



MAY 2024

**I came to Hope Street during my own dark night of the soul. I struggled with the question “am I good?” Not “am I good enough” just simply “am I good?” Seriously questioning my own goodness (and therefore worthiness), was the position I was in when I stepped into Hope Street.**

Lucky for me, Hope Street was a place that intentionally reminded people again and again that they are the Beloved. Our choices, our thoughts, our actions, might tarnish that reality (like a penny can get tarnished) but we start as the Beloved and we end there too. There is nothing that can make this untrue of us.

When I arrived at Hope Street, there had been 17 years of a foundation that had been laid before. At year 17, I had the opportunity to love out of our mission in my own way. The team I’ve gotten to work with over the last eight years has done a great job at continuing to invite people into quality physical spaces that remind us of our Belovedness and worth through beautiful, colorful and clean environments where we can cultivate hope, build community and are protected. These physical spaces are a reminder of the value and worth God invites us into believing about ourselves and others. As we celebrate 25 Years as an organization, it is humbling to look at our HIStory, joyful to remember the parts God’s invited me to be a part of and anticipatory to consider what may be ahead.

I pray that Hope Street will always be a place where people are reminded of their Belovedness (worth). That lives are filled with Living Hope through the love experienced by the men, women and children that work here, play here or pray here. Your Spirit is here Father and we experience hope because of that.

**- HANNAH DIRKSE**  
HOMES CONNECTION &  
GROWTH COORDINATOR

## **“INTERVIEW” with Kelly Bentley**

Kelly and I first met over a decade ago. Our journey together at Hope Street started out rocky. In my opinion Kelly acted as though the rules were beneath her, and she was entitled to whatever she wanted (when she wanted it). To Kelly I was too young, naive and pretty...a distraction to the real work people were trying to do in their lives.

Neither one of us really knew the other. We let limited interactions and stereotypes guide our initial viewpoint.

Eventually kids, two adorable little twin girls to be exact, became the needed bulldozer for the walls that we had built up. It didn’t take long for them to come crumbling down. We went from fighting against to fighting for, in and through every circumstance of life.

I watched as Kelly graduated with her GED, added year after year of sobriety under her belt, forgave herself and sought forgiveness for those she had hurt. She paid off debt, and saved up to buy her own home. Her care for her family is sacrificial and done with grace and care. It’s not often we have a full story that we can point to as successful, but Kelly’s is as close as it gets.

It’s no wonder, when we opened our doors at Shechem and a position became available that Kelly quickly came to mind. I knew that her love for people, belief in our mission and servant heart would be exactly what our community would need. In true Kelly fashion, she has stepped in and surpassed all expectations. I recently sat down with her and wanted to hear what she had to say about her time at Hope Street now, some ten years after living in our housing and now a member of staff.

### **WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES SHECHEM OFFER THE COMMUNITY THAT IS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IS OUT THERE?**

“When I do the interviews for intake, I have a unique opportunity to get to know the kids before they join the community. I am saddened often by the realities many of our kids face, situations that have forced them to grow up too fast. Here we provide an opportunity for kids to be kids. I can relate to a lot of the experiences kids are enduring, and this has been a good

**“I pray that Hope Street will always be a place where people are reminded of their Belovedness (worth).”**



opportunity for me to help them through while most of all providing a space of love, support and encouragement.”

**HOW IS HOPE STREET'S MISSION LIVED OUT IN OUR DAY TO DAY INTERACTIONS WITH PEOPLE?**

“We cultivate hope. The most practical way we do this is by showing up every day. This is a consistent place that kids can count on. We are present for hard conversations. We meet people in their place of need, and when we don't have a direct way to support - we will work to connect with available resources.

We build community. We help kids see the value of having people they can count on, and being someone others can count on. We create time and space to have important conversations and always make time to celebrate!

We protect. We hold kids accountable. We are aware of how kids are doing - whether they are sad or isolating. We set a standard for behavior - what is and what is not allowed here. We stay consistent in our process for welcoming people in, and we are present in different spaces to make sure kids feel safe.”

**WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR YOU TO BE ON THE “OTHER SIDE OF THINGS”?**

I love where I am right now. I am so grateful for how far I have come, and for the opportunity to pour back into the community that gave so much to me. I feel and experience love, safety and community here. The hardest part is seeing people who are still struggling. I want so badly for their lives to be different, but I know they have to want it first. I do my best to be present in their lives, and offer encouragement. I often wish I could just change things for everyone, but I know the best I can do now is support people in their journey.

“This side looks like a sunny sky, while I am also aware the other side can look and feel like a dark and stormy sky.”

**WHAT DO YOU WISH PEOPLE KNEW OR UNDERSTOOD ABOUT HOPE STREET?**

“Hope Street is the best place that you can go to start your life over from the beginning”.

There is so much you can learn and get from here. The only obstacle is

you, if you aren't ready to learn and get it - you won't. But if you are ready, you will be blown away by how much your life can be transformed. Here, your whole mindset can change. When I first arrived here I was so irritated and frustrated with life. I tried so hard not to learn and fight what was happening. Eventually there was so much opportunity I couldn't help but be positively effected by what was happening in and through people's lives around me. I was blown away by the care I received here, and that was the catalyst for my growth and development. My whole family's life has been positively impacted by this place.

**HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF LIVING INSIDE OF THE FRAMEWORK OF GREENHOUSE FOR PEOPLE?**

“I see myself as a growing flower, I always want to be growing and learning. I see myself as being a wonderful part of Hope Street, and that all that I have to give is being utilized in my time at Shechem.”

**I AM SO PROUD OF KELLY.**

For who she has become and what she means to our community. I'm grateful for her desire to continue to grow and be better, and invite people to join in that process along the way. I'm better off for it, and I know a lot of people would say the same. Her story especially blesses me as I see our model come full circle starting with Homes and ending (continuing on) with Shechem.

Our Hope has always been to equip people to be a light, to share His love, and invite people into the greatest story ever told. Kelly got that, and is living that out today.

**- ASHLEY THOMAS**  
HOPE STREET CEO



## Volunteering at Hope Street

I got involved with Hope Street about two years ago when a friend invited me to join her and her family on a Serve Day. I took all four of my boys and it was amazing. We had no idea what we were going to be doing that day, but we ended up doing a mix of cleaning, organizing, writing cards and just talking with Hope Street Members. After our first time there we were hooked. I've never really experienced that feeling in any other areas I've served. Once I went I KNEW I had to go back.

Now when I show up, I show up with no expectations. My heart is to serve wherever, however and whoever. Sometimes I play ball/trash talk with the kids at Shechem (my fav). Other times I make cards and just talk with the people coming and going. It always changes depending on the day. One thing I do consistently, and Kendall and Kelly can attest to this:) "If Beth is coming she is going to clean those bathrooms." And I do every time LOL. Not sure why I do this? But for whatever reason it's a small consistent thing I can do to keep the space clean and help the kids feel like it was prepared well for them.

When I first started coming to Shechem I came with my four boys and occasionally my husband. But shortly after, I started getting our church involved and designed a Community Group called the "Serving Sisters" that exclusively serves at local Non-profits. Now when I come, I bring all my beautiful friends who also have huge hearts to serve. And as you can guess.... they are now as addicted to Hope Street as me.

I love the way it feels when you walk through the doors of Hope Street (Homes & Shechem). Despite what people are going through it feels calm and it feels like a place where everyone can feel "Seen, Known and Loved". It's a place where YOUR story matters. I sense God's handprints and presence all over when I am there, and I believe he is bringing beauty from ashes in so many member's stories. It is so



**"I got involved with Hope Street about two years ago when a friend invited me to join her and her family on a Serve Day. I took all four of my boys and it was amazing... Once I went I KNEW I had to go back."**

cool to have a part in whatever that may look like.

If you are considering what it would look like to serve at Hope Street, I would tell you that "your greatest ability is your availability." Just SHOW UP and you will be blessed.

If your heart is for serving, come with no expectations, just be available and watch God do what he does.

**- BETH CARLIN**  
HOPE STREET SUPPORTER & VOLUNTEER

## Life at Shechem

For many years, I only thought of Howard Fuller as the windowless high school one of the Homes at Hope Street kids went to. When we first opened Shechem, that one Homes at Hope Street kid came down here after school and brought his friends who brought their friends. Soon, we had enough Howard Fuller students down here that we connected with the school administration. From there, they started renting the gym for their boy's basketball practices. The boys who came for practice loved the space and wanted to spend more time here, so they became members. Eventually, their girlfriends (or simply girl friends) wanted to be where the boys were. Now, I know the names of hundreds of kids who attend there as they fill Shechem each day after school.

The teens from Howard Fuller join students from Messmer, Hope Christian, Milwaukee Lutheran, North Division, and many other area schools each afternoon. They are welcomed in for activities like art therapy with Art Therapy House, sports tournaments with the MPD, job help with the Department

of Workforce Development, bible studies, tea time, and music and dance class with Kids from Wisconsin. Even if there isn't an activity at the moment, kids find a safe place to play basketball in the gym, work on their homework, snack, play games, and make tiktoks. They connect with staff, each other, and some of our adult members that play basketball. Just when we think we know all the kids from Howard Fuller, it seems a new one comes in to become a Shechem member. With the help of many of these kids, we've grown our Shechem membership to over 1,300 people.

It's been encouraging to see Howard Fuller grow as we grow too. Their high school is moving across town with a brand new gym and we're excited for the kids to go there and have a gym of their own. While we know that many of the Howard Fuller kids will remain connected, we also know some might not. Regardless, we're confident that the kids can go out into the community, to their neighbors, to their colleges, to their new school and take the values of community and safety they learned here with them. In this season,

Shechem has been a consistent gym space for local schools. While one is moving on, we know Shechem will continue to offer opportunities for kids and adults alike to be in a safe space to grow and learn.

## HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT THE SPACE?

**BE PRESENT.** Come to do your work remotely here. Play basketball in the gym. Use the space. Be a positive person in the community and another adult presence. Get to know our community. Bring your family. Get added to our Shechem Programming email list.

**BECOME A SHECHEM MEMBER SPONSOR** at our website, and support a member's monthly (\$20) membership dues.

**CHECK OUR SHECHEM AMAZON LIST.** We always need toilet paper, garbage bags, plastic bowls, cups, plates and cutlery and paper towels!

**- KENDALL SCHOENIKE**  
SHECHEM DIRECTOR



**THANK YOU, HOPE STREET FAM,** for the ways you faithfully show up and support this community. As we close out another fiscal year, we would love it if you could prayerfully consider how you can help us finish well. Know that each gift is cherished and stewarded well as we continue to walk alongside men, women and children. As we continue in our 25th year as an organization, it is not lost on us that people like you have helped shape and make who we are today. Thanks for doing your part!

**Interested  
in other ways to  
get involved?**

**REACH OUT TO**  
info@hopestreetministry.org