

Sandy Bowers

Volunteer is devoted to 'her boys' at Generations Group Homes

By **Abe Hardesty** • City People writer • January 6, 2010

At 44, and after 20 years of marriage, Sandy Bowers gets some puzzled looks when she talks about her boys – all 48 of them. “They are kind of our kids,” Bowers says. “Any time Jeff and I are shopping, it’s hard to buy for ourselves. We always wind up talking about things we could get for the boys.”

The boys in this case are residents of Generations Group Homes (GGH), a Simpsonville-area facility that helps young men overcome problems created by abuse. Students/residents are assigned to GGH by the Department of Social Services, state Department of Mental Health, Continuum of Care, and Department of Juvenile Justice

The boys, many of them victims of sexual abuse, are residents for 12-18 months – more than enough time for Bowers and husband Jeff to get emotionally attached. “I cry sometimes when they leave, even though it’s a good thing for them to graduate. It’s bittersweet,” says Bowers.

The connection is strong in part because Bowers says the young men who live at GGH, where they attend an on-site school, have plenty of personality to offer; it’s also strong because she pours much of her life into the ministry. “It’s more rewarding than any volunteer project I’ve been part of,” says Bowers. “It’s unreal. We get more out of it than we give.”

“We feel so blessed to be able to serve there,” says Bowers, a graphic artist who discovered GGH while talking to a friend at an auction two years ago. A few weeks later, after picking up some items at a good price, the Bowers' decided to donate them to the home.

That led to a mini-tour of the home, which includes 70 staff members and normally 45-50 residents.

Within weeks, Bowers – who about a year earlier had attempted to adopt a child through the Department of Social Services – was serving on a volunteer committee. “We fell in love with those boys,” says Bowers, who with Jeff typically visits the campus for a Friday-night party and special events. Often, they spend Sunday afternoons at GGH. “We’ll go and visit after church,



“We get more out of it than we give,” Sandy Bowers says of GGH.
(GWINN DAVIS / Staff)

take a fast-food meal and have a good time. We'll sit with the boys for three or four hours, playing games. "These boys don't get family visits very often. We go because the boys are like family to us," Bowers says.

Opened in 1991, the home provides a family atmosphere for boys ages 10-19. GGH's capacity, now at 58, will grow by more than 30 with the completion of a third home that will soon be under construction. A groundbreaking for that addition is scheduled Jan. 21.

GGH development director Roseanne Brown says the efforts of all volunteers are significant, because their mere appearance "tells the boys they are not throwaways. They are worthy of that person's time and attention for a positive reason. The simple sharing of time is an amazing gift."

Meanwhile, Bowers, who has donated her talents as a graphic artist to several non-profits during her 17 years in Greenville, has designed the GGH Web site (www.GenerationsGroup.com) while producing literature and video productions for various projects. Jeff is coordinator of a weekly Star Party. The couple enjoyed Thanksgiving dinner, and spends many holidays, with the GGH boys.

"In our hearts we have adopted a few boys... about 50 or so of them," Bowers says. "Not having children of our own, we get to feel what it's like to be a proud parent when the boys excel and graduate the program. In two words? A blessing."

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