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November 2026

Dear Friend of Stepping Stones,

Who really knows for sure why but since the dawn of humankind, sensitivity, creativity and mood disturbances have been integrally connected. According to Anthropologists, the oldest known drawing by Homo sapiens *(estimated at 73,000 years old) is an abstract hashtag pattern done with a red ochre crayon on a stone flake from the Blombos Cave in South Africa*. **Since that time, creativity and temperament have been woven together in a way that cannot be fully separated.** Poet Lord Byron saluted those with this artistic temperament by writing: "To those who, by the dint of glass and vapour, Discover stars. And sail in the wind's eye-"

While having a mental illness is not requirement for being an artist, and in fact most artists do not have a mood disorder-**there does exist this association between creativity, imagination and mood fluctuations; especially in bipolar disorder.** It is the link these "voyagers" share that clinical psychologist and writer Kay Redfield Jamison documented so thoroughly in her book *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*.

Many of the individuals in our program with mood disturbances display the drive to create. **Unfortunately, often times our clients do not see the value of their works and we strive to help each person recognize their talents.** Even though these abilities may not be self-realized, they are evident as Kay Jamison recognizes, "The specific emotional landscape of manic-depression can supply intensity, breadth of experience and a unique perspective on beauty to artistic work." **Simply put, experiencing the world differently can be at times a good thing.**

Unfortunately, mood disorders also have their dark side and can fluctuate from extreme sadness to mania with symptoms including; persistent low moods or extreme high energy moods, social withdrawal, sleep and appetite disturbances, body fatigue, irritability, cognitive difficulties, racing thoughts, impulsive behavior, psychosis, suicidal thoughts and actions. We are here because many individuals in our program are prone to re-experiencing these profound aspects of mood disorders and require our support and care to live as independently and successfully as possible. **I know you share our compassion for helping our clients address these challenges and that is why I am writing to ask you to show your support of the care we provide by sending a check, or going online to make a contribution, today. We count on your support at this time of the year and I look forward to hearing from you.**

By now you may be wondering why my letter is so focused on artistic expression this year. Or maybe you were there and know why. **It is because I am still feeling grateful for every person who attended the open house for our new corporate office and treatment center last month.** There were several creative activities featured including a "community art project" where guests painted images of Stepping Stones and recovery. Local artist Roni Golan finished the works and they turned out great as you can see by the enclosed card. They now brighten the inner hallway of our facility and are colorful reminders of all who participated in our relocation celebration.

Yes, I value the housing and mental health care Stepping Stones provides in our community!

☐ Please use my gift to help the individuals you serve improve their lives one step at a time.
☐ Please use my gift to support the Stars of Light program.
I have enclosed a gift of $ _____
Please make your checks payable to: Stepping Stones of Rockford, Inc., 4930 E. State St., Rockford, IL 61108
Email address: _____ Phone number: _____
I made an online donation via Pay Pal or ACH of $ _____ by visiting https://steppingstonesrockford.org
☐ My employer has a matching gift program. I have enclosed the form.
☐ I have included Stepping Stones in my planned giving. ☐ Please contact me about planned giving.

Stepping Stones is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. Your contribution is tax deductible to the fullest extent allowable by law.

Thank You!

The last several years have been marked by expansion and change here at Stepping Stones. In keeping with my end-of-the-year letter format, I would like to take the rest of my time with you to provide a brief update of our highlights this year. In 2026 Stepping Stones:

- Opened a new ten bed Group Home bringing the total number of owned and operated Group Homes to seven
- Implemented a new Document Assistant software system to help our clinical staff be more efficient, effective and reach an even higher rate of documentation compliance
- Increased the number of children, youth and adults served in outpatient services and began planning to expand parking access to accommodate the increased traffic at our Counseling Center
- Assisted an increased number of individuals in making their successful transition to a less supervised level of care
- Helped Stars of Light publish their 3rd edition of *Instilling Hope: Stories of Recovery*, (Smith Foundation sponsor), produce their Art of Recovery Gallery (Rockford Area Arts Council sponsor) and deliver educational performances.
- Relocated our administrative and treatment services to the new facility after thirty-five years at the previous location and moved our Apartment Program, which serves adults who live independently, to this new location which a will allow us to provide outpatient counseling services at the Glenwood office.



The journey to occupy the new facility was full of challenges and countless decisions that had to be made. I thank our board of directors and members of our leadership for their assistance. I was struck by how so many were with us throughout the move. **Please take the time to go to our website and see the names of our generous supporters and partners.** It's nothing short of amazing what was accomplished. The experience demonstrated the value of our community and we consider ourselves fortunate for all the support we received. Thank you to our employees and clients for being so understanding and flexible with the move.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. **The care we provide is made possible by the confidence you and our community show in us.** Remember, we count on receiving your support during this season of giving and I hope to hear from you soon. Until then, I wish you and your family a safe and meaningful holiday season.



With continued gratitude,

Sue Schroeder
LCSW, CEO

P.S. Your donation will let our clients know you thought of them at this time of the year and understand why experiencing the world differently can be at times a good thing.