

connections

Working Together to Grow the Kingdom

LEADERSHIP NETWORK®

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The Road to Recovery

REACHING OUT
TO THE
FORGOTTEN

FEATURED CHURCH:

Henderson Hills Baptist Church

LOCATION: Edmond,

Oklahoma

ESTABLISHED: 1965

SERVICES: 4 weekly services

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE: 3,000

Kim Swyden loves the story in John 4 about the Samaritan woman at the well. Verse 27 is a special pearl in the story—Jesus’ disciples just couldn’t comprehend why Jesus would spend time with this Samaritan woman or how he could be so compassionate, so patient and so giving. They simply didn’t get it.

And in many ways, the church doesn’t get it either—particularly when it comes to those who are homeless, addicted or deprived in some way.

Kim Swyden, Executive Pastor of Henderson Hills Baptist Church in Edmond, Okla., knows this pattern all too well. As Kim puts it, “We’ve abdicated most responsibility for people who are dirty, sloppy or otherwise unusual, telling them to simply go away and come back when you look better.”

Thankfully, Kim and the church he serves *get it*. Through their Ministry of Jesus recovery program, Henderson Hills—a member of Leadership Network’s Recovery Ministry Leadership Community—is making a difference in the lives of these too-often neglected children of God.

Two of Kim’s favorite stories give a good picture of why Henderson Hill’s recovery ministry, and others like it, are so needed.

KARA’S STORY

Kara lives out her deep faith in Christ, but she is far from religious.

She’s young, in college, and like many her age, has become disenchanted with the church. In Kara’s view, the church has not backed up its religious words with effective action—all too often simply ignoring those who are on the fringes of society.

Kara’s disappointment in the church doesn’t mean she doesn’t care. Far from it. In fact, Kara has always been the one in her family to willingly offer money, a ride or a bit of food to needy strangers—even in the midst of family vacations.



Pastor Kim and Jeff—now friends through Kara’s outreach.

Her casual generosity sometimes inspires—and sometimes frustrates—her deeply religious mother and stepfather, who are a little more cautious than their daughter.

As an art student, Kara also believes in the power of creativity. Several years ago, she became convinced that exposing hurting people to the beauty of art might help them find a new hope for their lives. So, she contacted the homeless shelter in nearby Oklahoma City. Soon, Kara was teaching an art class at

the shelter and holding art shows to expose the community to the talented people she worked with and raise awareness for their plight.

JEFF'S STORY

Jeff grew up in Los Angeles and spent his youth in and out of jail, thanks to drug abuse and other crimes.

After leaving the last in a string of court-ordered L.A. recovery groups, Jeff reached out to Jesus and was saved. He quickly realized that to survive he would have to get out of L.A., and make a fresh start far from all the bad influences that he knew too well.

Desperate, Jeff went to the bus station with very little money in his pocket but a strong determination to leave town. At the ticket window, he pulled out the meager wad of bills and simply asked the attendant, "How far can I go on this?"

"THEY COULDN'T FORGET HER WORDS, 'YOU'VE SAID YOU LOVE OTHERS, BUT ARE YOU REALLY WILLING TO WALK THAT OUT?' "

The attendant told him he could make it all the way to Oklahoma City.

Jeff got off the bus in Oklahoma City with no money and no idea what to do next. Eventually, he found his way to the homeless shelter where Kara volunteered. After a little coaxing, he enrolled in Kara's art class. And that's when the changes really began.

Kara's patient concern combined with Jeff's desire for a new life began to make a difference. Kara's encouragement and unconditional love gave Jeff hope.



WHAT LEADERSHIP NETWORK MEANS TO ME

"To me, Leadership Network means one word: COMMUNITY. We have the advantage of being hooked up with churches from all over the U.S., all working in recovery but all packaged differently. We can learn so much from one another. We can hold each other accountable as we all move toward the theology of recovery."

—Kim Swyden, Executive Pastor, Henderson Hills Baptist Church, Edmond, Oklahoma

But Kara wasn't content to just teach Jeff about art. She wanted to do more.

She thought her mother and stepfather could help. So she invited them to meet Jeff for lunch. Their sight of the man sitting with Kara was, to say the least, a bit of a shock. Jeff was shabby toothless (the drug abuse had rotted his teeth) and obviously destitute.

Although Kara's parents were used to her bringing home "stray cats," Jeff took the cake. They thought, "What is she thinking?"

But Kara's obvious desire to help challenged and inspired them. They couldn't forget or refute her words, "You've said you love others...but are you really willing to walk that out?"

COMING TOGETHER

Kim knows both of these stories well—because he is Kara's stepfather.

Kim had been the executive pastor at Henderson Hills for the last five years and had always thought he was committed to the call of Christ to "love one another." But this precious, idealistic, college-aged girl brought him face to face with his own hypocrisy. Through Kara, Jesus challenged Kim to start doing the things he'd always only talked about—breaking down the walls of a "them vs. us" mentality.

After years of resisting the call to action, Kim was ready. He welcomed Jeff into the Ministry of Jesus recovery program and saw to it that Jeff got even more of the attention and love he needed.

Today, Jeff is employed as a custodian at Henderson Hills. With help from the church, he's passed his GED and enrolled at the Oklahoma City campus of Oklahoma State University, majoring in Substance Abuse Counseling.

As for Kara? She's still reaching out to help others. And now, part of those efforts involve the church—Kara is teaching pottery to women who are transitioning out of addiction through the Ministry of Jesus program. And Kim? He couldn't be happier.

The church and ministry perfectly illustrate outcomes when caring believers challenge assumptions, break down walls and actively show the love of Jesus to those who are shackled by addiction.

Recovery ministry—it's about faith in action.

Or, you might say, it's about reaching out to the Jeffs, the Karas—and the Kims—of this world. **LN**