



As the holiday season approaches, we want to share with you a message of hope and promise of the lives being changed through your support of Gracenter. The women we serve have been through many life challenges, and are bravely seeking long-term recovery from addiction.

Cynthia, who shares her story below, battled addiction for many years and relapsed multiple times, but always found a way to pick herself back up and strive for long-term recovery. Thanks to people like you, we are able to provide the opportunity and resources for women like Cynthia to successfully recover from addiction.

We are grateful to her for sharing her experiences with us.



Cynthia

Cynthia's parents separated when she was young, as neither were financially or mentally stable enough to provide a consistent home for her and her sister. **She was in foster care for two years while her dad was in prison, and also experienced homelessness several times throughout her childhood.** Cynthia started smoking at age 10, and by the time she was 14, was self-medicating with alcohol and marijuana.

Cynthia struggled to find a healthy identity in her hometown, so in high school, she moved to Florida to live with her sister. Cynthia excelled in Florida, moving her grades up from failing to straight A's while also working two jobs. She eventually also became the guardian of her nephew due to her older sister's own mental health and addiction problems.

“I am so grateful that I had that time with my nephew,” says Cynthia. **“I took care of him since he was in first grade, and we are both better people for it.** It makes me cry.

I graduated high school and decided to move back to California so my nephew could be with his dad who had just gotten out of prison. It was a bad choice, but one that I learned a lot from. Being back in my hometown and back in my dad’s shadow again, I started using harder drugs for the first time and I wasn’t mentally stable. My nephew went to live with his grandma, and things went downhill for me.

I’ve been chronically homeless, basically my whole adult life. Through an unhealthy relationship that did have the silver lining of getting me into treatment, I settled in San Francisco. It was in treatment that I heard about and enrolled in Gracenter. During my first stay at Gracenter, I wasn’t fully engaged in the program and was prioritizing my romantic relationship.

I chose to leave Gracenter before completing my recover goals. I stayed clean for 18 months, but relapsed and ended up losing everything. Sandra would call me and ask if I was ok. I would tell her I was fine, but she knew I wasn’t. One day I was honest with her and told her I needed help.

Without hesitation, Sandra welcomed me back to Gracenter. I wasn’t mentally stable during that time, and I relapsed again after five months, leaving Gracenter and returning to the streets.

I am back at Gracenter now, and I’ve been very successful in working the program. I have been here for two years, am completing my recovery goals, and things are going really well for me. Sandra has honestly been, and I cry just thinking about it, the support that I wish my parents were. If it wasn’t for her, I don’t think I’d be clean today. Even when I didn’t have a phone she would always find a way to get a hold of me, through social media or by asking other women who know me. **Sandra has helped me believe in myself, and Sr. Marguerite is the reason why I have so much patience and can be humble.** If she can be so calm, and understanding, and patient, I can learn to be that way with myself, to love myself the way she loves us.



Cynthia is awarded the National Society of Leadership and Success for her high grades at SF City College

Because of their love and Gracenter's peace, I have the time and headspace to work on things that I knew were a problem but kept pushing away. I have been able to talk about and get therapy for things that I have never dealt with before. Sandra helped me get to this point. She would say talking about it is the first step to healing and that she's there for me.

I've also been able to greatly improve my credit score while I've been living here, stop smoking, graduate from a domestic violence support group, and get an award in The National Society of Leadership and Success.

Gracenter is just such a special place. Everyone who works here really cares about each of us. **They do so many special things to create a loving environment.** Some of my favorite memories at Gracenter have been around the holidays. For Halloween, they put out pumpkins and construction paper so we could create Halloween decorations and carve pumpkins. I am such a kid at heart and never got to do that stuff when I was younger, but here I get to let my inner child come out and create decorations, play holiday music, and just be my goofy self.

Right now, I'm working on my associate degree in child development and family studies, and a social justice and diversity certificate at City College of San Francisco. My goal is to work with children who have been through trauma like me. Maybe in a family counseling center where I can work with parents to help them do better, or supporting kids in an afterschool setting. I want to be the reason why at least one child smiles each and every day.



Cynthia at City College of San Francisco

Gracenter has helped me to always look toward the future, and now I feel like I have a positive future to look forward to."

At Gracenter, we are determined to provide more women like Cynthia with the opportunity to achieve long-term recovery from addiction. But we can't do it without your help. If you are able to, **please consider a donation, which is 100% tax-deductible**, to provide the support needed for women like Cynthia to build better lives for themselves. **Your support makes this program possible.**

- A gift of \$1,000 sponsors one woman for a month and includes housing, three meals each day, one-to-one recovery mentoring, job and school application support, financial literacy courses, and connections to healthcare providers.
- A gift of \$500 provides job-readiness mentoring sessions for 13 women as they pursue their goals, including resume support and referrals to job training.
- A gift of \$100 provides 40 nutritious home-cooked meals that support each woman's health and foster a healthy peer community among the women.
- A gift of \$50 provides basic toiletries like soap and toothbrushes for women arriving at Gracenter.

Gifts of any size will make a difference in the lives of the women we serve at Gracenter. Thank you for considering a donation.

With gratitude,



Sr. Marguerite Bartling, RGS
Executive Director
Good Shepherd Gracenter

P.S. Does your company offer matching gifts? If so, please email me at sr.marguerite@gsgcenter.org and I will help make sure your gift is doubled.