



First Light

# Summer of Hope

Summer 2026 Newsletter

[www.firstlightshelter.org](http://www.firstlightshelter.org)

# Standing Together Through Every Season

As we move into the summer months, I want to take a moment to share what is happening at First Light and invite you to continue walking alongside us in the months ahead.

While many people associate homelessness with the cold of winter, summer brings its own serious challenges. Extreme heat can be dangerous, especially for individuals managing chronic health conditions. During these long, hot days, our shelter remains a place of safety and refuge. Unlike many who must spend their days outdoors, our guests are able to remain inside, protected from the heat and the health risks it brings. They have a safe place to rest, access to meals, and the support they need while working toward stability.

As we navigate an uncertain landscape of changing funding and increasing needs, I continue to find hope in the resilience of the women and families we serve and in the unwavering commitment of our staff and Board of Directors. Every day, we witness lives changing. Guests who arrived with few resources are obtaining identification, securing income, accessing healthcare, and taking important steps toward employment and permanent housing. Through meaningful life skills classes, wellness activities, case management, and supportive services, we are helping each person build the confidence and stability needed for lasting independence. These comprehensive services provide more than immediate assistance, they offer hope, dignity, and a pathway to a brighter future.

Summer is traditionally one of the most difficult times for nonprofit organizations as charitable giving often slows, even though the need remains constant. That is why your support is especially meaningful right now. Every gift, every volunteer hour, and every act of encouragement helps ensure that women and children experiencing homelessness have a safe place to sleep, compassionate care, and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

As the summer sun shines over Birmingham, I am filled with gratitude—for this mission, for our dedicated staff and volunteers, for our faithful Board of Directors, and most importantly, for you. Thank you for standing with First Light in every season. Together, we are bringing hope, restoring lives, and creating brighter futures for those who need it most.

With warmest regards,  
Sherry Bray

## Twenty Minutes at the Door Conversations with the Director

I still think about the first time Vanessa came to First Light.

She told me later she stood outside our door for almost twenty minutes before she finally came in. I believe her. I've watched it happen more times than I can count. People circle the building, check the parking lot, look for a way to back out before they've even stepped inside.

"I almost didn't come," she told me weeks later, while sitting in the dayroom playing cards. "I thought it would be loud, unsafe. I thought someone would judge me before I even said my name."

"What changed?" I asked.

"Someone at the front desk didn't ask me to explain myself," she said. "She just asked what I needed that night. A bed. That was it." That small kindness became a pattern. A case manager who remembered her name and a plan she developed that she is getting support on.

"I'm not fixed," Vanessa told me. "I don't think anyone really is. But I'm steadier. I have an address again. I have people who check in on me because they want to."

I think about that often. How fear meets so many people right at our threshold and how it's our job, every day, to meet it with something steadier.

*Because of your generosity, we are able to provide services to Vanessa and many like her, who are looking for a different path towards stability.*



Sherry Bray  
Executive Director

# Ashley's Story

*Name changed to protect her privacy.*



## BEYOND HOMELESSNESS

The day Ashley arrived at First Light, she was carrying far more than a few belongings. She had lost her job, her housing, and the stability she once knew. More than anything, she carried fear—fear of the unknown, fear of failing, and fear that she might never be able to rebuild her life. Exhausted and overwhelmed, she walked through First Light's doors hoping for a safe place to sleep. What she found instead was something even more powerful: compassion, encouragement, and people who believed in her before she could believe in herself.

Over the next 5½ months, Ashley worked incredibly hard to rebuild her future. With the support of First Light's staff and her own determination, she accepted a position as a Hospice Caregiver at UAB, a job that gave her not only financial stability but also renewed confidence and purpose. She was able to purchase a reliable vehicle—something that meant far more than transportation. It meant independence, freedom to get to work, and the ability to keep moving toward the life she dreamed of.

As Ashley continued reaching her goals, she accomplished something she once thought was impossible. She moved into a place she could finally call home—a permanent home where she could begin building a new life. But the greatest gift wasn't the apartment itself. It was the opportunity to welcome her daughter into that home. After spending time apart, the two were able to reconnect, creating new memories together and beginning a new chapter filled with hope, healing, and love.

In just 5½ months, Ashley's story became one of remarkable resilience and transformation. What began as one of the darkest moments of her life became the beginning of a future she never thought possible. Today, Ashley has a career she loves, reliable transportation, a permanent home, and—most importantly—the joy of having her daughter back by her side.

*"Hope doesn't just provide shelter—it opens the door to a future filled with possibility."*



Renovated Community  
Bathrooms



New Flooring Throughout the  
Fourth Floor



Updated Community Kitchen



Updated Community Dayroom

# A Place to Call Home

## Updates to Our Fourth Floor

For the nine women who call First Light's fourth floor home, these renovations were about much more than new flooring or new countertops, they were about **dignity**, comfort, and creating a space that truly feels like home.

Many of these women live with disabilities that prevent them from living independently, making First Light their **permanent home**. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, this spring we transformed the fourth floor with beautiful new flooring throughout the hallways and common areas, completely renovated bathrooms, and an updated community kitchen where residents gather each day.

These improvements have made everyday life **safer**, easier, and **more welcoming**. The new flooring provides better stability and reduces slipping hazards, while the renovated bathrooms and refreshed kitchen create spaces that are brighter, more functional, and filled with the **dignity** every person deserves. Every detail was thoughtfully designed to remind our residents that they are valued, cared for, and worthy of a beautiful place to live.

*"The new flooring makes our home feel warmer and is much easier to walk on because it isn't as slippery. It's also beautiful. The renovated bathrooms have made an even bigger difference. I truly appreciate all of the upgrades."*

*— Tina (Name changed to protect her privacy.)*

# Volunteer SPOTLIGHT

## Faith Community Fellowship Church



For nearly ten years, Faith Community Fellowship Church has been a faithful partner to First Light, serving women and children with compassion, encouragement, and practical support. Throughout their partnership, the church has donated more than 100 Bibles and helped meet a variety of needs, including car seats, clothing, and specialty items. When additional volunteers are available, they have even stepped in to provide lunch for our guests.

On the fourth Saturday of each month, their team serves a hot breakfast, shares a devotion, and spends time praying with the women at First Light. “What began as an opportunity to serve has become a true joy and blessing to our team, and we are honored to support the incredible work being done at First Light,” shares Alicia Vincent.

We are so thankful for the faithful presence of Faith Community Fellowship Church and the kindness they bring to our shelter. Their willingness to simply show up, listen, and care has made a meaningful difference in the lives of many women over the years.

# Volunteer SPOTLIGHT

## Cahaba Heights Church of Christ



For more than twelve years, Cahaba Heights Church of Christ has been a faithful part of the First Light family. What started as a simple desire to share the love of Jesus has grown into a meaningful ministry that continues to encourage and uplift our guests today.

Each month, members of the church provide breakfast and lead Bible studies for our guests. Through these visits, they offer not only a meal but also friendship, encouragement, and a reminder that no one walks through difficult times alone.

"We came with a simple desire to share the word of Jesus and to remind the women there that, through Him, there is always hope," shared volunteer liaison Sheila Ellis. "We are truly grateful that First Light not only meets physical needs but also nurtures spiritual growth."

Over the years, the relationships formed during these Bible studies have been a blessing to everyone involved. The volunteers have faithfully shown up month after month, sharing their time, their hearts, and their faith with the women we serve.

We are so thankful for Cahaba Heights Church of Christ and their commitment to First Light. Their kindness, compassion, and unwavering support have touched countless lives, and we are grateful for the hope and encouragement they bring to our guests each month.

# Summer of SERVICE

Summer is a wonderful time to give back, build community, and remind the women and children we serve that they are supported and cared for. Get your family, youth group, workplace, or community organization involved at First Light this summer!

## Help Us

# BEAT THE HEAT!

As temperatures climb across Birmingham this summer, the women and children we serve face real risks from heat-related illness, especially those who spend time outdoors before finding shelter. Dehydration and heat exhaustion are serious concerns, and the need for water, sports drinks, and other hydration supplies grows right alongside the heat. Every donation, no matter the size, helps us make sure no mother or child in our care goes without what they need to stay healthy this summer. We are collecting the following items:

- Bottled water
- Gatorade or sports drinks
- Fresh fruit
- Individual water bottles or reusable water bottles

Donations can be dropped off at First Light or shipped directly to the shelter.



Hosting a collection drive for much-needed items such as bottled water, sports drinks, toiletries, or cleaning supplies



Organizing a summer donation drive in your neighborhood, church, or workplace



Volunteering to host a movie night, game night, or special activity for our guests



Preparing and serving a meal



Creating care kits or welcome bags



Helping with special projects around the shelter



**BOTTLED WATER**



**GATORADE OR SPORTS DRINKS**



**FRESH FRUIT**



**INDIVIDUAL WATER BOTTLES OR REUSABLE WATER BOTTLES**



*Thank you*  
**FOR BEING THE LIGHT THIS SUMMER.**



If you are looking for a way to get involved this summer, we would love to help you find the perfect opportunity.



These simple items can make a big difference during the hot summer months and help keep our guests **healthy, hydrated, and cared for.**



# Illume

A BRIGHTER WAY TO GALA



Thank  
you!



First Light's Illume was an incredible evening and a true reflection of the generosity and compassion in our community. Thanks to the support of our sponsors, donors, volunteers, guests, and community partners, the event was a tremendous success, raising critical funds to support women and children experiencing homelessness. Every ticket purchased, paddle raised, auction bid placed, and donation made will help provide safe shelter, meals, case management, housing assistance, and hope to hundreds of women and children over the coming year. Because of this collective generosity, lives will be changed, families will find stability, and women will have the opportunity to build brighter futures. We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make Illume such a meaningful and impactful night.

 **Join First Light at the Ballpark!**

# **First Light Night with the Birmingham Barons**

**Friday, August 14 • 7:00 PM • Regions Field**




## WHY IT MATTERS



**Gather your family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors for a fun summer evening cheering on the Birmingham Barons while supporting First Light! Every ticket purchased through our special fundraising link helps provide shelter, housing, and support services for women and children experiencing homelessness in our community. First Light will receive a portion of every ticket sold through the event page.**

### **How to Participate**

 Purchase your tickets here:

[Buy Tickets & Support First Light](#)

**Every ticket helps create brighter futures for the women and children we serve. Come enjoy America's favorite pastime and make a difference in our community at the same time!**

# SAVE <sup>THE</sup> DATE

First Light's  
**DANCING**  
with the  
**STARS**  
of the Magic City

**November 5, 2026**

**The Lyric Theatre | Birmingham, AL**

**Join us for Dancing with the Stars of the Magic City 2026, a fun, family-friendly fall event where local teams compete for the Torch People's Choice Award while raising support for First Light.**

**DANCING WITH THE STARS**



first light

# TOGETHER, *We Bring Hope Every Day*

Summer is a season for rest, adventure, and time with the people we love. **Thanks to you, First Light is here every day**—providing safety, support, and hope for women who need it most.


Every day and night, women experiencing homelessness turn to First Light for emergency shelter, nutritious meals, supportive services, and a pathway to stable housing.



**Because of generous supporters like you, our doors remain open *365 days a year.***

*Thank you for making hope possible all year long.* 

**OUR DOORS  
ARE OPEN**  
*every day of the year.*  
**BECAUSE EVERY WOMAN  
DESERVES A SAFE PLACE  
TO CALL HOME.**

**365 DAYS OF SHELTER.**  
*365 DAYS OF HOPE.* 



**EMERGENCY  
SHELTER**



**NUTRITIOUS  
MEALS**



**HOUSING  
SUPPORT**



**HOPE &  
STABILITY**



# first light

## The Board of Directors

### **Millicent W. Ronnlund- President**

Davis Goodson, Past President  
Tiffany Nabors  
Ronnetta Peoples  
Allison Chang-Roberts

### **Beth Malizia-Co-Vice President**

Jeffrey A. Cowart  
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### **Damon Reed - Treasurer**

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A.B. Puckett  
Mary Beth Wagner  
Robert Pendley

### **Emily T. Vande Lune- Secretary**

Kate Eason  
Alexis Brinkmeyer Mazut,  
Ex-Officio

## FIRST LIGHT STAFF

### **Social Service Team**

#### **Chaquita Pendleton, MSW, Program Coordinator**

Shulette Prince, BSW, Case Manager  
Rebekah Schollmeyer, BA, Case Manager  
Alexa Hall, BS, Case Manager  
Octavia Pointer, BS, Case Manager  
Kimberly Madison, LBSW, Social Worker

#### **Sherry Bray, LMSW, MPA Executive Director**

#### **Leigh Ann Johnson Finance**

#### **Kelley Smith Director of Development and Donor Relations**

#### **Casey Schaffer Development Coordinator**

#### **Camilla Jones Director of Volunteer Services**

### **Shelter Operations**

#### **April Graham, Shelter Manager**

Geneva Sanders, Receptionist  
Therese O'Hare, Shelter Assistant  
Carmen Taylor, Weekend Manager  
Pauline Word, Weekend Manager

# Contact Us:

**For volunteer information or donation report: Camilla Jones- [camilla@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:camilla@firstlightshelter.org)**

**Need a speaker for an event: Sherry Bray- [sherry.bray@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:sherry.bray@firstlightshelter.org)**

**Agency fundraisers: Casey Schaffer- [casey@firstlightshelter.org](mailto:casey@firstlightshelter.org)**

**Shelter services: 205-323-4277**



**first light**



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