



With warm hospitality and steady leadership, SHAMICA SOUTHERN keeps the Fresh Start Laundromat running smoothly for our neighbors.



Heart Ministry Center
DIGNITY FOR ALL

LEADING WITH PURPOSE AT FRESH START LAUNDROMAT

On a chilly evening at 24th and Binney Streets, light spills from the windows of the Fresh Start Laundromat, Heart Ministry Center’s first social enterprise. Inside, the hum of washers mixes with conversation and laughter as neighbors fold clothes and visit. There is a warm atmosphere in the space, reflected in Shamica Southern, who leads the laundromat with skill and heart.

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DIGNITY FOR ALL



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Our CEO, **DAMANY RAHN**, reflects on the possibilities of transformation at the Heart.

LETTER FROM THE CEO

Time and time again, we see that personal transformation does not happen by accident but by following a way forward, one step at a time. It is rarely instantaneous. With the right support in place, change becomes possible. Our Fresh Start participants have opportunities to navigate through Heart's continuum of services. Through the process of skill-building and personal development, participants move from survival to stability, from opportunity to ownership, and leave the program with their Fresh Start, beginning their future filled with purpose.

One of the clearest examples of this transformation in programming is the evolution of our Fresh Start program and the expansion of our social enterprises. What began as a way to provide immediate support has grown into a set of career pipelines; real jobs, real training, and real advancement for individuals working toward long-term economic mobility. From the Fresh Start Laundromat to Fresh Floral and now Brave Heart Gear, our social enterprises are building businesses that not only serve people but prepare them. The work of the Heart is creating pathways where people can grow, contribute, and ultimately thrive.

Because of your partnership, the Heart Ministry Center continues to be a place where fresh starts turn into lasting change. Together, we are transforming individuals, families, and ultimately, this Omaha community we call home. ■

Damany Rahn

Chief Executive Officer



LEADING WITH PURPOSE

SHAMICA SOUTHERN'S first-time homebuyer moment, shared with VP of Advocacy, **LINDA ALSHARIF**, reflects months of budgeting and saving to make her dream a reality.

Shamica works to keep operations running smoothly by tracking the laundry app, coordinating promotions, community raffles, and facilitating free drying times offered each week. Yet what stands out is the way she connects with people who walk through the door.

"We don't just provide laundry," Shamica says. "We provide A Way Forward. I know that the people who come in here go out and share that with others. We make ourselves accessible. These doors are always open."

Shamica's empathy runs deep because she once sought the open door of the Heart. Years ago, Shamica looked across 24th Street, feeling unsure of her place, struggling with the challenges of severe poverty. Outside the building, she encountered former CEO Mark Dahir. He offered kindness, a food pantry, and invited her to return and connect with a case manager.

At Heart Ministry Center, Shamica found encouragement, structure, and eventually confidence in her own leadership. Through completing Pathways, an earlier version of the Fresh Start Program, she discovered that she could shape her own future. "Everybody is embraced at HMC," she recalls. "I believe that the staff goes above and beyond to make sure people's needs are met. I worked hard and am the first one to make it out of poverty in my family, and the first one to own a home." ■

Her achievements, like leading the laundromat team and purchasing her first home in November 2025, come from her persistence and belief in her potential. "All that I have been through shaped and molded me into the strong woman I am today," she says. "And it is worth it if I can be a beacon of light for others. People shouldn't put limits on themselves. It's not how you start, but how you finish that matters."

At Fresh Start Laundromat, families enter with more than baskets of clothes. Through conversation, Shamica and her team connect community members with opportunities at the Heart, food for their families, medical care, legal assistance, and financial literacy resources. She sees these interactions as building community. Every conversation opens the door wider for someone else to take their next step forward.

Shamica is building commercial laundry accounts across Omaha and finding creative ways to expand the laundromat's reach. "Our revenue is recycled back into our resources so that we can continue to help others," she explains. "It's about helping the next person that comes through our doors."

As the night settles in around 24th and Binney, the laundromat's light glows, a reflection of the woman inside who turned her challenges into strength. Shamica continues to build community within the laundromat, proving that her fresh start was only the beginning. ■

NEW SOCIAL ENTERPRISES, SAME MISSION: EXPANDING JOB TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

New growth is taking root through Heart Ministry Center's network of social enterprises. Each helps provide needed services, opens doors for Fresh Start graduates and other employees, and generates support that advances the mission of Heart Ministry Center.

That growth now includes three social enterprises creating jobs for Fresh Start graduates while meeting neighborhood needs. Two are already well established. The Fresh Start Laundromat offers a clean, attended facility with affordable services and free dry times several days each week. It is led by Shamica Southern and staffed by fellow Fresh Start graduates. Fresh Floral in Midtown Omaha pairs flowers with opportunity, providing hands-on job training while creating arrangements for weddings, celebrations, and everyday life.

Brave Heart Gear is the newest social enterprise, now open and sharing retail space with Fresh Floral at 4922 Dodge Street. This custom apparel and merchandise printing business provides schools, teams, corporations, and local organizations with high-quality gear while creating meaningful work for Fresh Start graduates. For inquiries, reach out to contact@braveheartgear.com.

Chief Financial Officer Mike Masek reinforces that the purpose of the Heart Ministry Center's social enterprise reflect three goals: to support workforce development, meet essential community needs, and reinvest any revenue directly into the programs that make this progress possible. "Our intention," he says, "is for Fresh Start graduates to move up within our enterprises and move into higher-paying jobs where they can continue developing their skills."

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2028, the Heart will open a grocery store offering fresh, affordable food, conveniently located in our North Omaha neighborhood. According to the USDA, "an urban food desert is a low-income tract with at least 500 people, or 33 percent of the population, living more than 1 mile from the nearest large grocery store". The area around Heart Ministry Center has long been considered a food desert.

Chief executive officer Damany Rahn explains how the grocery store project is closely aligned with the mission of the Heart Ministry Center. His enthusiasm for the store's value reflects his desire for the area to experience improved health and economic momentum: "The grocery store will address food insecurity while creating jobs and reinvesting dollars back into the neighborhood."

As Dom notes, planning for the grocery store has been discussed with community members, stakeholders, and foundations that support the mission. Research has been thorough and is ongoing. "We interviewed more than five hundred people," he says, "and the enterprise we're building is coming directly from what our community told us it needs."

As our social enterprises expand, from workforce training for Fresh Start graduates to the neighborhood resource and economic momentum of the new grocery store, they anchor our mission of providing food, healthcare, and a way forward for Omaha families facing severe poverty. ■



Director of Innovation **DANI ROGERS**, Facilities Specialist **CHRIS MOORE**, and CFO **MIKE MASEK** are near the DTF printer at Brave Heart Gear, our newest social enterprise.



FRESH START, EXPANSION FOR GROWING OUTCOMES

Fresh Start Facilitator **CRYSTAL SEEFUS**, celebrates with Fresh Start graduate **HEATHER DISHONG**, as she reaches this milestone.

Cheering erupts in the Heart lobby as the newest Fresh Start graduate rings the bell. The triumphant tug on the rope signals a successful completion of the training program and a hard-won fresh start. Each graduation marks a personal transformation and a network of support that continues well beyond the celebration. While every graduate brings their own story, they share the connection that their fresh start was built on community support and a belief that their goals are within reach.

This November, the Fresh Start job training program expanded from its original 15–18 weeks of coaching and skill-based training to a nine-month timeline. The extended structure allows participants to strengthen the habits and mindset that lead to lasting stability and success.

Rayna Pollock, director of A Way Forward programs, explains why personalized support remains central to the program. "When participants register for their initial three-week trial, each is seeking a way forward on their own unique path," she says. "Some may need support complying with a court order, working with a parole officer, or fulfilling drug court requirements. The one-on-one coaching, mental health support, job readiness training, daily group check-ins, and hands-on work experience are just the beginning."

That investment in each person reflects the Heart Ministry Center's core value of dignity for all. Every member of the staff who works directly with Fresh Start participants listens, guides, and celebrates their progress. This shared involvement reinforces the idea that participants are valued members of the Heart community.

Rayna explains that her team has worked diligently to bring the expansion to life and is thrilled to see it in motion. She's

especially excited about the internship program, which allows participants to gain experience in departments across the organization. "We currently have Fresh Start interns serving in the Monen Healthcare Clinic and the IT department," she says. "They're being exposed to roles they haven't seen before at the Heart, building confidence and discovering new interests along the way."

When asked why a longer program was both necessary and meaningful, Rayna reflected on what the team has observed over time. "We discovered that the longer participants are in our building and in our care, the better they did when they left," she explains. The extended timeline provides space for deeper learning, consistency, and connection, key ingredients for long-term success.

Chris Moore, a recent Fresh Start graduate working as a facilities specialist at Heart's social enterprises, says the extended program makes a real difference. "Nine months is the perfect amount of time for the program," he says. "If I were advising a prospective participant, I'd tell them to 'Keep an open mind. Once you get out of your own way, they will help you. This place will do amazing things for you if you give it a chance.'"

"ONCE YOU GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY, THEY WILL HELP YOU. THIS PLACE WILL DO AMAZING THINGS FOR YOU IF YOU GIVE IT A CHANCE."

CHRIS MOORE, Fresh Start graduate

THE WILLING PARTNER PROGRAM PROVIDING THE POWER OF PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Maria Ramirez, Willing Partner coordinator, says many choose to begin the Willing Partner program with a simple thought: "I am ready for something different." Community members arrive seeking greater stability and may not yet see a clear path forward.

"They come to orientation with motivation, but not always the resources or guidance they need, so they enroll in Willing Partner," explains Maria. The program is built on relationships. Navigators walk with participants, learning their situations and identifying long-term solutions together. They may explore housing, finances, food insecurity, mental health, legal concerns, and more, all with the goal of helping clients build lasting stability.

Beyond providing immediate relief, which Maria calls "band-aid" responses, Willing Partner looks deeper. Is the current rent sustainable? Could resume-writing help or job coaching lead to higher income? Through regular appointments and weekly phone calls, clients meet with a Willing Partner navigator to discuss challenges, set goals, and track progress. Along the way, they may connect with other Heart Ministry Center resources, including free legal clinics, Monen Healthcare Clinic's mental health providers, or personalized budgeting support.

When Teresa met with Maria, she had completed a prison sentence in another state and spent years in recovery from addiction. A physical disability limited her job options, and her income could not cover her bills. Together, they reviewed her finances and discovered she qualified for more affordable housing. They also identified job opportunities she could

realistically pursue. With help completing online applications and sending follow-up emails, Teresa secured a new job and increased her income. With more sustainable housing and higher earnings, she gained the confidence to live within a realistic budget.

"We are here for community members to be successful in their future," Maria says. "Each situation is different. For someone living in a shelter, moving into an apartment can be a huge goal. Every small goal we reach is a big success."

Last year alone, the team supported 450 individuals facing challenges like these. But the numbers tell only part of the story. As Maria often reminds clients, "We are just here to help; you did the work. You achieved your goal." In 2025, hundreds of individuals took meaningful steps toward greater stability—the heart of Willing Partner's mission to honor dignity, resilience, and the quiet transformations that happen when someone chooses a new way forward. ■



Through meetings like this, **MARIAM RAMIREZ** and the Willing Partner team help community members achieve their goals.

FRESH FLORAL

4922 Dodge Street
402-991-1970
freshfloralomaha.com

CELEBRATE THIS

Mother's Day!

WITH FRESH FLORAL

May 10, 2026

A Heart Ministry Center Social Enterprise

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

On a Saturday morning this February, Food Distribution Director Jimmy King invited Joe Verzal to share why he volunteers. Joe's thoughtful response reflected his frequent Saturday-morning presence at the Heart Ministry Center. He explained that when he faces challenges during his professional workweek, he thinks about the obstacles faced by those who line up for food at the Heart. Keeping their struggles in mind helps him see his own hurdles in a new light.

Distributing over 3 million pounds of food in more than 160,000 visits in 2025 takes many dedicated hands. Highlighting just one of our 7,566 volunteers is not easy. Yet on many Saturday mornings, Joe's upbeat disposition and calming presence help the pantry run smoothly. He greets community members, collects their information, and sets in motion the distribution of food pantries as volunteers, staff, and Fresh Start participants move carts into position and load them into cars.



MADELINE, a college student, volunteers with **JIMMY KING**, food distribution director, and her dad, **JOE VERZAL**, during a Saturday shift in the food pantry.

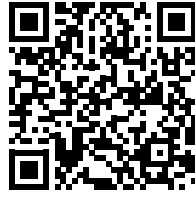
Jimmy shares, "Because of volunteers like Joe, the Heart Ministry lives up to its nickname, the Miracle on 24th Street. When people keep coming here and showing up when they are in need, our mission keeps on growing." ■



SEE THE IMPACT YOU MADE IN 2025!

Heart Ministry Center's first-ever Impact Report shows how you helped provide food, healthcare, and a way forward for our neighbors facing poverty.

Scan the code to view the Impact Report today.



WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR ALL WHO SUPPORT OUR MISSION

In 2025,

- 7,566 volunteers offered their time and expertise
- Volunteers supported the food pantry, assisted with building and grounds through Campus Cares, and served at the Monen Healthcare Clinic as both providers and patient support.

Thank you for leading the way forward.

Volunteer & Be Part of The Heart

Be the Heart in our community this spring. Volunteer with Heart Ministry Center and help provide food, healthcare, and a way forward for neighbors affected by poverty in Omaha.

Serve in pantry operations, lend a hand with landscaping, or, if you are bilingual, help with patient check-in at the Monen Healthcare Clinic. Come on your own or bring co-workers, friends, neighbors, family, or your workout group. Visit the volunteer page on our website to find service dates that work best for you.

Provide a way forward. Scan the QR code to donate today!
heartministrycenter.org/donate



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SOCIAL ENTERPRISE WITH A HEART INSIGHTS FROM OUR VISIT TO HOMEBOY INDUSTRIES

Earlier this year, four members of the Heart Ministry Center team visited Homeboy Industries (Homeboy), a longtime leader in social enterprise and support for individuals rebuilding their lives after incarceration and gang involvement. The group — Rick Berger, chief development officer; Amy Holmes, chief operations officer; Rayna Pollock, director of A Way Forward programs, and Dani Rogers, director of innovation — spent their days immersed in Homeboy's programs, touring facilities and speaking with staff and trainees about the practical and philosophical aspects of the organization.

Founded by Jesuit priest Fr. Greg Boyle in 1988, Homeboy Industries has become the world's largest gang rehabilitation and reentry program. It's known for its culture of 'radical kinship,' a phrase that captures the idea that healing happens through genuine human connection. The Los Angeles based organization operates 14 social enterprises, each supporting stable long-term employment and offering a sense of belonging and hope for each participant.

For the Heart Ministry Center team, visiting Homeboy was inspiring and affirming. Both organizations serve people who have faced personal barriers and want to work toward meaningful change. Both believe in the power of second chances and in the dignity that comes with meaningful employment. As Dani reflected, "training is not just about learning a job skill; it's about rebuilding trust, consistency, and confidence."

That sense of purpose carried throughout the visit, from conversations with Homeboy trainees guiding the Heart Ministry Center team through the facilities, to the moments of shared laughter and tears that brought everyone together. "You could feel the courage it took for the trainees to be seen and see the confidence it gave them knowing the trust the organization placed in their voices," Dani said.

Rick Berger was equally moved by Homeboy's scale and reach. "At any given time, Homeboy may have 500 people going through their program," he noted. "They are surrounded by resources, social workers, educators, case managers, all working toward the same outcome. The parallels with the Heart are clear; what's different is the size of Homeboy's operation. It's inspiring to see what's possible."

Heart Ministry Center's team witnessed firsthand what unfolds when second chances are sustained by radical kinship at Homeboy Industries. Their 14 social enterprises impress with scale while their deeper impact lies in helping people reclaim their inherent value. Back in Omaha, as the Heart Ministry Center sets out to open new social enterprises, this conviction endures. The aim remains clear, to operate successful ventures, while providing steady work for fresh start graduates to build skills, regain their sense of purpose, and enjoy long-term stability.



COO AMY HOLMES, A Way Forward Director RAYNA POLLOCK, and Director of Innovation DANI ROGERS, visit Homeboy Industries in LA.

GET CONNECTED TO OUR COMMUNITY TODAY

- Visit Heart Ministry Center's campus and take a tour to see our mission in action.
- Volunteer at our Choice Food Distribution providing fresh and shelf-stable food items to community members in need.
- Make a financial gift to Heart Ministry Center or donate in honor of a loved one.
- Follow us on social media.

Thank you for supporting Heart Ministry Center. You are making a difference with families experiencing poverty in the Omaha metro.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

HEARTMINISTRYCENTER

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Amy Holmes Chief Operations Officer	Conor Berigan Healthcare Director	Rayna Pollack A Way Forward Director
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