and that's what CBS4's Spread the Warmth campaign is all about—opening eyes to a need and encouraging all of us to do something.

### How has your connection with the Mission personally impacted you?

I think any time I can learn about someone's struggles and help someone who needs a hand up, it makes my heart that much softer. For me, listening to people and talking with those in more challenging situations is what I need in order to learn, have empathy and take action.

### What would you say to encourage others to get involved with the Mission?

I would encourage others to find a program or event that the Mission offers that speaks to them and then get involved. You can start by serving food, but there are so many ways to help out.

## Your Business Can Work Alongside the Mission...here's how:

Group Volunteer Experience

Sponsorships

Adopt a Meal

Host a Drive

Workplace Giving



Learn about getting your company involved at  
[DenverRescueMission.org/Corporate-Engagement](http://DenverRescueMission.org/Corporate-Engagement)

## OUR CORE STRATEGIES



EMERGENCY SERVICES



REHABILITATION



TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## LOCATIONS

**Lawrence Street Community Center:** Meals, restrooms, showers, clean drinking water, and access to Mission staff for encouragement and guidance



**Lawrence Street Shelter:** 24/7 shelter for men and chapel



**Holly Center:** Overnight shelter for men assigned weekly and lockers for storage



**The Crossing:** Transitional program for families and rehabilitation program for men



**Harvest Farm:** Rural rehabilitation program near Fort Collins



**Fort Collins Rescue Mission:** Meals, shelter and access to resources and services



**Ministry Outreach Center:** Central warehouse facility including food, clothing and furniture distribution



**Administration & Education:** Entry point for Mission transitional programs and home to the Mission's administrative and development staff



**48th Avenue Center:** 24/7 shelter for men, operated in partnership with the City of Denver



## Volunteer With Us!



DENVER RESCUE MISSION  
IS A PROUD MEMBER OF:



MISSION  
MEMBER  
CERTIFIED EXCELLENT



P.O. Box 5164 | Denver, CO 80217 | 303.297.1815

