



Spring 2026

## From the Executive Director They Need What You Need

This winter, a once in a generation ice storm struck Nashville, leaving nearly a quarter million residents without power – and reminding everyone of our common humanity. As temperatures plummeted below freezing, Nashvillians were literally left in the dark, with no light or heat sources, no warm water, and no way to know exactly when power would be restored.

Everyone in the city experienced real vulnerability. For those with power, we were grateful for the “basic” utilities we too often take for granted and felt compelled to check on our neighbors. For those without, we had just a taste of the uncertainty that our neighbors struggling with homelessness face every day, simply trying to figure out where to go next.

For me, this experience reinforced the critical role that community plays and how important it is to support others as they attempt to figure out their next steps. It called to mind Room In The Inn’s Navigation program, where we meet the complexities of others’ lived experiences with love and mercy and engage with every individual as just that: an individual.

Each person who finds their way into our community comes with a singular story and unique circumstances that can affect the “right” next step. Whether someone has been without a home for just a few days, or a few months, or a few years, it can be difficult to know where to turn. This is why our Navigation program is so important.

We accompany and empower participants as they embark on their own journeys. And we see that, once a neighbor trusts that they have someone they can turn to, everything becomes a little easier. Once they have a plan, they have just a little more control over their own destiny. Once they begin taking steps in the right direction, they gain agency, confidence, and clarity. And the road ahead opens up.

The ice storm of 2026 brought our most essential needs into focus: the need for warmth, food, and a place to belong. Our neighbors here at Room In The Inn share these same needs, and I pray that we’ll all continue to respond from a place of empathy – our own understanding of what it means to live with uncertainty and instability.



*Through the ice storm, friends and neighbors showed up to serve in our Meal Program, provide essential services, and show hospitality to our community.*

Your support has allowed us to walk faithfully alongside our neighbors for more than 40 years. We couldn’t do this without each other, and I am so grateful.

Yours in service,

*Rachel Hester*

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# Navigation Empowers Participants to Take the Next Step

We all know the frustration of waiting at the DMV to get an ID. For someone experiencing homelessness, it is even harder. What used to take seven days for our community members, and possibly even longer, is now only a two-hour process thanks to a pilot partnership with the Tennessee Department of Safety. This incredible new program, available twice a month, allows our neighbors experiencing homelessness to get on their feet faster and keep moving forward.

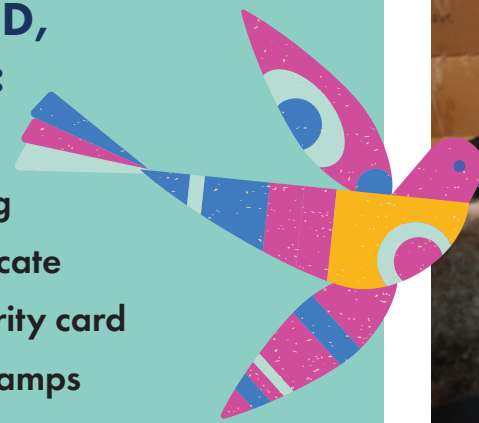
For individuals who are unhoused, things like replacing an ID may seem so challenging that it is difficult to know where to even start. At Room In The Inn, we empower participants to take the next step toward their goals with what we call Navigation.

More than “case management,” Navigation does not see people as problems to solve, but neighbors to love. We sit down with participants one-on-one to have a conversation about their unique situation and provide individual support to reach their goals toward health, recovery, income, and housing.



## WITHOUT AN ID, YOU CANNOT:

- Apply for a job
- Apply for housing
- Get a birth certificate
- Get a social security card
- Apply for food stamps
- Travel on a bus city-to-city
- Vote
- Cash a check
- Open a bank account
- Purchase certain medications



**TOP:** Navigation means walking side-by-side with our neighbors! Maggie, Director of Hope University, which includes our Education and Navigation Services, completes intake paperwork with a guest during our expanded Legal Clinic.

**BOTTOM:** Each month, Legal Clinic brings in partners from the Public Defender’s Office, a Disability Advocate, and H.E.L.P. Clinic lawyers from various law firms, coordinated by Baker Donelson, to meet participants’ needs to navigate a variety of legal challenges.

Treating each individual and story with respect, our team assists in navigating these needs:

- Obtaining important documents
- Starting the journey toward housing
- Connecting with mental health resources
- Connecting with substance abuse treatment resources
- Helping to make a plan and determine next steps

Our Navigation team is able to make referrals internally, to our Legal and ID Clinic, and to our expert partner organizations like mental health or treatment centers, for additional support.

Our neighbors experiencing homelessness face so many challenges that it can be difficult to know where to turn. By building supportive and trusting relationships in community, and providing one-on-one support through our Navigation services and expanded Legal and ID Clinics, we can help untangle the knots and offer hope as we move forward together.



**TOP:** Through a new pilot partnership, the Tennessee Department of Safety runs an ID clinic at Room In The Inn twice each month. Identification is critical for participants to move forward. They are experts at getting participants to smile for their ID photos!

**BOTTOM:** Maynette McMichael (right), with the Nashville Public Defender’s Office, has been volunteering at Room In The Inn for more than 30 years. She first got started as a Winter Shelter volunteer!

What I love most about being involved in our Navigation programming is **witnessing hope returned** when we are able to walk alongside someone who has a complicated path forward and **identify solutions**, as well as the excitement of someone getting approved for housing that has been **living in survival mode** for much longer than anyone ever should!

- Carolina Smith,  
Manager of  
Navigation Services,  
a new position generously  
underwritten by Clay Blevins Philanthropy



Help us create more pathways for our neighbors to succeed! Visit [roomintheinn.org/donate](http://roomintheinn.org/donate)

# Next Steps on the Journey: Orientation & Housing Class

At Room In The Inn, we believe that everyone deserves stable housing. For those in our community, there can be many challenges standing between them and a place of their own. There is a deficit of affordable housing in Nashville, and waiting lists are long. Housing Class allows us to talk about some of the barriers. Below are some of the questions and conversations that happen each week in our housing classes.



**INN The Know** is Room In The Inn's daily orientation to our daytime services for new participants. Jon, pictured above giving a tour to new participants, has been working with our Day Services for over 20 years. Any adult experiencing homelessness is welcomed into community at 8:15 a.m. Mon-Fri. by receiving a tour and learning about the services we have to offer. Click the **Get Help** button on our website to learn more or help a neighbor in need get connected!

**What important documents do I need to apply for housing?**

- \* STATE ID OR DRIVER'S LICENSE
- \* SOCIAL SECURITY CARD
- \* BIRTH CERTIFICATE
- \* PROOF OF INCOME

**How do I know which housing is right for me?**

- \* WHAT CAN I AFFORD?
- \* CAN I LIVE INDEPENDENTLY?
- \* WILL I HAVE EASY ACCESS TO MY BASIC NEEDS (FOOD, HEALTHCARE, TRANSPORTATION, ETC.)?
- \* IS IT PART OF A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY? WOULD ADDITIONAL WRAPAROUND SERVICES BE IMPORTANT TO ME?
- \* IS IT A PLACE WHERE I CAN FEEL SAFE?



Want to know more about Coordinated Entry and Nashville's approach to Affordable Housing? Visit [nashville.gov/departments/office-homeless-services](http://nashville.gov/departments/office-homeless-services)

# Bring Love into a New Home by Building Welcome Home Baskets

Provide a basket of move-in day essentials for our neighbors moving out of our community and into their own housing! Collect these items with your family, school, or group, and assemble an incredible gift for your new neighbors.

Since November 1st, we have helped 33 individuals move into housing...and counting!

- Laundry Basket or Storage Bin
- Kitchen**
  - Boxed Silverware Set
  - Boxed Dish Set
  - Drinking Glasses (4)
  - Pot (1)
  - Pan (1)
  - Cutting Board
  - Dish Towels
  - Dish Soap
- Bathroom**
  - Shower Curtain
  - Shower Curtain Liner
  - Shower Curtain Hooks
  - Washcloths (2-4)
  - Bath Towels (2-4)
  - Toilet Paper
- Bedroom**
  - Pillow
  - Full-size Sheet Set

Or shop for online and ship directly to campus by scanning the QR code:



Please email [volunteer@roomintheinn.org](mailto:volunteer@roomintheinn.org) with any questions and to schedule delivery of your completed baskets. Thank you for loving your neighbors!

**Have gently used housing items to donate?** Connect with our community partners!



When you donate items to ThriftSmart, you can make it count even more by specifying Room In The Inn as the community partner you would like your donation to benefit. We then receive gift cards as part of their GiveSmart program!



H2H brings hope to families transitioning from homelessness into housing by helping turn empty rooms into homes. Visit their website to donate gently-used household or furniture items at [house2homenashville.org](http://house2homenashville.org).

# Building Trust with Hospitality

## FOOT CLINIC

Navigating community members through their challenges requires that they share their hardest moments, days, and stories with us. We cannot address the barriers we face without being vulnerable and allowing others to see the hurdles that loom large before us.

In our participants' lives on the streets, vulnerability is often met with violence. *If I am weak or in need, I am also susceptible to someone taking advantage of me.* In response, guests come to us guarded.

Our Navigation services are only possible by standing on a solid foundation of trust. In order to have a conversation one-on-one about the most difficult parts of someone's journey toward housing, we have to be able to trust each other and let our guards down.

This is where our core value of hospitality comes in. Experiences like our Foot Clinic and Cafe Program exist so that we can meet participants exactly where they are. Not only do they meet an immediate need—receiving care for aching feet or having breakfast—but they also create the necessary space for participants to relax, to be vulnerable, and to experience their own dignity.

Whether in Cafe, the Foot Clinic, our Winter Shelter Program, Hope University, or our Meal Program, guests have the opportunity to let their guard down and experience not harm, but love, safety, and community. They can begin to feel safe enough to share their challenges and work toward a better future.

*In our weekly Foot Clinic, we invite you to wash your neighbor's feet. This gift is both an act of loving service and an important part of caring for feet worn by many tough miles throughout our city. Each month, 60 guests engage in this sacred act. Chris B., one of our guests, recently participated in Foot Clinic to celebrate his birthday. When we asked how it was, he said, "Fantastic!"*



## CLANCEY'S CAFE

Our community comes together at Clancey's Cafe to have a cup of coffee and a pastry, to get to know one another, and enjoy live music. Performers have included Grammy Award winners, Country Music Hall of Famers, Opry stars, volunteers, and members of our community. Guests are able to visit Clancey's with tickets that they can buy with points earned through attending classes at Hope University.

Clancey's Cafe gives our community a space to feel welcome and special. It is less about providing an essential service and more about helping people feel like they matter.

While the Meal Program fulfills a physical need, the Cafe fulfills a mental and emotional need. There is no better feeling when you have had a long week than going to a restaurant or coffee shop to catch up with your friends and relax. That is the experience we try to provide for our guests in Clancey's.



## Volunteer for Cafe!

Cafe is one of our biggest year-round volunteer needs. We host cafe service every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 8:30 a.m.-10 a.m.

If you are interested in providing hospitality to our community, please email [volunteer@roomintheinn.org](mailto:volunteer@roomintheinn.org). We would love to have you!



Cafe is my *favorite ministry* we do. I have had a multitude of conversations in the cafe ranging from **SEC football**, to **music preference**, to **deep heart-to-hearts**. I truly believe that I know our cafe volunteers and regular attendees so well because of the **hospitable** and **community-centered nature** of Clancey's Cafe.

- Lauren Clayton, Community Engagement Coordinator, pictured with one of our regular cafe volunteers, Taylor Hammond



**Sing it, girl!** Room In The Inn Volunteers and Opry regulars Randy Hart and Mica Roberts performed "Ride Sally Ride," in our Cafe program, and these participants couldn't resist singing along! Scan the QR code to enjoy the finest morning tradition of Music City!





# A Conversation with Tony

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO START BY INTRODUCING YOURSELF?

Well, my name is Tony. I was born and raised here in Nashville, graduated from Whites Creek High School, worked in the hospital for over—wow, it's going to tell how old I am — I worked in the hospital for over 20 years. Then, I was a supervisor over custodians, and I did that for like eight years. Then I had my own custodial service for a while in Georgia. I came back in 2010 and took care of my mother and father until they died.

## HOW DID YOU COME TO ROOM IN THE INN?

After my mother and sister died, I had a mental breakdown, my brother sold the house, and I became homeless. I was homeless for about 10 years. I was sleeping on the ground, trying to find a place to sleep for awhile. And I slept up under Jefferson Street Bridge for a long time, up until the tornado hit. Then I started coming down here regularly, doing classes, staying over at the Guest House and going out to the churches [congregations], which kind of got me back to my roots of growing up because my father was a minister, so they kind of grounded me into who I was.

## THEN YOU STARTED LOOKING FOR YOUR APARTMENT?

They [Room In The Inn] helped me look for a place. They will tell you, 'Well, we'll put you in the location, but you got to do the footwork.' I kept on saying, 'Now wait a minute, hold up! Y'all gotta be helping me, I can't do all this!' I got out there. Man, I used to go to like five apartments a day. I put applications in, then I waited to hear something. I had, a long time ago, an eviction on my record. So I had to work and get that paid off. Then as soon as I got that paid off, I got in... I've been in my place for two years now. Has it been that long? Yeah, two years!



*Tony (at left) is incredibly competitive! He was a four-sport athlete in high school and hates to lose any game, especially cornhole in our courtyard. If he loses, everyone hears about it!*

To hear more of Tony's story,  
visit [www.roomintheinn.org/40-years-of-stories](http://www.roomintheinn.org/40-years-of-stories)

