



BLOG: CROSSCURRENTS

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: LINDA BRANDT AND ST. MARKS

2/11/2026

Volunteers from St. Mark's Cathedral, a downtown Minneapolis congregation, feel called to serve their community. They have chosen 180 Degrees' Great River Landing program in Minneapolis as a place to focus their efforts. Their committee is called "Fresh Start" and reflects their mission.

Longtime 180 Degrees supporter Linda Brandt helps to lead Fresh Start, and her calling to help the formerly incarcerated has deep roots. Her career includes working as a public health nurse and founding the Rural AIDS Action Network in 1991. During this work she discovered that many of the patients that sought help from the organization because of their AIDS diagnoses were incarcerated. This experience gave her a strong sense of compassion and empathy for those in the criminal justice system, and she joined a pen pal program with incarcerated individuals over the following years. That work and compassion inspires her to this day in her volunteerism with 180 Degrees.





Degrees and Great River Landing. The group was looking to get out into their neighborhood and community and have a true impact—Linda was confident that Great River Landing was the place to do that. The Fresh Start volunteers focus on loving their neighbors, and they have truly done that at Great River Landing.

“The Fresh Start committee is making a big difference for our residents at Great River Landing”, said Associate Director Layee Sanoë. “They hosted holiday meals for residents at Thanksgiving and in December, providing a welcoming environment for residents who struggle to re-build social skills.”

The committee sponsored a drive at St Mark’s church after hearing the bed sheets was often a pressing need for clients arriving at Great River Landing. Now our residents have clean bed sheets and towels upon arrival. They also coordinated to send holiday cards to the residents at Great River Landing. Many of the men have lost touch with their families, and Linda wanted to ensure that they knew that someone was thinking of them during the holiday season.



The Fresh Start team worked with Great River Landing staff to ensure new residents received bed sheets and towels upon arrival.



Residents and Fresh Start volunteers connected over holiday dinner.

Now, the group has turned their attention to one of the most pressing issues for Great River Landing residents: finding employment. Connecting residents with felony-friendly employers is no small feat, but the St. Mark's group are dedicated to finding ways to help.

Great River Landing resident, Robert Cantin, serves as a liaison between the St. Mark's volunteers and the other residents. For him, the experience is deeply fulfilling. "It gets me out of my element, and it gets me helping others. I'm trying to give back some of what I've gotten here." Robert has lived at Great River Landing for about two years, and the program helped him navigate mental health challenges and be discharged from parole for the first time in more than 40 years.

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on their work.

180 Degrees is so thankful for Linda and the Fresh Start volunteers for the additional opportunities they create for our clients to take meaningful steps forward on their journeys towards stable, fulfilling lives. As Layee said, “We appreciate the dedication and strong commitment from these volunteers. Their efforts to support our clients truly provide meaningful support for the Great River Landing Residents.”

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