

SISTERS UNITED

Amy Downes and Kathleen Nesler had no idea their relationship would be restored through a drug rehabilitation program. But what was once a tension-filled relationship is now a close one.

The sisters lived similar lives over the past few years – both were drug addicts trying to raise children. Amy was a newly separated mom of three who started using drugs when her marriage became difficult. Kathleen was a single mom of one whose life of addiction grew as she became more independent.

During their time of addiction, the two were not on good terms. Little did they know, they'd end up getting through their struggles together at the Gospel Center Rescue Mission.

Kathleen's addiction started at the young age of 20 when she gained more independence. She had her own apartment and went out with friends. What started as drinking turned into doing drugs, and her life spiraled from there.

"I was a mess. I was on probation. My life was a revolving door through jail. I'd wake up in the morning and pack my kid up and get out of the house just so that CPS wouldn't find me," said Kathleen.

Kathleen dragged her daughter around in her lifestyle until she came to



Kathleen Nesler and Amy Downes with Kathleen's children

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2018 New Life Program Scholarship Gala in Review

The amazing cover story of the Nesler sisters who are New Life Program graduates reminds me of our New Life Program Scholarship Gala that took place on April 12. I know that many of our faithful supporters who receive The Vision newsletter were not able to attend; however, this issue has photos to help you get a feel of this event. The following are several exciting announcements from our recent Gala:

- We raised 20 New Life Program Scholarships!
- At the 2017 Gala, we made a promise to begin actively fundraising for the former Alustiza Hotel's renovation. Today, we have secured in-kind or cash pledges totaling almost \$2,768,000 of the total estimated \$3,100,000 required, pending a \$1,350,000 Federal Home Loan Bank loan/grant decision in June. Upon its predicted completion in 2020, this renovation will create one of the largest homeless regeneration programs in America, with 150 beds for women and children when 96 are added to our current program.
- We have officially pledged a new Disaster Refugee Relief Program to San Joaquin County. Should a natural disaster or terrorism event occur in San Joaquin County, we will be able to accommodate up to 50 refugees for several

weeks. In working with the Red Cross, we will provide lodging, food, and clothing. This program is in addition to our current overnight shelter program for 100 men, women, and children.

- I am pleased to announce a partnership with Finding a Best Friend Animal Rescue. Oftentimes, homeless individuals refuse to enter our program because they have to leave their dogs behind. This partnership will allow homeless people coming into the New Life Program to have their dogs fostered during the entire time they are at the Mission. This will solve the issue and allow them to reunite with their dogs after graduating.

We thank God for the favor He has given to the Gospel Center Rescue Mission as evidenced by these exciting new advancements. The greatest, however, is our faithful friends and supporters like you! God bless you always!

Wayne G. Richardson

GRADUATION



11 graduates accepted diplomas on March 16 – each expressing their deepest thanks to the staff and students of the Mission and their supportive families and friends. Several of them received certificates for the second and third phases of their programs. 101-year-old donor Bernice Harray (see The Vision's April feature story) gracefully gave the opening prayer. The keynote speaker was San Joaquin County District 3 Supervisor Tom Patti, who was inspired by the graduates' hard work and success. Congratulations to Lindsey Aguilera, Sal Azevedo, David Fox, Billy Freeman, Matthew Leonard, Katherine Mesa, Darryl Pierzina, Gabriel Silva, Carrie Smith, Martina Terry, and Kandi Ziemann!

Annual Gala Celebrating Restored Lives Through Scholarships

April 12, 2018

God was truly present at our Gala, where hundreds of community members gathered for an evening exhibiting our accomplishments over the past year. The evening consisted of an inspiring message from District Attorney Tori Verber Salazar, testimonies from two graduates, and fellowship among so many of our supporters. We'd like to thank our Gala sponsors, whose support will give students the opportunity to go through our programs and hear about God's love.



The room was filled with hundreds of community members who support the Mission



GCRM employees Anna Villagomez, Jody De La Cruz, Yvonne Ferrell, Laura Stanley, and Dianna Clay



Stockton Ports mascot, Splash, with guests from Dignity Health St. Joseph's Medical Center, who are Ports season ticket holders



Carol Richardson, Nancy Gruber, Board President Bill Conley, and former Board President Richard Gruber



CEO Wayne Richardson and District Attorney Tori Verber Salazar



County Supervisors Miguel Villapudua and Chuck Winn



GCRM resident Daniel Campos II led the pledge of allegiance and received his GCRM battle coin



GCRM employees Gabriel Silva (left) and Monica and Britton Kimball (right) with GCRM students

GOSPEL CENTER RESCUE MISSION

over 75 years of restoring lives

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the Mission in January 2017. She decided to leave her daughter with her parents so that she could focus on her program at the Mission.

The Gospel Center Rescue Mission was her sixth rehab program. Upon arriving, Kathleen found out she was pregnant again. At that time she knew she wanted a better life for her children. "I always thought I wanted it, but I didn't until this time," she said.

While Kathleen went through the New Life Program, her sister Amy showed up at the Mission.

Amy's addiction began towards the end of her 10-year marriage. When things started to fall apart, she fell into the same addictive lifestyle that her now ex-husband had. To prevent putting her kids through the hardship, she sent them to live with her siblings-in-law in Texas.

Without the responsibility of caring for her kids, Amy spiraled deep into her addiction. With nowhere to go and with nothing to survive, she went to live with her parents, who requested she go into a program. She landed in the same New Life Program as her sister.

"When I got here I immediately saw how good Kathleen was doing and she took me under her wing," said Amy.

And Kathleen did just that – she was able to give Amy advice from her experience. And as the big sister, Amy also stepped up and helped Kathleen take care of her toddler and newborn. They both encouraged each other throughout their time at the Mission, even in the midst of trials.

One of the biggest challenges for Kathleen was being humble and giving up her independence.

When she depended on the staff at the Mission and trusted what they said was best, Kathleen's life changed completely.

Being away from her kids was difficult for Amy, but she made arrangements to contact them often. "I told my kids I was going to get better and my daughter told me she was praying for me," said Amy. That was all the motivation she needed to keep going.

Since coming to the Mission, Amy and Kathleen have grown tremendously in their relationship with God. "I'm praying a lot and I'm finally seeing Him answer my prayers," said Amy.

The sisters are not only closer to God, but they are also closer to each other than they've ever been. "My sister and I now have an amazing relationship," said Kathleen. Amy added, "I don't know what I'd do without her."

They both graduated from the New Life Program – Kathleen in September and Amy in January. They have goals to find places of their own where they can live with their children.

But for now, they will remain partners in their journey out of the bondage of addiction and into the freedom they have found in Christ.

DONATIONS NEEDED

The women's shelter is a place not only for students, but also their children. Donation needs include baby bouncers, rockers, walkers, miscellaneous children's toys, a TV, and DVD player for the nursery.