

Resident Director Penni Simms (front, right) with residents of Grace House.

Grace House

By Toni Garrard Clay

AMAZING GRACE

Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake shows women a better way to live.

The people who run Grace House believe in second chances ... and third, and fourth and fifth. In other words, it really is a house where grace is taken seriously.

"When a woman arrives at Grace House, she's lost hope in herself," said volunteer April Anderson. "When we deposit love, grace and mercy in somebody's life and show them there's hope, it causes a change for the better."

Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake is a faith-based transition home for women struggling to overcome destructive lifestyles such as addiction, incarceration and violence. The home opened in Tool this year and currently houses about 10 to 15 women with applications for residency coming in each week. Eventually, with the expansion of staff and leadership, the goal is to have up to 28 residents.

"I believe we're one of the only places in the country that will do our best to help ladies find the help they need one way or another, whether she becomes a resident here or not," said Jeff Reynolds, executive director of Grace House. "We want to be part of helping women break the patterns of a destructive lifestyle."

Twenty-one-year-old Krystal Larson knows all about that. "I grew up in a family with a lot of abuse in the home, and it led me to a destructive lifestyle," she said. By the age of 16, Krystal was a drug user and pregnant by an abusive boyfriend. "I eventually signed over my parental rights because I knew I wasn't ready to be a mother, and I wanted to give her a better life," said Krystal. "After that, I went to Grace House in San Antonio, and that's where I gave my life to Christ. Before that, I didn't care."

Grace House in San Antonio was the inspiration for Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake, though the two are independent of the other. Krystal eventually became a resident of Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake where she graduated from the program this past summer.

"If it wasn't for Grace House, I don't know if I would have hope today."

— Krystal Larson, former resident

Krystal said her Grace House experience taught her how to have a healthy relationship, how to set boundaries and equipped her with tools for overcoming addiction. "I didn't have any of that before," she said. "It was life changing."

The women at Grace House have to be at least 18 years old; there is no upper age limit. As Executive Director Reynolds points out, "addiction and destruction aren't respecters of age."

Most days at Grace House start with Bible study in the morning, a variety of classes throughout the day and "Overcomers" or "Call to Recovery" meetings in the evenings. The on-site classes include anger and money management, parenting and addiction recovery, and computer and life skills training.

"Within that first week, you start seeing the foginess in their minds clear," said Resident Director Penni Simms. "In the third and fourth weeks, you see them getting hungry for the word. That's what keeps me going is seeing that hunger and thirst for the right way of life."

"This is a facility that we've known for so long is needed," said Reynolds. "There are numerous facilities for men, but there was no place like this for women. ... We knew the problem has been in our community, and we're finally able to do something about it with a place like Grace House for women."

Reynolds, as associate pastor at Christian Life Center in Gun Barrel City, said their church saw the tremendous positive impact that Grace House in San Antonio had on the daughter of one of the families in their congregation. That experience led them to establish Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake, which is an independent ministry.

"We've connected and partnered with a number of community leaders, businesses and churches in our area to raise support for Grace House," said Reynolds. "There's no costs to the ladies or their families. So there is a need, certainly, for community support in order to continue doing what we're doing."

Women like Krystal Larson testify to the effectiveness of the ministry. "Things are really good now," she said. "I'm interning at a ministry called Strong Foundation in San Antonio. I have a part-time job doing photography. I volunteer at another ministry called Kingdom Resource. God is starting to slowly restore relationships with my family and the family that has my daughter."

"I'm so thankful for Grace House. If it wasn't for Grace House, I don't know if I would have hope today."

Volunteer April Anderson puts it succinctly: "It's important we not forget the women who struggle. We need to pull people up out of the darkness."

To learn more about Grace House of Cedar Creek Lake, find it on Facebook or visit christianlifecenter.tv. Donations may be sent to PO Box 43012, Seven Points, TX 75143.

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