

Middle Tennessee

Inspiritus Program Report 2022



Inspiritus

Guiding individuals and families
on a path from **surviving** to **thriving**.

Message From Our Executive Director:



Recently our staff, along with some very devoted volunteers, spent many hours making phone calls, doctor visits, and trips to grocery and drug stores to help one of our Building Healthy Families participants through a series of medical issues. **Your donations helped us empower this client on their path from surviving toward thriving. Thank you.**

In this 2022 report, you will read about many of the happenings within our program areas. You will read how our **Building Healthy Families** program **supports** women through **gatherings, meals, and educational offerings**. You will read how the **gardens provide nutritious food** for families in public and subsidized housing. You will see **beautiful creations from youth** in at risk communities learning how to **express themselves** and **heal** through art. You will be amazed at the number of families receiving food assistance in our **pantry**.

What we can't share in this report is the **experience** of the one-on-one interactions that are the heart of the work we do in Middle Tennessee. You won't be able to experience the **emotions** our volunteers and staff feel when we have conversations with strangers on the phone or at our food pantry, who have lost jobs and hope. Unfortunately, we can't put on paper the **feelings of stress** and **irritation** of families trying to navigate clunky systems to feed their families or find housing. This report can't relay the **power of prayers** offered in our parking lot to individuals who might have lost their hope, many of whom are left with words of frustration and emotions of anger and despair.

But for our team, this is where the mission is. This is where words turn into **ministry**. This is where survivors start on a path toward **thriving**. Your prayers, gifts and support keep these moments of hope alive, and we are so grateful for all of it. I hope you will find comfort in knowing these untold moments happen every day at Inspiritus, not only in Middle Tennessee, but all over the southeast in all our programs. We do this work not for the numbers served but for the **individuals** who come to us for **healing** and for **hope**. We do this work so that they see in themselves what we see in them - Children of God, full of promise and precious in His sight. As you read the statistics, know there is so much more happening than what you find in this report, and it is lovely and good. **You are always welcome to join us to experience where hope and thriving begin.**

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Executive Director of Middle Tennessee Programming

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RIS Advocate & Community Volunteer

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Pastor Peace Lutheran Spring Hill TN
Community Activist & Program Volunteer
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Inspiritus Nashville Campaign Cabinet

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Nashville Business Journal recognized 40
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Jenneen Reed

CFO of The Nashville Symphony, Board member
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Tuwisha Rogers

Founder & Principal of Wish Factor, Former Vice
President of Brand and Partnerships for the
National Museum of African American Music
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Doug Werth

Retired Phillip Morris Corporate and International
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Our Savior Lutheran Church



Healthy Gardens Program

Inspiritus' Healthy Gardens equips individuals living in low-income communities with the knowledge and tools they need to grow their own garden. Through Healthy Gardens, families and individuals have access to fruits and vegetables to supplement their meals, as well as a healthy outlet for relieving stress and staying active. **Gardeners often experience immense satisfaction and empowerment through growing their own food right outside their door.**

The Healthy Gardens program began in 2011 with 12 gardens in the Cheatham Place Community in North Nashville. Those 12 gardens grew to over **190 gardens in 2022, providing fresh fruits and vegetables to over 575 individuals.**

Meet Charlie Jones (Gardener):

Charlie is a remarkable 62-year-old Inspiritus participant residing in North Nashville's Cheatham Place Apartments. Despite losing both of his legs due to a degenerative disease a few years back, Charlie has remained a beacon of warmth and friendliness in his neighborhood. With the help of Inspiritus, Charlie's life has taken an inspiring turn, as he's not only discovered newfound friendships but also cultivated personal growth and resilience. With the help of Inspiritus' Healthy Gardens program, **Charlie has transformed a once barren patch of land into a lush garden brimming with vibrant vegetables.**

Inspiritus provided him with the necessary resources and guidance to create a thriving garden, allowing him to relish in the joy of nurturing life from the soil.



When my brother passed away in June, I was really sad and down. So, to keep me moving and to keep my mental health in order, I decided to dedicate my garden in memory of my brother and it has helped me a lot. Thank you.” - A New Gardener in 2022

These Healthy Gardens provide the additional benefit of increased emotional and mental health. 98% of gardeners surveyed said working in their garden gives them a sense of calm and peace, and 98% said the garden makes them feel good about themselves and their abilities.

Thrive Studios Program

THRIVE Studios by Inspiritus provides therapeutic art sessions that promote growth, healing and creativity in youth and adults living in underserved communities. Through creative expression, THRIVE accompanies individuals as they discover their strengths and resiliency while they grow into vibrant contributors to their community.

In 2023, Inspiritus' THRIVE Studios remains a source of artistic healing and growth, uplifting both adults and young children within Nashville's most underserved community.

Through therapeutic art sessions, THRIVE Studios offers a sanctuary for these young individuals to **navigate their emotions, cultivate self-awareness, and enrich their social skills.** Under the dedicated guidance of art therapists, these sessions lead to noticeable improvements in behavior and communication.

THRIVE Studios doesn't focus solely on the final artwork; it's all about the journey. The program embraces the therapeutic process of creation. **In 2022, it touched the lives of 268 young participants, including 124 students from Middle Tennessee State University, through more than 90 impactful therapeutic arts workshops across Nashville and Murfreesboro.** The year also saw the creation of an inspiring mural in Murfreesboro, bringing color and inspiration to the community!

In addition to nurturing young minds, THRIVE Studios instructors also ensured no child went hungry by providing 1,100+ youth meals & snacks during these therapeutic sessions.



Everyone comes here because we know that y'all care about us, like, for real." – Thrive Studios Youth Artist.

For the children, this program provides a unique outlet for emotional expression and a sense of belonging in their community. **Through art, they find a bright spot in their lives, even when facing personal storms.**



As 2023 unfolds, Inspiritus clients, staff, and volunteers eagerly anticipate the continued growth of this program, especially as it prepares to **break ground on a new art studio in North Nashville.** In the words of THRIVE Studio participants, **"My weather is sunny because I'm here, with you all, doing this."** This sunshine of creativity and healing is set to shine even brighter in the years to come, **thanks to your support.**

Building Healthy Families Empowerment Program

At Inspiritus, our **Building Healthy Families** program offers an educational support group for women living in underserved communities. This program is focused on encouraging healthy family relationships, and participants gather weekly for a class, meal, and the opportunity to choose personal or household items from the Caring Closet.

In 2022, Inspiritus continued its unwavering commitment to empowering women underserved communities through our **Building Healthy Families** program. This educational support group, focused on fostering healthy family relationships, helped bring **74 women together for 49 engaging meetings**. Participants discussed a wide array of topics, from grief and thankfulness, to voting rights, to controlling one's destiny.

Beyond the classroom, field trips to the **National African American Museum** and the **Tennessee State Museum** provided enriching experiences that deepened participants' cultural understanding. Back at home, events like the Haunted Porch, cookouts, and Thanksgiving meals brought the community closer.

Inspiritus' Building Healthy Families also went the extra mile with initiatives like "**Inspire the Block**," an art show and school supply distribution, and "**Christmas Blessings**," which touched the lives of **402 individuals across five communities**. The "**Giving Tree & Stocking Store**" provided Christmas bags and a toy store experience that made the holiday season brighter for many.

In addition to these achievements, Inspiritus is making strides in improving accessibility for neighbors with special needs. With the arrival of an 80-unit affordable housing complex offering wheelchair accessibility and other benefits in 2025, disabled community members will be better equipped to fully participate in the Building Healthy Families program.



“

This program helps me find myself when I feel lost. Prayer changes everything...may God keep Inspiritus there for me. I feel safe.” - Building Healthy Families Participant

Our Building Healthy Families program isn't just about education; it's also about forging deep connections through a multi-generation sisterhood dedicated to personal growth and wholeness. **In 2022, it proved that personal growth is best achieved through the strength of community and shared experiences.**

Nashville Food Pantry

In 2022, for many vulnerable residents in North Nashville's Cheatham Place community who lived paycheck to paycheck, making ends meet was a constant struggle. **In the heart of this community stood Inspiritus' North Nashville Food Pantry**, a lifeline that filled over **5,000 hungry stomachs** and served over **52,000 meals** in Nashville. The Inspiritus Food Pantry was a critical support system in a time of historical food price inflation, **helping individuals and families stretch their budgets and combat food insecurity.**

Gloria, a resident of Cheatham Place and one of our dedicated staff at the pantry, knew the importance of this service firsthand. **When the pantry opened its doors, she stepped into her role with enthusiasm and empathy.**

Last year, the pantry served an average of **471 individuals** and **2,802 households**. The impact on the community was profound, with the pantry playing a crucial role in ensuring that people had access to **nutritious food**, particularly during these challenging economic times.

In 2022, Inspiritus harnessed several new collaborations. Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee, which has been a longstanding partner, delivered a truckload of fresh meat, vegetables, canned goods, baked items, and other nutritious food each week. Every Thursday, a dedicated team of volunteers, led by Gloria, waited outside the food pantry as Second Harvest's truck arrived. **They diligently unloaded and sorted the food, ensuring the pantry was well-prepared to serve its clients when it opened the next day.**



For the clients, staff, and volunteers at the heart of this small but mighty food pantry, it was not just about canned goods and groceries; it was about resilience, unity, and care. **The Pantry stood as a testament to the power of community collaboration and individuals like Gloria who worked tirelessly to ensure that no one in Cheatham Place went to bed hungry.**



Sometimes I forget how good I have it and have to be reminded. Through Inspiritus and what you gave me, God is helping feed the hungry.” - Food Pantry Recipient

In 2022, Inspiritus, our partners, and dedicated staff like Gloria, continued to make a significant difference, **one meal at a time, filling not just stomachs but hearts as well.**

Refugee & Immigrant Services

In 2022, Inspiritus empowered 3,042 refugees, asylees, and immigrants on their journey from surviving to thriving. Inspiritus aims to help new Americans achieve self-sufficiency and integrate successfully into their new communities and country. We are an affiliate of Lutheran Refugee and Immigration Service (LIRS) and the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. **Inspiritus provides services to refugees, asylees, and immigrants at any point in their journey to help them become self-sufficient, socially integrated, and culturally acclimated.**

Meet Alma, Kenny & Magaly:

Alma Ramos, her partner, Kenny Elizabeth Rosales Medrano, and their daughter, Magaly Ramos, is a lovely family of three from El Salvador who Inspiritus helped welcome to Nashville a little over one year ago. Back in San Salvador, Magaly was excelling as a student of business administration, graduating with honors. Meanwhile, Kenny & Alma dedicated themselves to defending the rights of marginalized communities. Alma served as the director of an agency committed to this cause. Unfortunately, Alma and her family became targets of persecution and made the impossibly difficult choice to uproot their lives to somewhere they could be safe and be themselves.



This place of refuge would ultimately be found in Nashville, Tennessee. Immediately upon arriving, they were welcomed by Inspiritus staff members who helped give them a ride from the airport to their new apartment our Refugee & Immigrant Services team helped secure and furnish for them. Looking back one year later, the family cites this experience as the first of many that would eventually motivate them to give back in a similar way and begin the process of becoming a “First Friend” volunteer with Inspiritus.

Wanting to “paying it forward,” they find volunteering to be therapeutic in their process of adjusting to a new job, new language, and this all-around new chapter of their lives, while also helping them feel connected to the larger community, as they experienced last summer while working the Inspiritus table at the Nashville Pride celebration (pictured above).

The Ramos-Medrano family exemplify what we already know to be true: **When we invest in refugees, they invest right back into their new local communities and to the country that welcomed them.**

Disaster Relief Services

Inspiritus' focus is providing Response and Long-Term Recovery assistance for families and individuals who have unmet needs following a natural disaster. In 2022, Inspiritus Disaster Relief teams were deployed to 3 Disaster Response operations, in addition to our 5 on-going Long-Term Recovery projects: W. KY Tornadoes Response (Mayfield, KY), E. KY Flood Response (Floyd County, KY), Hurricane Ian Response (Lee County, FL), Newnan Tornado Recovery (2021), Nashville Flash Flood Recovery (2021), Waverly Flash Flood Recovery (2021), Mayfield Tornado Response (2021) and Cookeville Tornado Recovery (2020).

Thanks to the support of volunteers, partners and community members like you, together we accompanied **5,851+ resilient disaster survivors in 2022** on their journey from surviving to thriving! Special thanks to The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee for helping us serve hundreds of local neighbors.

Meet Diane Wilson (Waverly Flood Survivor):

In August 2021, massive flooding in Waverly, Tennessee brought a wall of water down Main Street that crashed into Diane's little house. Her son was home that night when the trestle gave way sending a tidal wave hurtling through the town of Waverly, a quaint community one hour west of Nashville. Her son quickly ran upstairs with the dogs and cats and climbed out onto the roof of the house as rescue personnel, helicopters, and boats made their way to their street. They were preparing to rescue him when the young man saw their 87-year-old next-door neighbor through the window standing in his house in chest deep water. The young man on the roof pointed the rescuers to help the man in the house instead. More than a year later, these two neighbors are still traumatized by the events of that night. **Every time it rains, Diane finds herself glued to weather news, wondering and worrying for her safety and that of her family.**



Inspiritus Disaster Relief immediately deployed Response Teams to Waverly, TN to assist flood survivors on their road to recovery by providing free Debris Removal, Muck & Gut, Chainsaw, and Heavy Equipment services, wherever needed most. Once our Waverly Response operation transitioned to the phase of Long-Term Recovery, Inspiritus remained on the ground, committed to helping the residents of Waverly until they were brought home.

When making conversation with a few of our volunteers, Diane says, **“Inspiritus is not merely repairing our house, they are helping us heal our lives. We are grateful to know that they won't leave until we are whole.”**

A New “Live-Thrive-Give Campus” in North Nashville

We were fortunate to secure our property on the corner of Rosa L. Parks Boulevard and Garfield Street (site of the former St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, where our current base of operations is located) with a generous contribution from the Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This was made possible because of our shared vision and dedication of this site to continue the Lutheran legacy of service to those in need in North Nashville.

By redeveloping the Inspiritus Campus in North Nashville, we can guarantee that our neighbors have access to urgent support and affordable housing.

Key Features At A Glance:

The redevelopment will expand Inspiritus programming and add beautiful, affordable, community living for seniors and individuals with disabilities to age into. The 80-unit building will feature:

- ✓ Affordable Housing Apartments
- ✓ Ground floor community space
- ✓ State-of-the-art supportive services, including:
 - ✓ Client Choice Market
 - ✓ Community Kitchen
 - ✓ Rooftop Garden
 - ✓ Therapeutic Art Studio
 - ✓ Health & Wellness Service
 - ✓ Community Meeting & Educational Spaces



“St. Paul’s Lutheran was already deeply involved in the community when I arrived in Salemtown 15 years ago. I’m excited to see Inspiritus reimagining their campus in a way that will deepen that community commitment, including critically needed affordable housing.”

-Freddie O’Connell, Mayor of Metropolitan Nashville & Davidson County



Inspiritus

Guiding individuals and families
on a path from **surviving** to **thriving**.

**Formerly Lutheran Services of Georgia
and Lutheran Services in Tennessee**

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