

"I can honestly say the mission has been tremendous," he says. "I had gotten to the bottom, but this place has done me good. I'm glad it was here."

For residents who choose to remain at the mission for an extended period of time, there is the option of becoming a resident staff member, whom are paid a stipend and live at the mission full-time.

Howard Hale, who has been at the mission since August 2004, now serves on the staff. Some of his responsibilities include monitoring and helping the other men and running errands.

"I'm trying to help the guys to not go through some of the same things I went through in the past," he says.

After struggling with alcohol before coming to the mission, Hale says his life has been turned around "through prayer and patience." But he has seen more than just his own life affected.

"I've seen guys that have come in here that have families that didn't want anything else to do with them, like forever, but within months, their families are back visiting, and it's a complete, 100-percent turnaround," he says. "They got self-esteem and confidence back and their families' confidence back."

Lives Changed for the Better

But before the men can go experience these life changes offered by the mission, they must understand and agree to abide by the rules, Sellew says.

If applicants for residency don't have the right attitude toward the regulations and aren't willing to follow direction, Sellew says the mission is hesitant to offer assistance.

"We try to work with them," he says. "A lot of them have spent most of their life in prison and getting what they want when they want it."

Periodically, when prisoners are released, the mission is notified if they would be good candidates for residency, allowing them to move from the prison to another safe

place, rather than returning to their previous lifestyles. In the case of men who are without a family and have nowhere else to go, the mission works out accommodations quickly.

"But we call it an at-will ministry — you don't have to stay if you don't want to, but we also don't have to allow you to stay if we feel like you aren't abiding like you should," he says. "It's a retraining period when they come to a place like this."

Resident Brandon Albright has experienced this retraining firsthand since he arrived at the mission almost two months ago.

"I was falling off of the straight and narrow," he says. "I wanted to get right with the Lord and get spiritually right and find wisdom and understanding, and this place has been a blessing."

Citing a verse from Proverbs, Albright says he is now living his life as the Lord leads him.

"It's been life changing," he says. "A lot of the guys here lift each other up. It really shows that there are good people left in the world."

Homeless for the Holidays

During the holiday season, men are given certain allowances to spend time with their family. For Thanksgiving, this means men can be signed out by a family member and returned that night. For Christmas, after a special breakfast service and devotional time, including Christmas gifts donated from supporters of the mission, the men can be signed out overnight by family members.

Rimmer, who is separated from his wife and suffers from prostate cancer, says he hopes to go home for the holidays.

"I have two daughters, a grandson and a granddaughter, and I hope to spend it with them," he said.

Rutledge, who plans to go home for the holidays, says the season is an exciting time, especially for those working

to regain the trust of their families.

"It will give them time to bond, and that's everyone's hope here," he said.

For those in the community looking for a holiday meal, the mission offered a Thanksgiving dinner two weekends ago that was welcome to everyone.

"We have them come into the chapel, get a chance to tell them about the mission," Sellew says. "In the past, the dining area has been completely filled."

For Albright, the holiday season represents a time of hope and change from his past life.

"I've got a pretty big family. I'm blessed," he says. "It's going to be pretty good, I have a feeling."

Though he didn't hear from his family during his first two weeks staying at the mission, he says his grandmother was the first to visit when she attended a church service with him.

"This one is going to be a lot different than all the other Christmases," he says. "God is good."

Daily life in the Mission

Though all residents are required to attend Bible studies, church services and other meetings throughout the week, along with their chores and required job hunting, there are other facilities available to them in the mission.

A library, complete with reading desks and lamps, is open to the men, as well as a computer room where, on certain evenings, those men without a GED or high school diploma can come in and do individualized studies.

"Some here are even so needful of instruction that they have to have someone help them with reading, so we have men volunteer to help," Sellew says.

After their chores are completed for the day and dinner is over, the men also have a lounge area available, complete with sofas and a television.

But on Tuesday and Thursday nights, TV is not always the main attraction for the men. From 6 to 9 p.m., they are permitted visitors at the mission, which Rutledge says has been instrumental in the change of course his life has taken.

"I couldn't ask for any more support from my family," he says. "I feel like the Lord would have still worked, but it sure has made it easier for me."

Though Rutledge says he has been blessed with the continued encouragement of his family, not every man has the same assistance.

"Some people here have burned so many bridges that they don't have that support, and I stress to them that they have to be patient, pray and hope they'll forgive you, even if they don't change overnight."

Funding the Mission

Though the mission does not accept any state or federal funds, there are certain industries, including Food Lion, and local churches that provide support.

"Something that's been a real blessing was that when they started the mission, they also started the (Good Samaritan Super) Thrift store," Sellew says. "There are a lot of things given to the ministry that we can't use physically, so it's taken there and sold, and the benefits come back over here. This represents a fairly large percent of what runs the mission."

As the men sit down to a dinner prepared by one of their own, a chorus led by Sellew recites Romans 5:1, scrawled on a blackboard in the cafeteria.

"Don't forget Bible study this evening and don't forget a pencil for notes," Sellew says, after praying over the meal. "Now, dig in."



ALL PHOTOS BY WILL ANDERSON

- 1 - Brandon Albright first arrived at Alamance Rescue Mission on October 12. After two weeks without hearing from his family, his grandma visited to attend church with him.
- 2 - The Piedmont Rescue Mission encompasses the Alamance Rescue Mission, housed in the former Glenhope Elementary School, Alamance Pregnancy Services, the Grace Haven Ministry boarding schools for boys and the Good Samaritan Super Thrift Store.
- 3 - Resident Cliff Rutledge has lived at the mission for 6 months, after struggling with problems of drugs and gambling. He currently works in the kitchen at the mission, holds an outside job and said he does everything he can to support the other men.
- 4 - At 5 p.m., all the men are called to the cafeteria to enjoy a meal prepared by one of their own, after the recitation of a Bible verse and a prayer led by Director Chip Sellew.