

Hope Reborn

In our March 2022 edition of B-Metro, we introduced readers to the passionate work of Beverly McNeil, a longtime fixture in the Birmingham art world and longtime supporter of The Lovelady Center. Portraits of Hope began with the launch of the coffee table book and traveling exhibit featuring a collection of original portraiture

Brittnie Piteo's journey from darkness to light.



Brittnie Piteo is one of the Lovelady Center graduates featured in the upcoming second Portraits of Hope book. The book will feature 20 additional Lovelady graduates with their stories in their own words.

by many of the world's greatest portrait artists centering on graduates of The Lovelady Center.

Nineteen months later, Portraits of Hope continues to impact the lives of Lovelady graduates. Working closely with Lovelady Center staff, the organization has helped 90 graduates with over \$100,000 in significant grants. Some of the needs that funding addresses include paying back fines so driver's licenses can be restored, paying unpaid utility fees to help reestablish services, assisting with tuition to aid in advancing careers, and providing down payments for vehicles to provide reliable transportation to and from work. In some cases, Portraits of Hope will cover the cost of fines and fees associated with previous offenses before their time at the Lovelady Center.

"I started using at 16 and ended up dropping out of school." Says Brittnie Piteo, a graduate and now employee at The Lovelady Center. "I started working fast food jobs and had a string of abusive boyfriends. I started harder drugs at 21."

Abusive relationships, drug addiction, two pregnancies, and two attempts at rehab later, Brittany found herself homeless and on the streets.

"I slept under bridges or wherever I could find shelter," Piteo explains. "I started doing crack cocaine and joined up with a drug dealer. I caught a lot of charges for possession and distribution in Birmingham City and Jefferson County."

Finally, her time ran out. In 2018, Piteo appeared before a district court judge who told her the system was done with her being in and out of the courtrooms. He decided to sentence her to prison. "It was the best decision anyone could have made for me then."

Once out, Piteo attempted to return to her former life, but the Lord had a different plan. On March 11, 2019, she entered The Lovelady Center and has been clean from drugs and alcohol ever since.

While at the Center, Piteo earned her GED and earned certification as a Child Development Associate through Ashworth College, is certified through the state as a child care provider and is fully restored to her children. Piteo lives in a Lovelady Center graduate housing program called Community Gardens.

Upon graduation, Piteo was saddled with over \$15,000 in debts from previous charges and fines with Birmingham City

and Jefferson County.

"Portraits of Hope is amazing." Piteo shares. "They paid a jail fine I owed at Jefferson County and for another criminal case. It lifted a huge burden that was on me. At the time I graduated, I was mailing in four different money orders a month to Jefferson County. There was so much. It was so overwhelming."

"When I filled out the paperwork for Portraits of Hope, I had already been a graduate for two years. I wept when I found out they were going to help me. They let me know I wasn't forgotten about. They showed me there was hope and that people still cared for me."

Piteo is working hard to build her financial future. She has paid her debt down to \$1,000 and is working with a financial advisor to build her credit. She's even working with a lender through her church so she can purchase her first home.

Brittnie Piteo is one of the Lovelady Center graduates featured in the upcoming second Portraits of Hope book. The book will feature 20 additional Lovelady graduates with their stories in their own words. Bart Lindstrom, Brittnie's portraiture artist, is nationally recognized and is represented by Portraits, Inc. A southern Californian, Lindstrom's work hangs in federal courthouses, state capitals, prestigious galleries, corporate conference rooms, and private homes. Now, his work will show among other portraits of Lovelady Center graduates.

Since March 2022, Portraits of Hope has provided financial support to graduates of the Lovelady Center (www.loveladycenter.org). The organization strives to build on the graduates' successes while at the Lovelady Center and to help remove barriers that can hinder women in their journey to becoming productive members of their communities.

A separate 501c3, the organization raises funds to provide these significant grants. On December 14th in partnership with the Samford University Wright Center, Portraits of Hope presented nationally known Christian recording artist Charles Billingsley in concert. The concert was held at Samford University Wright Center. Billingsley was joined by the incomparable Sadie Goodman and Denver and The Mile High Orchestra. Information about the event and how you can donate is available at www.portraitsofhope.charity. All proceeds benefit Portraits of Hope.

