



ONWARD Written by: Cheri DeBr

When I think of the word onward, the word upward naturally follows. To me, onward means marching forward - continuing to put into place the things that draw us closer to our mission, vision, culture, and core values. It's about improving our processes, strengthening our relationships, and refining the way we serve so that we do it better than we did last month. And upward reminds me that our progress depends on looking to God for direction - He holds our success in His hands.

As I reflect on CityLinC's journey, I see how the challenges we've faced have made us stronger. Many of our struggles have pushed us to formalize our systems and operationalize our processes, ensuring that what we do, we do with excellence and consistency. This growth has brought unity and structure, and in that, I see God's steady hand guiding us forward.

Our goal for the coming year is to expand our ministry footprint - both in what we do and how we do it. As a private, faith-based organization, we should look and feel different because of the hope that fuels our work. We want our faith to be visible not only in our services, but also in the way we treat one another, the families we walk alongside, and the children we serve. We're also prayerfully exploring new ways to help families before they enter the child welfare system -focusing on prevention, strengthening relationships, and keeping families together whenever possible.

I'm especially encouraged by how our core values - Faith, Love, Stewardship, Integrity, Excellence, Unity, and Dignity - are taking root within our staff. As our team grows, so does our capacity to reach more people with God's love. Hiring individuals who align with these values ensures that we move forward as one, united in purpose and faith.

To our supporters, volunteers, and community partners: thank you for walking onward with us. As we continue to grow and adjust, we invite you to be part of the story - whether through giving, volunteering, sharing our message, or simply praying for our staff and the families we serve. Your partnership allows us to bring hope into homes and healing into hearts.

When the days are difficult, I find strength by beginning each morning on my knees - in prayer and in God's Word. One verse that continues to ground me is Deuteronomy 31:6:

"Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

This reminder keeps me focused not on yesterday or tomorrow, but on today - trusting God to lead us onward and upward, together.





Belongin

Sometimes the most inspiring stories are still in progress. This is one of them.

"Marcus" (name changed for confidentiality) is a bright six-year-old who has already faced more challenges than most children his age. When he first entered foster care, his aggressive behaviors were so severe that residential placement- a level of care typically reserved for much older youthwas being considered. For a six-year-old, this was almost unheard of.

After several disrupted placements and a difficult transition through respite care, Marcus was placed in a pre-adoptive home with a single father Marcus is thriving in his new home and and three other boys. From the very beginning, the change was remarkable.

Within weeks, the school reported a complete turnaround. At a recent Family Team Meeting, his teachers shared that Marcus had made friends, was meeting all academic milestones, and no longer required a behavior plan or special education support. "They were shocked to hear about his past struggles," our Program Director noted. "They haven't seen any of the behaviors that once defined him."

Even more inspiring, Marcus has learned to recognize when he needs space. During his first week, after one small incident, he independently chose to take a book and head to a quiet spot to calm down-something unthinkable just months earlier.

When asked what makes this placement work, staff point to the adoptive father's patience. He doesn't view every misstep as a crisis, but understands that some behaviors are simply "a little boy being a little boy." This grace has given Marcus the stability and safety he needed to thrive.

Though the adoption has not yet been finalized, community. His story is a powerful reminder of why we do this work- and of the life-changing difference foster and adoptive parents can make.

The Program Director shared: "We need more parents with big hearts who are willing to step in, love these children, and give them the chance to grow. Marcus is proof of what can happen when a child is finally given a place to belong."

We look forward to sharing more of Marcus' story in future, when his adoption is complete.

GIVING TUESDAY



"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give... for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7

On Tuesday, December 2nd, people all over the world will come together for Giving Tuesday, a special day set aside to celebrate generosity, compassion, and making a difference in our communities.

Here at CityLinC, we see the power of giving every single day. Your generosity makes it possible for us to mentor youth, support foster and adoptive families, and walk alongside individuals who are finding a fresh start. Every story of hope and healing begins with someone choosing to give.

Giving Tuesday is more than just a date on the calendar. It is a moment to pause in the middle of the busy holiday season and remember what truly matters: lifting up our neighbors, strengthening families, and living out the love of Christ in real and tangible ways.

This year, we would love for you to be part of the movement. No gift is too small, and every dollar given to CityLinC goes directly into programs that are changing lives right here in our community.

Together, we can turn one day of giving into a lifetime of

Scan the QR code below to give today and join us in making a difference this Giving Tuesday.





WHEN TRAGEDY

STRIKES

At the end of this summer, one of our longtime foster families experienced a devastating house fire. Thankfully, no one was home at the time, and everyone was safe, but the fire caused significant damage, forcing the family to leave their home and move into temporary hotel housing.

The fire, caused by an electrical issue, began inside the flooring of the children's bedroom and spread into the living room below. In a matter of moments, this large, multi-generational family-made up of foster parents, adopted children, adult children, and grandchildren- was displaced from the home where so many memories had been built.

In the first hours, the family's most urgent needs were simple yet vital: clothing, hygiene items, food, gas cards, and even small activities to keep the children's minds occupied. The call for help went out, and the response was immediate. Staff, community members, and donors stepped forward with overwhelming generosity. Clothes, gift cards, financial support, and toys began pouring in.

One especially impactful gift came from the Battle Creek Community Foundation, which donated \$1,000 to help the family get back on their feet.

As their foster care worker shared, "It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a village to raise a family. And we saw firsthand this village come together for this family."

While insurance is working to place modular homes on their property, the family continues to live in several hotel rooms- a challenging arrangement for such a large household. Yet through it all, their gratitude has been steadfast.

Even the smallest donations, like a board game for the children, have been met with joy and deep appreciation.

This family has given so much to the foster care community over the years, welcoming children with a wide range of needs into their home without hesitation. To see our broader community now rallying to care for them in their time of crisis is a powerful reminder of what it means to stand together.

Though the road ahead is not easy, the love and support surrounding this family makes it clear: they are not walking it alone.



As many in our community know, CityLinC is no longer operating the Second Wind Handymen program. While that chapter has closed, we're pleased to share that the same trusted work continues through Boyer Boyz, led by Dale Boyer, a Licensed Contractor with the State of Michigan.

Dale was inspired to start Boyer Boyz "to continue our commitment to offer quality handyman services while mentoring and training young adults in the handyman trades." This vision ensures that every project not only provides dependable help for families but also gives young adults valuable skills and experience.

Boyer Boyz provides just about everything for home and yard upkeep and repair. From routine fixes to bigger projects, their team is committed to the same high-quality service that Second Wind was known for at CityLinC.

What makes Boyer Boyz unique is the impact each job has beyond the work itself. As Dale explains, "When you hire the Boyer Boyz, you become a partner in encouraging young adults to develop a wholesome work ethic, to make significant contributions to their community, while pursuing a successful career in the handyman trades."

To learn more or schedule a project, you can reach Boyer Boyz at info@boyerboyzbc.com, visit boyerboyzbc.com, or call (269) 209-1219.

The same spirit of professionalism and service that defined Second Wind Handymen lives on through Boyer Boyz- now with the added mission of shaping the next generation of tradesmen.

ASTORY OF GROWTH AND HOPE



At Second Wind, mentorship is built on relationships that change lives. Pastor Mike Howard, our Chaplain of Spiritual Faith, recently shared the story of his journey mentoring Christian, a young man he has walked alongside for over four years.

"When we first started, Christian had three simple goals: employment, housing, and getting his driver's license back," Pastor Mike explained. "He now works full time in a factory in the industrial complex in Fort Custer. He obtained a mortgage and has his own home, and he's working on getting his license back. Of his three big life goals, he's already accomplished two."

One of the most meaningful milestones Pastor Mike has seen was Christian's graduation from drug court nearly two years ago. "He continues to be committed to his sobriety," Pastor Mike shared. "He and his girlfriend had a baby about six months ago. The commitment Christian has to his sobriety is heightened by his desire to give his new baby daughter a steady life."

Pastor Mike also recalled a pivotal moment when Christian's choices carried heavy consequences. "While he was in Drug Court, Christian refused to leave his girlfriend who was, and still is, an active user. Because of that decision, he spent five months in jail. While he was in jail, I paid his mortgage for him, as well as utilities and other miscellaneous expenses. It made a huge impression on him. Now he is doing well and is intent on paying his gifts forward."

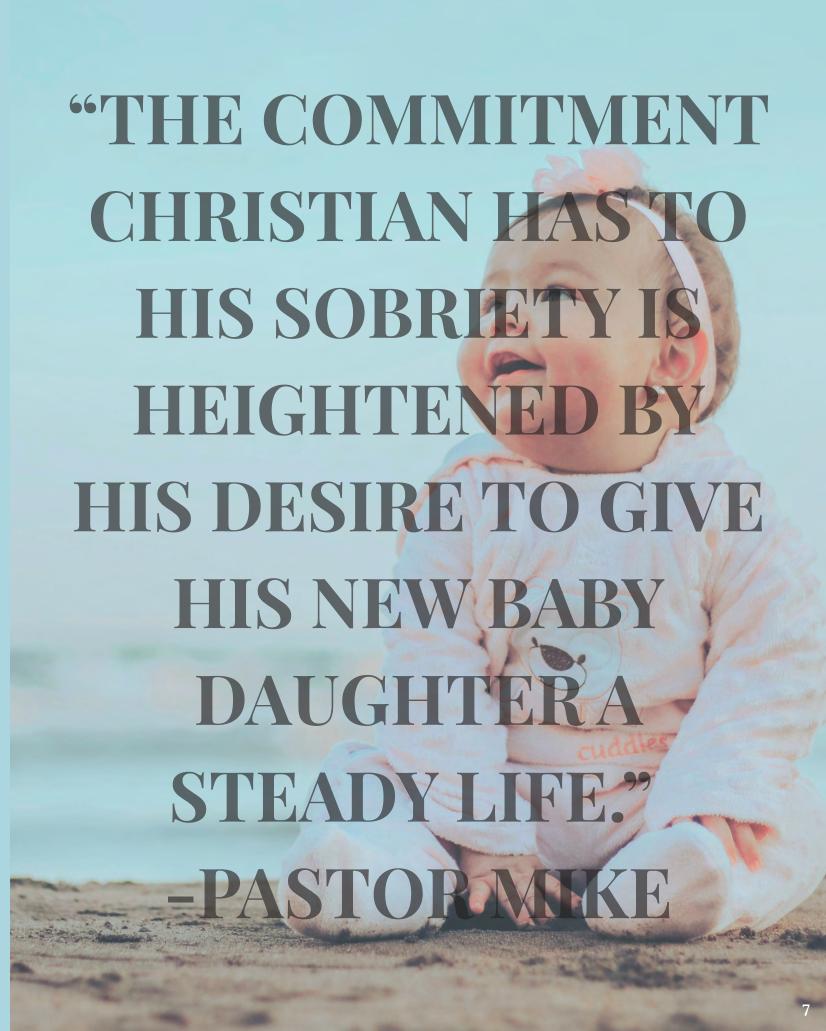
The growth Pastor Mike has witnessed is best captured in two quotes he shared:

"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you are." – John Maxwell

"As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world... as in being able to remake ourselves" – Mahatma Gandhi

Pastor Mike explained why this approach works: "Our mentorship at Second Wind is built on relationships. Much of what we call 'mentoring' is based on the 5 C's – Challenges, Choices, Consequences, Creative Solutions, and Conclusions. Once the relationship is established, you are then allowed to challenge, come up with creative solutions, and more. But the relationship comes first." For those who may be interested in mentoring, Pastor Mike offers a heartfelt invitation:

"The top priority of mentoring is to meet people where they are. If they are three months behind in rent or mortgage payments, are you willing to step up and help? If they need a ride to work, are you willing to provide it? If they call with a problem in the middle of the night, will you be there for them? If you can answer any of these questions in the affirmative, then please call me at 269-986-4061. Maybe you are not in a position to provide financial resources, but there are other ways to contribute."



RECOVERY WITH REAL RESULTS IN CALHOUN COUNTY

Calhoun County is investing opioid settlement funds in practical solutions that help neighbors rebuild their lives. At CityLinC, those dollars strengthen Second Wind Mentoring, our long-running program that walks with justice-involved participants through recovery and back into community.

Since 2014, Second Wind has supported more than 500 men and women with coaching, life skills, transportation, and steady encouragement. We partner closely with local Drug Courts so participants can meet requirements, stay sober, and move toward stable housing, work, and family life.

- What the funding makes possible:
 A part-time peer support specialist with lived experience
 • Seven-day drug testing coverage when it
- SMART Recovery groups and updated class
- Rides to appointments, GED testing, interviews, and court

Why it matters:

Second Wind focuses on the everyday barriers that make recovery hard. A ride to a MAT appointment, help preparing for a job interview, or a class that teaches relapse-prevention skills can be the difference between momentum and a setback. Graduations are frequent and joyful, reflecting months of verified solviety and real reflecting months of verified sobriety and real next steps.

Looking ahead:

With this support, Second Wind can serve more participants, keep people engaged, and celebrate more reunions, new jobs, and fresh starts. Thank you to our community partners and donors for believing in recovery and investing in neighbors who are ready for their second wind.



"HE HEALS THE **BROKENHEARTED AND BINDS UP THEIR WOUNDS.**" - PSALM 147:3

Donate Here!



A PLACE OF DIGNITY & HOPE FOR FAMILIES The first impression matters.

When a child enters CityLinC's newly remodeled foster care visitation room, they are no longer met with stark walls or mismatched furniture. Instead, they walk into a place alive with color and light - a room where laughter feels possible, where parents and children can simply be together. For families who are in the middle of one of the most difficult seasons of life, this transformation is more than décor. It is dignity. It is hope.

For years, CityLinC's foster care team dreamed of a space that reflected the heart of their mission. The previous room served its purpose, but its dated furniture and clinical atmosphere stood in contrast to the warmth families needed to feel during visits. "We knew we could do better," said Sue Crawford, a CityLinC Board Member who led the renovation project. "My primary goal was for families to have a nice, clean, well-furnished room in which to visit. I wanted it to be cheerful, comfortable, and spacious - a place where parents and children could read, play a game, and just enjoy being together."

That vision came to life thanks to a generous grant from the WK Kellogg Foundation, the dedication of CityLinC's Board of Directors, and the practical, hands-on support of community members who believed in the project. What once felt cold and impersonal has now become a haven - a thoughtfully designed space where children feel welcome, and parents feel respected.

More Than Paint and Furniture

The changes are evident in every corner. Bright colors line the walls, playful accents invite curiosity, and comfortable furnishings make the room feel more like a family living room than an office. There is space for activities – puzzles spread across a low table, shelves filled with books waiting to be read aloud, toys and games designed to spark joy. Every detail was chosen with children in mind.

Yet the renovation goes beyond appearances. Equipped with new AV technology, the room can now accommodate virtual visits and staff meetings when distance or schedules prevent families from gathering in person. For parents balancing transportation challenges or work commitments, this small upgrade makes a big difference.

Crawford believes these details matter. "If I were coming into this room for the first time, I would see that steps had been taken to make it a comfy, cozy area. There's a relaxed atmosphere here now - a sense that this space was clearly thought out for all ages. Hopefully, families will feel at home the moment they step inside."





Honoring the Weight of the Moment

Foster care visitation rooms carry profound significance. They are the backdrop for reunions, conversations, tears, laughter, and sometimes even goodbyes. For many parents and children, the hours spent in this space represent some of the most meaningful moments they will have together. That is why CityLinC approached the renovation with such care – not to create a showcase, but to honor those moments with thoughtfulness and love.

"This project reflects what can happen when people come together with purpose," said Cheri DeBree, Executive Director of CityLinC Ministries. "Our hope is that every parent and child who walks into this room feels cared for, supported, and reminded that brighter days are ahead."

A Symbol of Community and Care

In the end, the visitation room is more than new paint and furniture. It is a symbol - of healing, of community, and of the belief that every family deserves a safe and loving place to reconnect.

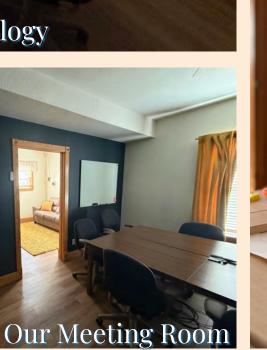
The transformation is also a testimony to what is possible when people rally together. Board members gave their time and energy. Community supporters contributed their hands and resources. The WK Kellogg Foundation's generosity provided the means to turn vision into reality. The result is a room that radiates not only warmth, but also the hope of restoration.

For the children who come here, the room is a place where play and imagination can flourish despite difficult circumstances. For parents, it is a reminder that their dignity is valued, and their role as mom or dad is still deeply honored. For staff, it is a tool that makes their work more effective, helping them create positive memories in the midst of hardship.

And for the community, it stands as a beacon – proof that small spaces, when filled with love and intentionality, can carry immeasurable impact.

As Crawford reflected, "I hope that when people walk into this room to have a visitation with family members, they will feel complete peace and joy. That's what this is all about."













Dwayne Kelley and Ralph Moore

Reflections from Dwayne Kelly, Former Board Chair

"It has been with great pleasure and honor to serve in the capacity of Chair for the CityLinC Board of Directors."

Dwayne's tenure, beginning in 2016 upon the recommendation of former Executive Director Dale Boyer, has been rooted in humility, wisdom, and an unwavering belief in CityLinC's mission. Through years of dedicated leadership, Dwayne has seen the ministry become a vital resource and refuge for countless individuals and families across our community.

During his leadership, programs like Adoptions and Foster Care embodied CityLinC's mission to help children and families overcome life's obstacles and find lasting placement and purpose. As Dwayne affirms: "God's plan for them is to have hope and a future—not for any hope"

He also witnessed transformation through initiatives like Second Wind Handy Men, where men who had experienced incarceration, substance abuse, or homelessness found renewed hope and skills through mentorship and job training. Under Pastor Mike's leadership, this program became a catalyst for change—both practically and spiritually.

Additionally, outreach programs such as Red Wagon, Angel Tree, and Stuff-a-Bus extended CityLinC's reach, bringing tangible love and support to families in need.

"We have had the opportunity to show that God's hand is on this ministry. Every challenge that has arisen, we've overcome through the stability of leadership, our Executive Directors past and present, and our dedicated staff."

Dwayne reflects proudly on a pivotal shift during his time as Chair—from a focus on "It's all about relationship" to a bold embrace of "It's all about excellence."

As he steps down, his prayer is clear: for continued vision, financial stability, and divine favor over every leader, donor, and supporter.

"Some plant, some water, but only God gives the increase." - 1 Corinthians 3:6

"We are more than conquerors." - Romans 8:37

CityLinC is profoundly grateful for Dwayne's leadership, heart, and legacy. We honor the strength of his service—and the seeds he has faithfully sown.

A Message from Ralph Moore,

Incoming Board Chair

"I step into this role with a heart full of gratitude—for Dwayne's example, for the strong foundation CityLinC has laid over decades, and for the extraordinary legacy we now inherit."

CityLinC has long stood as a beacon of hope and transformation. As Ralph Moore III begins his service as Board Chair, he does so with great humility, energy, and an unwavering commitment to advancing the ministry into its next era.

"Cheri and the CityLinC team have done more than build a ministry—they've built a movement."

That movement is defined by healing, justice, and restored dignity for youth and families. It's a legacy Ralph is both honored and eager to continue. Guided by faith and anchored in purpose, he envisions CityLinC's next chapter as one of innovation, deeper impact, and expanded reach.

"This next season will be marked by a deep respect for what has been and a bold readiness for what's next. CityLinC has always been about legacy—of love, of leadership, of lives changed—and that legacy inspires our vision forward."

With fresh perspective and enduring reverence, Ralph leads the board in partnership with a staff and community that shares his belief: excellence is the standard, and transformation is the goal.

As the mantle of leadership is passed, CityLinC stands on sacred ground—celebrating a rich past, elevating a powerful present, and looking ahead to a vibrant future.

To our partners, donors, and community: we invite you to walk with us. The mission is alive, the work is urgent, and the call is clear.

Together, we will continue to plant, to water, and to trust that God will give the increase.

With gratitude and great expectation,

Ralph Moore III Board Chair CityLinC Ministries



2025 CityLinC Staff



Cheri DeBree **Executive Director**



Joy Hendrix YGFC Director



Sarah Herwarth Administrative Director



Trisha Elliot **Executive** Assistant



Mike Howard Chaplain



Alyssa Hamby Adoption Supervisor



Brenna Tanner Foster Care Supervisor



Danielle Robbins Foster Care Lead



Jackie McFarlan Foster Care Specialist



Bryanna Carey Foster Care Specialist



Aaliyah Hall



Nicolle Larson Foster Care Specialist Foster Care Specialist



Whitney Mostafa Foster Care Specialist



Hannah Belote Licensing Specialist



Brittney Ramos Program Aide



Teresa Lopez Program Intern

CELEBRATING OUR TEAM



Truckin Tuesday.



At CityLinC, we know that the work we do every day is only possible because of our dedicated team. That is why the Employee Appreciation Committee (EAC) was formed, to create intentional moments that show our staff just how valued and loved they are.

Since starting, the EAC has planned a variety of fun and meaningful ways to bring our staff together. From enjoying food trucks at Truckin' Tuesday, to gathering for a family potluck at Waffle Farms, to cozying up at our Sweater Weather lunch with homemade soups, we have found creative ways to connect outside of daily tasks. Most recently, we celebrated National Coffee Day by treating everyone to fancy lattes, matcha, and chai tea drinks, a little caffeine with a lot of gratitude.

What makes the EAC special is that we go beyond birthdays and work anniversaries. We believe in celebrating each other every day, finding reasons, big and small, to pause, enjoy one another's company, and remember that we are a team united in purpose.

And we are just getting started. With so much more planned, our committee is excited to continue finding new ways to make sure our CityLinC staff feel supported, encouraged, and loved.





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ANGEL TREE: **Bringing Hope & Connection This Holiday Season**

The holidays are a time for warmth, togetherness, and reminding those in our community that they are not forgotten. Through our Angel Tree Program, CityLinC partners with Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree to offer that connection for children whose parent is incarcerated.

What Is Angel Tree?

Angel Tree is a nationwide ministry that equips churches and organizations to deliver Christmas gifts, personal messages, and spiritual encouragement on behalf of incarcerated parents to their children. The program seeks to strengthen relationships, support families, and offer hope during a time when distance and separation often feel the most acute.

Gifts are carefully chosen (new items, age-appropriate) and delivered during the holiday season, often with a personal message from the incarcerated parent.

But Angel Tree's reach goes beyond Christmas. The ministry also enables summer camps, mentorship, and local church care throughout the year for these families.

How CityLinC Is Involved

This year, CityLinC is proud to again host an Angel Tree effort in our community. We will coordinate gift collection, wrap and deliver items, and partner with volunteer teams to make sure children receive not just presents- but a tangible sign that they're remembered, loved, and valued.

If you've participated before, you'll see the same heart for dignity and relationship. If you're new, we welcome you to join us in making this season brighter for families often left in the shadows.

Want to Participate?

We'd love your help. Here's how you or your group can get involved:

- Adopt a child's "angel" (get a name tag, know their age and gift wishes)
- Purchase and wrap a gift
- Help with collection and delivery
- Volunteer in coordination or outreach
- Donate funds toward shipping, materials, or underserved angels
- If you have questions or want to join as a volunteer or sponsor, email us at info@citylinc.org.

Together, we can show children that even amid distance, they are seen and loved this Christmas.



Donate Here!



Foster Home Holiday Sponsorship Program

Bringing Comfort and Joy to Foster Families

This holiday season, you can make a difference. CityLinC is inviting individuals, families, and businesses to sponsor a foster home for Christmas.

Your generosity helps provide meals, decorations, and gifts- bringing warmth and joy to families caring for children in foster care.

Sponsor Levels

Tinsel Sponsor: Covers a warm holiday meal and basic household essentials (like pantry staples or winter gear) for one foster family, \$250

Noel Sponsor: Provides personalized Christmas gifts for foster children- helping make their celebration feel special and full of love, \$400

Star Sponsor: Ensures a full holiday experience for one home, including gifts, a family meal, grocery support, and small comfort items like board games or blankets that bring families together, \$600

Angel Sponsor: Supports two foster homes through gifts, meals, and shared blessing funds used to meet unique needs (such as winter clothing or a family outing), \$1,000

How It Works

- Sign Up Fill out our quick form or email us to get started.
- Get Matched Our Foster Care team pairs you with a licensed foster home.
- Give Joy You can donate online, by check, or with select gift cards.
 We Deliver CityLinC ensures gifts reach families before Christmas.

Ways to Get Involved

- Sponsor as an individual, family, or business team
- Share this opportunity with your church, coworkers, or friends
- Add a personal touch with a card or message of encouragement



Be part of something meaningful this Christmas because every home deserves a little holiday magic



CityLinC Ministries 70 Calhoun St Battle Creek, MI 49017

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Bless Our Staff This Season

This December, we're planning a special surprise to show our appreciation for the incredible staff who serve our community year-round. If you'd like to help us bless them with a meal or small tokens of gratitude, please consider donating gift cards or contributing toward our Staff Appreciation Fund.

Every act of kindness reminds our team how valued they are. Thank you for helping us pour back



