

grace

FALL 2020

REPURPOSED



SAVING *grace*

DEAR FRIENDS,



WHAT A TRULY UNPRECEDENTED TIME WE'VE FOUND OURSELVES IN.

I remember when our country “closed up shop” and we were all sent home—for what we thought might be a couple of weeks. Here we are months later trying to find a new norm amidst mandatory mask wearing and leaning into conversations surrounding injustice. All the while doing a “pulse check” on our own hearts.

We've sheltered in and found a quiet rhythm, even when it wasn't comfortable. Suddenly everyone has margin in their lives. A Holy and sacred hush fell over my own soul and I found much needed rest and restoration. I made time for conversations that might not have happened otherwise—through prayer and a groaning in my own spirit—even uncomfortable ones surrounding racism.

The Saving Grace house is full of the most beautiful kaleidoscope of diversity. We invited conversation into this group of

young women, into our team, and extending into the community.

In that space we found a sacred sisterhood of all shades of creation. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now these three remain: Faith, Hope and Love. But the greatest of these is Love.” Oh, that LOVE may be our voice.

When this all started, there was a moment where my team and I had to make some quick decisions for the ministry—like converting our annual Butterflies & Blooms luncheon into an online gathering, versus being in person with all of you. That was hard for us, but you showed up for us virtually. We cried as you raised as much money during that online event, as you did the year before in person.

I am still in awe by the way you love and champion “Grace”. We also had to see where we could cut back and how we could better live out our B.R.A.V.E. values and to be good stewards with all God has entrusted to us, especially during these uncertain times. One way we knew we could do that immediately was by not printing and mailing our Spring newsletter. We took all the beautiful stories we'd prepared for you, to our online blog.



You may have read our cover story about our soon-to-be-graduate, Ciera, online—but I believe her story is too important not to be in print. And now, just 4 months after sharing her story online, we have—not one—but THREE young women ready to graduate! Each one has worked tirelessly to reach their goal and we wanted to take the time to share each of their brave stories with you!

YOUR SUPPORT IS TRULY CHANGING THE OUTCOMES FOR GIRLS AT SAVING GRACE—PREPARING THEM FOR A MUCH BETTER TRANSITION THAN WHEN I AGED OUT OVER 30 YEARS AGO.

This wouldn't be possible without you. Thank you for being a champion for "Grace".

Friends, may "The Lord bless you and keep you; make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." 'Numbers 6:24-26

God's grateful girl,

Becky Shaffer

Becky Shaffer,
Founder & Executive Director



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GIVE FOR
"GRACE"
AND CHANGE
A LIFE

\$37 is enough to provide one day of support for one girl at Saving Grace. Give now at savinggracencwa.org or by return envelope.



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Ciera's Story

BROWN EYED GIRL

When I opened the door to Ciera for the first time, I remember thinking how mature and lovely she was. You can see it in this photo. She carries herself with such poise, strength, and confidence—traits that made her stand out from the majority of my “welcome home” experiences.

But it wasn't just the way she carried herself, with her fluffy blanket scarf and her bright brown eyes. Her excitement and energy drew me in immediately and I couldn't wait to get to know her. She kept me at arms length for quite some time, though. Honestly, I didn't blame her. People who were supposed to love and protect her used the name of Jesus to hurt and abuse her. Thinking about it makes me angry.

EARLY LIFE

When I asked what parts of her story she was willing to share with you, Ciera bravely offered up everything she could remember. After suffering nearly fatal injuries in a house fire, she struggles to



“Watching Ciera blossom into an independent, confident, and loving young woman has been incredibly fun! She has a thirst for life and learning that has been amplified by her participation in Senior Seminar. This girl has made waves that will be felt for generations of people in her life!! It truly is nothing short of amazing!”

WENDI, PROGRAM DIRECTOR



retain memories from those early days.

“They think my father burned the house down due to gang violence,” she shares. “My grandmother actually died saving my life and I survived—but just barely. They were going to pull the plug and that’s when DHS stepped in and took me. I was just a baby.”

Ciera was officially adopted around the age of 5 or 6 but shares that it was far from the family life every little girl deserves. After suffering years of abuse, she was taken back into care and bounced around between multiple foster and group homes. “They would just put me wherever,” she says. “I didn’t have any of my biological siblings with me—no family—so it didn’t matter. I was put on the adoption page but nobody really wants to adopt an older kid—ya know?”

A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Eventually, Ciera found her way to Saving Grace through Chrysalis Scholars*, an initiative started by Saving Grace in 2015 to help foster youth navigate college. “I needed all the things that college kids usually get from their families,” she tells me. “I needed supplies. I needed a tutor but couldn’t afford one. I had a place to stay but that was about it. I knew I might have to drop out of school without more support.”

“Kara was my mentor in the Chrysalis program. She’s the one who was really there for me when I was struggling to make the decision to move to

Saving Grace. To this day, I’m an outside-thinker because she taught me to do that. It was a big decision, but I completely trusted her and she blanketed me with her peace and calm. Eventually, I decided I had to do this for me.”

WE HAVE A SENIOR

After 4 years in the Saving Grace program, Ciera has advanced to senior phase and is studying to become a licensed counselor. She’s worked hard building up her savings account and recently bought her very first car, but her journey hasn’t been easy. “At one point I had decided that maybe college just wasn’t for me. It was so hard to keep up and I kept failing class after class. I just wanted to be financially stable, so I thought about getting a minimum wage job at a grocery store or clothing store or something,” she says.

“I considered trade school—hair school, dental assisting, welding, coding—all the things you look into when you have no idea what you’re good at. But thank the Lord I have mentors like my mentor, Danielle, to tell me “Hey, it’s gonna be a journey, but I think college is gonna be the most rewarding thing for you.” She put my head on straight.”

A PERSONAL CALLING

“So, what’s next for you?” I ask her. “That’s what everybody wants to know!” she laughs.

“I had a plan, but like most plans go in my life, God wants to do something else.”

“Okay, then what is drawing you to want to be a counselor?” I asked. “The mental



health field is my calling,” she replies. “I want to do therapy in a more natural setting so that people don’t feel boxed in. I want to help them understand their mental health like Saving Grace helped me understand mine. I know what PTSD is now and how it affects me. I used to not be able to empathize with people. Now, I can pause and ask questions—I can question “why” instead of jumping into a reaction. I’m more in touch with my emotions and the emotions of others.”

“Jaclyn is my secret weapon.”, she says of a former Saving Grace staff member, turned counselor. “I talk to her a lot about the field. It goes back to the community I’ve found here—connections move you forward. I’m so grateful to Saving Grace for that. I don’t think I would’ve been able to make these kinds of connections on my own.”

ABOUT LOVE

“Speaking of connections, can you tell me what you’ve learned about love in your time at Saving Grace?” I asked. “Well...” she pauses for a moment. “I thought there was really just one kind of love. I thought love was submission—in the most horrible way.” she says.

“I remember when I first came to Saving Grace and you would always tell me, “Ciera, I love you and I hope you have a great day.” And inside I would flip out. I was so not used to that. Where I come from, no one said that to me, so I was really suspicious of your motives and I just couldn’t get over it.”, she shares.

“Over time I learned that there are different kinds of love. Love is not just this messed up version that’s not actually love at all—there’s friendship love, motherly

love, daughterly love. Real love is healthy.” she says.

“I learned that love is patient and kind, love is gentle and peaceful. I think I still struggle a little bit, but now I know, this is what real love looks like.”

A VOICE OF REASON

Today, Ciera is working hard to complete her degree and holds a steady job to continue building her savings account. As part of “Senior Seminar” at Saving Grace, she is putting together a work portfolio and making plans to job shadow social workers and counselors. She loves to spend time cooking and collecting new recipes, hiking, bullet journaling, abstract art journaling, and has quite an eye for fashion.

I am grateful to know and love Ciera. I’m honored to be her friend and sister and to watch God be glorified in her story. 1 John 4:18-19 says, “There is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. We love because [God] first loved us.”

It is God’s perfect love—freely given— that allows each of us to give our own love away and somehow remain full—not just remembering the words “I love you”, but also how they made us feel seen, wanted, and truly loved.

Gratefully,



Cherri Rodriguez
Director of Development,
Saving Grace NWA



A PLACE TO CALL HOME

Saving Grace is a home for young women 18-25 years old who are single, without children in their care.

Applicants must be at least 60 days clean and sober and motivated to become independent.

Learn more at savinggracencwa.org/live.



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WE'RE ALL IN THIS *together*



GIVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OR NEEDS LIST ITEMS

\$37 provides one full day of support for one girl at Saving Grace and sustains the ongoing work of generational change. To learn more about giving, and to find a list of most needed items, visit savinggracenwa.org/give.



SERVE WITH US

Each girl at Saving Grace is paired with 3 mentors who commit to a lifelong relationship with her. These mentors play a vital role in reshaping the idea of family for “Grace.” Learn more about mentorship and other volunteer roles at savinggracenwa.org/serve.



LUCY'S

story

If you've been in the Saving Grace family for very long, you probably feel like you already know our beautiful Lucy. She's always been open-handed with her story—sharing each milestone with the most genuine excitement and gratitude. You've likely seen her grow and mature before your very eyes—just as we have—since the day she came to Saving Grace in May of 2019. From the start, this brave girl faithfully pursued her goals with a quiet determination.

Because Saving Grace is very different from a homeless shelter, each young woman must apply and have an interview with our team. We want to ensure that our program is the right fit for her and that she is ready to rise to the challenges of true life transformation that are offered here. From the outside, Lucy's gentle demeanor was a light that drew each of us to her, but admittedly, she was cautious from the beginning, unsure if she had what it would take to be successful. "I remember being really

nervous at the interview," she shares. "I assumed that if I didn't have all the right answers and act just the right way, it was highly likely that I wouldn't get in."

But of course, there's no right set of answers on that day, as we invite each girl to show up authentically herself. Shortly after her interview, Lucy was invited to move in. "My first few days in the program were hard," shares Lucy. "I wanted so badly to make friends with all of the girls, but it wasn't as easy for me as I expected."

I just had to remind myself that this was a life-changing opportunity and that I was in a better place than I was before. I felt safe."

Lucy has always been ready to dive right in and try a new thing with gusto! Like the day she announced to our program coach, Maggie, that she wanted to find her own feminine sense of style. Days later she had poured her spare time and energy into volunteering at a local thrift shop, earning herself a beautiful new wardrobe full of flowy dresses and cute shoes. "One thing that I've learned through Saving Grace is that I'm my own person and I get to make my own choices," she shares. "For the longest time I struggled to value my own opinion. I was able to stop looking for approval from others and be my true self."



Before long, Lucy began finding her voice in other ways. “I was used to working hard, only to give all my money to my family just to pay for their bills.”, shares Lucy. A common theme in poverty, many young women who come to Saving Grace struggle with the responsibility they feel to financially support family members that they no longer live with. This prevents them from ever budgeting or saving money and keeps them stuck in the cycle of poverty. “After realizing that I’m not responsible for the choices of other people which made them dependent on me, I was finally able to keep all my hard earned money and be responsible with it.”, she shares.

Lucy was eventually rewarded in a big way for that responsibility, when she was given her very first car. “I had put aside money in savings for a long time and was tempted to just rush out and buy a car with it, but I felt that if I was patient, God would bless me with the gift of a car when I was ready.”, she says. “I worked hard to get my driver’s license while in the program and then when the time was right, God did bless me with a car, and I am forever grateful for it! I give thanks to Him every time I hop in to drive home from work.”

As she prepares herself for graduation and the transition to her own apartment, Lucy reflects fondly on all that she’s learned and the people who walked with her

through her journey. “I now know that if you’re spending all your time with people who are not trying to build you, you’ll have a much harder time getting to where you want to be. You have to take that big step away from what’s familiar, and you have to do that part alone. But when you do, you’ll find people who want to help you and love you more than you could ever imagine. All of that love and support will forever be the highlight of your life!” she shares.

“Out of everyone, Maggie has probably made the biggest impact on me. I could always tell her what I was going through and we would work through it together. I appreciate every single thing that she has done for me.”, she says. “I am so thankful to be graduating from Saving Grace financially stable, enrolled in cosmetology school, owning a car, and with the most amazing friends and mentors—who I love so much! I couldn’t have done these things without the support of everyone here.

The way that they’ve cared for me and loved me has given me a better understanding of how God feels toward me. It really gives me a lot of peace and joy.”

Lucy is a phenomenal cook and is quick to fill an extra plate or two to feed a friend, but her presence has been a gift to her housemates in other ways. “I like to think I contribute kindness and gentleness to the house”, she shares. “I want to bring a little bit of peace and some love and joy to everyone when I walk into a room. I try my best to hype people up and make them feel good about themselves. I’m also the one who gets called on to come and kill all the spiders.”, she shares with a smile. “I truly feel a very warm, loving feeling every time I get to pour into another of the girls. I feel it’s a beautiful gift God has given me. I will always come home to visit.”



As part of Lucy’s senior phase she’s creating a portfolio of her work and building her business on a professional Facebook page. She invites you to follow her progress by “liking” her Facebook page, “[Flowers and Scrunchies and Things](#)”.

MAKAYLA'S STORY



When Makayla first walked through the doors of Saving Grace in June of 2019, she admits she was terrified and exhausted. “I felt like I was constantly treading water to try and stay afloat. I just needed a break.” she shares. Truth be told, Makayla’s distress was evident to all of us. She sank into the interview chair looking utterly defeated—her golden blonde hair hanging down to hide her tired eyes.

“When I finally got the call that I’d been accepted into the program, I cried.” she says. “And when they told me we’d be going to the beach together for week, I just couldn’t believe it. I hadn’t done anything except just survive for the last two years, so I was really shocked that this opportunity to rest and enjoy myself was even being offered to me.”

At Saving Grace, we believe that good experiences for “Grace” can help to heal the bad experiences of her past. While not every girl will go to the beach while she’s with us, we’re intentional to provide experiences that show her she is worthy of rest and enjoying God’s good gifts. It was only through this

community’s generous giving that this restful moment was possible for Makayla and the other young women at SG.

“That beach was the first time I’d felt any sort of peace in a very long time. And the other girls were really sweet and patient with me.” Makayla shares.

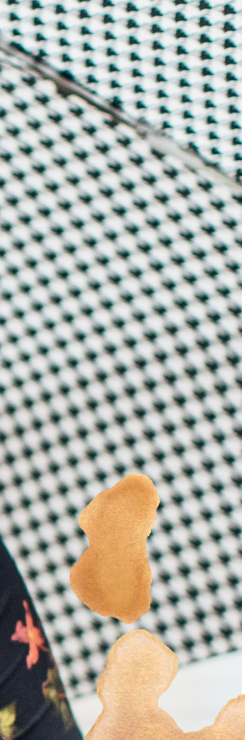
Coping with multiple autoimmune diseases and the threat of homelessness for many years, had taken its toll on her. “Before coming into this program, I used to walk four miles just to get to work every day and I was homeless most of the time. My medical conditions required constant attention, doctor’s visits, and medications that I couldn’t afford. I’ve been through two surgeries in the last two years and had no support from my family.” she says.

Moving to Saving Grace was not just a walk on the beach for Makayla, “I struggled at the start and had a lot of breakdowns as I faced the reality of



HELP US
CELEBRATE
MAKAYLA'S
GRADUATION!

You can help us celebrate Makayla and our other two graduates by mailing cards and gift cards to Saving Grace! See back page for details.



the situation I'd been forced into." She says. "I had collections debt from hospitals and from the apartment I had to leave because I couldn't make my rent. I had no car, no credit, and a lot of debt—but Saving Grace gave me the courage to keep fighting."

"Maggie, my program coach, and Summer, my counselor, have been two of my greatest helps through all of this. They take the time to evaluate how I'm really feeling and help me problem solve in creative ways. I'm grateful for the understanding and comfort they bring to my life." She says. "With their support and guidance, I've paid off \$9,000 in collections in the last year. I was able to raise my credit score significantly and finally get my own car. My world has opened up because I'm no longer limited by how far I can walk to work somewhere.", she says. "I am also thankful for my SG mentor, Sue, who is so great about taking me out to just talk about life. She's the one who went with me to shop for my car and my new apartment that I will be moving to soon! She always encourages me when I feel like things are just so tough." She says.

While Makayla is quick to point out all that others have invested in her, her generous, compassionate heart has been just as quick to pour out and invest her love in the other girls at Saving Grace. "Personally, I feel like the house "mom" sometimes." She says. "I always crack

up when I'm in the kitchen and one by one all the girls will file in to tell me all about their day. I love all of them and they make me laugh constantly! I'm happy I've been able to be there for some of them when they just needed a friend to talk to. And because of my job in banking, I've become like the financial advisor for the house. Everyone knows if they have bank questions it's gonna be Makayla!", she says with a giggle.

Looking back on her time at Saving Grace, Makayla shares, "I'm proud of myself for not giving up. Even though my body makes life near-impossible sometimes, I know it's worth holding on. I've learned that it's okay advocate for yourself instead of just accepting the hand you're dealt. You don't have to be completely alone.

It's okay to fall down and cry when things get hard, but you don't have to stay at the bottom."

"I'm looking forward to discovering my new life and finding more peace within myself after graduating. I hope to eventually get a dog I can snuggle, and I'm probably gonna be a crazy plant lady! I'm excited to be able to plan vacations with my friends and just get to feel that full sense of freedom of being capable of being on my own. I never knew I could do it before."

I hope to eventually get a dog I can snuggle, and I'm probably gonna be a crazy plant lady! -Makayla



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legacy OF GRACE



At Saving Grace, we believe God is calling us to serve deeper and wider in our community and our world, and to empower even more young women to build and nurture healthy families for generations to come!

A Legacy gift (or estate gift) to Saving Grace in your will, inspires grace for many years to come. With your help, many more brave girls will have the opportunity to grow into strong, empowered women of Faith—healthy, healed, and prepared to live independently, as positive contributors to the community.

GIFTS FOR GRADS

YOU can help us CELEBRATE our seniors as they graduate by sending them a note of congratulations with a grocery/gas card that they can use to get settled! Ciera, Makayla, and Lucy will be showered with your cards at their graduation party in October!

*Cards can be mailed to
the Saving Grace home:*

Saving Grace NWA
C/O: "Grace's" first name
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Rogers, AR 72756

*Contact us for more information
about leaving a Legacy gift.*

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