

HEARTLAND ARTISTS GALLERY PARTNERS WITH NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER IN PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBIT

The Heartland Artists Gallery has joined forces with the Marshall County Neighborhood Center in an exhibit designed to bring more awareness to the Center and local families living at or just below the poverty line. Entitled, *This is Us: A Photographic Storytelling Exhibit of the Marshall County Neighborhood Center*, the exhibit features over 80 photographs depicting the stories of the Center and a few of its clients living in the Marshall County area. The exhibit is scheduled to open Tuesday, January 5th at the Heartland Artists Gallery in Plymouth.

The idea for the exhibit came about in October of 2019 when Anna Kietzman, President of the Heartland Artists Gallery, attended the annual Indiana Arts Commission Homecoming Conference in Indianapolis. One of the presenters was an arts organization from central Indiana who partnered with a food assistance program similar to the Neighborhood Center. They provided cameras to their clients, asked them to photograph aspects of their lives, and then put the photographs on exhibit. The exhibit led to positive community discussion and increased involvement and advocacy for those who are struggling to put food on the table. Anna states, "I was so inspired by the presentation that I texted Chris Garner the second I left the seminar."

A year and a half later, just after this Thanksgiving, Chris Garner, Executive Director of the Marshall County Neighborhood Center, received the cameras from the Gallery clients of various backgrounds were invited to participate. The selected clients represent a variety of life scenarios: young single mom, traditional family, single dad, and single seniors. Chris was excited to have these households share their stories, "We know our clients on a personal level. We have cried together, laughed together, celebrated together, prayed together, and encouraged each other. I hope the community sees through the stigmas and recognizes the beauty in each of these households."

Without any definitive directions, the clients were given complete creative control over their photographs. Anna Kietzman states, "I had no idea what to expect. I just wanted to look through their eyes and have them tell their stories." Aside from some basic photography pointers, the clients and workers at the Center could photograph whatever they wanted. Then Anna, along with professional photographer and Heartland Artist, Tony Straw, did some basic editing to the photographs. The photographs range from playful images of children's art projects and family Christmas trees to that of grocery donations and necessary COVID adaptations. "I believe in the vital role art can play in the process of imagining and understanding the lives of others. I am hoping that this exhibit, like most art exhibits, challenges attitudes, sparks conversation, connects us on another level, and maybe, just maybe, spurs a call to action."

The community is encouraged to visit the Heartland Artists Gallery Tuesday – Saturday from 1PM-4PM to view the photographs and learn a little more about the Neighborhood Center and its programs. The exhibit is also available online at the Gallery's website: www.heartlandartgallery.com. The exhibit will run through January 30th.

The Marshall County Neighborhood Center is a county wide non-profit dedicated to helping lift people out of vulnerable situations. With support from community donors, United Way, Marshall County Community Foundation and Real Services the Center provides a food pantry, clothing closet, utility assistance, client advocacy, family development, budget counseling, and community referrals. We believe in being a hand up, not just a hand-out. Over 75% of our funding comes from community

donors. Together, we make Marshall County a great neighborhood to be a part of. If you would like to donate you can donate on-line at www.helpingmcfamilies.org or through mail to PO Box 353 Plymouth, IN 46563.

The Heartland Artists Gallery's mission is to support area artists, and to bring and to teach the arts to our community. Our not-for-profit Gallery gives area artists a venue to show and sell their artwork. Activities are made possible in part by the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, and the Indiana Arts Commission, which receives support from the State of Indiana and the National Endowment for the Arts. Visit our website and find us on Facebook and Instagram. For more information contact the Gallery at 574-936-9515. The Gallery is located at 101 N. Michigan Street in downtown Plymouth.