

Human Interest

Hannah's Haven: Offering hope, healing

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by **Alicia Cosgrove**

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Two years ago, Bonnie Harris saw a dream come to life: Hannah's Haven, a faith-based, live-in treatment program for women fighting to overcome addiction, opened in a tidy brick house in Browns Summit.

Franklinton native Harris, 47, a former drug addict whose addiction led her to prostitution, knew the challenges of defeating substance dependency. For her, Christian faith was the key.

Nine students have graduated so far from the nine- or 12-month-long curriculums designed to teach them how to take control of their lives. There have been other students who didn't graduate, and some who relapsed but then found the strength to pull themselves together and try again. Hannah's Haven is supported by donations and spends an average of \$16,000 per student per year for housing, food and educational materials.

The six women currently in the program have been through detox and rehab time and again. At Hannah's Haven, they are trying something different. "It's the Christ factor," says 42-year-old Sandra, who is married, with two adult children, and says she can't remember how many programs she has tried throughout her history of crack cocaine addiction.

After Sandra went through her last detox at Forsyth Medical Center in Winston-Salem, she accepted a list of rehabilitation programs from a social worker. Sandra says she knew the moment she talked with Harris that she had found the program for her.

"The minute she asked me, 'Do you know Jesus?' I knew this was the place for me," Sandra says.

Dawn, 32, says she has tried at least 15 other programs in an effort to defeat her 20-year addiction to crack cocaine and opiates. An overdose was the catalyst that led friends to recommend a rehabilitation program based on faith.

"The best thing about this is that it is faith-based," she says. "The other programs just didn't work."

For Melissa, 23, her 11-year addiction to a myriad of drugs, including heroin and crack cocaine, wreaked havoc on her life. She has a husband and two young children back home in Maryland. Leaving her children



Front row (from left): Hannah's Haven students Dawn and Sandra. Middle row: Manager of operations Virginia Cornell, students Arista and Melissa. Back row: Founder Bonnie Harris and live-in residential tech Michele Hilerio.

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was difficult, as was adhering to the program's rules and policies.

"Submitting to the Lord and humbling myself to authority – that was hard," she says. "Learning how to not do things my way, learning how to do things God's way because my way didn't work."

Arista, 22, has battled alcohol addiction since her teens. The North Carolina native says the most profound lesson she has learned at Hannah's Haven is that "life doesn't have to be the way I was living it."

Everything in the program, Harris says, is designed to teach the women to stop self-destructive behaviors and embrace what God meant them to be.

Harris says the program is based on the Spiritual Growth, Affirmation, Fellowship and Education (S.A.F.E.) model she developed. The program received accreditation in December 2007 from Teen Challenge USA, a nationwide faith-based recovery program established in the 1950s.

The women receive addiction recovery counseling and mentoring and attend classes five days a week. The program offers GED courses as well as classes on relationships, parenting, nutrition, budgeting and the psychology of addiction. One-on-one training includes a Bible-based 12-step program. In addition to their studies, homework and household chores, the students volunteer with various churches and organizations.

On Oct. 23, at an appreciation dinner and fundraiser, they will step forward to share their pasts, their hopes for the future and their gratitude for being able to see wholesome futures on the horizon. In December, several will graduate to begin those futures.

Help Hannah's Haven

Hannah's Haven will hold an appreciation dinner and fundraiser on Oct. 23 at 6 p.m. in the Mullin Life Center at First Presbyterian Church,

617 N. Elm St., Greensboro. Tickets are \$15 per person. To buy tickets, call

656-1066. For more information, visit www.hannahshaven.net.

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