

INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK

ALPHA HOUSE

Volunteer Newsletter

May 2026 Issue #4



Dear Volunteers and Coordinators,

Spring has sprung! We hope that all our wonderful volunteers are doing well. The past two months have been dynamic and full of meaningful activities. From mobilizing volunteers to organizing holiday events, your dedication continues to make a real difference.

This spring, we launched various sign-up opportunities, inviting volunteers to fill the gaps between meals at Alpha House East (Del's House) and Alpha House West. Your response to our call for help was outstanding, and we are deeply grateful for your enthusiasm and willingness to assist us in this endeavor. At Del's House, we have 30 new rooms, one-third of which are already occupied!

This season, Alpha House began Pre-Strategic Planning Workshops to map out our internal strengths and limitations. We are always seeking opportunities for improvement! We identified limitations that fell into the categories of planning, communication, systems, & resources. We asked:

- What are areas to improve regarding internal & external communications?
- What systems are broken and require fixing?
- What are the critical gaps in our current planning?
- What resource limitations we are facing?

We are also very grateful to Zingerman's ZingTrain for generously offering Alpha House free training opportunities for Executive Director Shonagh Taruza and Volunteer Coordinator Yohannes Desta. The training, a Zingposium on systems problem-solving, was conducted in late April and was highly practical. Our staff benefited greatly from the experience and are now working to apply knowledge learned in order to strengthen our organization.

Gratitude Dinner

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hosted a fabulous Gratitude Dinner this past March. The purpose of this dinner was to bring all the amazing partners of Alpha House together, to say thank you for your contributions, and to plan for the future. The dining hall was beautifully prepared, with flowers and welcome cards arranged for each participant. The event began with a welcoming speech from the President of



Gratitude Dinner table setting

the Ann Arbor Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, John Larsen, followed by a remembrance of prayer for Judy Mayo, a long-time volunteer and congregational member, kindly given by Pastor Adam Bissell of West Side United Methodist Church. Shonagh Taruza, our Executive Director, also made a welcoming speech while extending her gratitude to the long and persistent journey of grateful congregations. Preliminary survey results about our volunteer program were then presented, offering insight into how our partners view our volunteer programming. **Thank you** for hosting this wonderful event and helping to facilitate our tremendous gratitude for our partners!



*Shonagh Taruza & Peggy Cole
at the Gratitude Dinner*



*Entrance signage from
Gratitude Dinner*



*Pastor Adam Bissell giving the
remembrance speech*

Meal Service & Hospitality

We remain incredibly grateful for all our volunteers who work to help feed the residents of Alpha House. Throughout these spring months, **11 congregations and five organizations generously hosted meals at Alpha House**. Each meal benefited an average of 40 individuals (including individuals in our Winter Amnesty Program), resulting in the delivery of 81 dinner packages and 22 brunch packages. We are so thankful for this program and all who donate their precious time and supplies in hosting meals. The Little Caesar's Love Kitchen, a travelling restaurant program, also paid a surprise visit to Alpha House West in April, providing 20 pizzas for dinner!



Surprise visit from the Little Caesar's Love Kitchen, pictured with Je'Kayla, our Operations Specialist (left)

Community Involvement



John Larsen, President of the Ann Arbor Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, beautifying the gardens outside Alpha House West

This past April, youth volunteers from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and their parents worked to beautify the gardens and children's play area outside Alpha House West. They also organized the pantry, engaged the children in arts and crafts activities, and gave manicures to several residents. Thank you!



The beautiful gardens outside Alpha House West are blooming!

Community Involvement

An Ypsilanti Girl Scout Troop served dinner at Del's House in March, hosted an activity for the children, and assisted in the laundering of linens at Alpha House West.

We were visited in March by church leaders from the First United Methodist Church of Ypsilanti, who toured Del's House and discussed the potential temporary use of their commercial kitchen. We have also hired a Hospitality Coordinator, Mr. Kelly Weaver, to assist in the preparation of meals for the residents at Alpha House East.

The Interfaith Hospitality Network at Alpha House has been working hard on internal improvements. In addition to hiring Kelly Weaver, Shilpa John joined our team as Finance Assistant, and Lee Solo joined as Communications Associate. Welcome!

Two youth volunteers, Leah and Seona, have taken the initiative to raise money through can returns in order to buy necessities for residents. They also rearranged the basement of Alpha House West to better accommodate the various books and toys that are available for the children to use, and we are so appreciative!



Alpha House West basement after being organized!



Pictured left to right: Lee, Kelly, & Shilpa, our newest Alpha House staff!

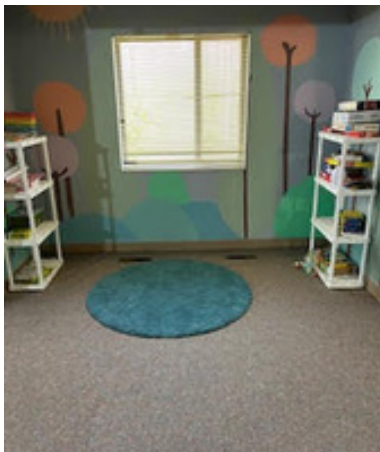
Community Involvement



Students from Greenhills School of Ann Arbor touring Alpha House East (Del's House)



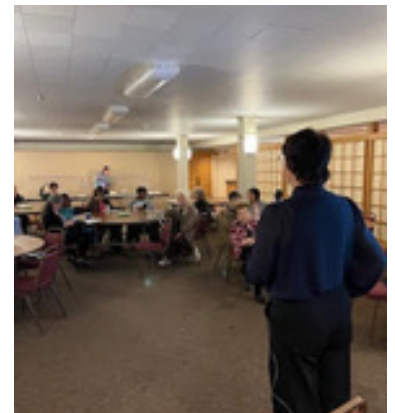
Gratitude Dinner entrance



Shelves purchased by volunteers for storage



Visitors from the First United Methodist Church of Ypsilanti being given a tour by Peggy Cole, our Development Director



Part of the Alpha House team pictured hard at work!



Students from the University of Michigan School of Social Work visited Del's House for an overview and tour

Gratitude & Looking Ahead

We are beyond grateful for every one of our volunteers and coordinators and all that you do. Without you, the work that we do would not be possible. As 2026 progresses, we look forward to sharing more milestones and heartfelt moments with you all!

If you or your organization is interested in volunteering with Alpha House, please reach out at ydesta@alphahouse-ihn.org with your details and let us know if you have a specific volunteer opportunity in mind. We cherish our volunteers and would be thrilled to work with your group!

If your organization is interested in hosting meals at Alpha House West, please head to www.alphahouse-ihn.org/community-and-congregational-coordinator to view available dates & resident allergens *and* email ydesta@alphahouse-ihn.org with your preferred date(s). These meals nourish the minds and bodies of our residents and we are impossibly grateful for each and every meal hosted.

Thank you,
Yohannes Desta
Volunteer Coordinator

Contact Information

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Gimme Shelter

Wednesday, October 14th from 6-9pm
The Freighthouse, Ypsilanti, MI

The Road Home Screenings

Sunday, May 31st 2pm
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ann Arbor

Friday, July 10th 6pm - 9pm
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor
(registration required at <https://uuaa.org/trh>)