



February 2026 enCourage Newsletter

Dear Friends and Supporters,

I have some news I'm genuinely excited to share. enCourage has been selected as a model site for Praxis International's Rural Initiatives for Service Enhancement (RISE) project—a national initiative aimed at strengthening services for survivors in rural communities.

Here's what this means. On February 3-4, representatives from Praxis will be in Hastings conducting focus groups with survivors, community members, and advocates. They're coming to learn from the work we've been doing across our four-county service area. What we've figured out about serving survivors in rural Nebraska—the challenges, the creative solutions, what actually works—will be used to develop best practices that get shared with rural programs across the country.

This recognition matters for a couple of reasons. First, it acknowledges that rural advocacy work looks different and requires different approaches than urban services. The isolation survivors face here isn't just emotional, it's geographic. The barriers aren't just about leaving an abusive relationship, they're about having nowhere to go for 40 miles. Being selected as a model site says that the adaptations we've made to serve this community effectively are worth studying and replicating.

Second, this brings resources back to enCourage. Praxis will provide technical assistance to strengthen our programs. We'll learn from their expertise while they learn from ours. That kind of exchange makes us better at what we do, which ultimately means better support for the survivors we serve.

Being a model site means our work here in south-central Nebraska will inform how rural programs nationwide approach survivor services. That feels significant, not because we have it all figured out, but because rural survivors deserve the same quality of advocacy as anyone else, and that requires acknowledging that one-size-fits-all approaches don't work.

With gratitude,

Jo Bair, MSW



Notice the Signs Before It's Too Late

Violence often starts quietly, with small comments or behaviors that escalate over time. Green Dot teaches us to notice early warning signs: microaggressions, isolating behaviors, or coercion. By recognizing these "red dots" early, you can take preventive action safely. Even a casual conversation or checking in with someone can redirect potential harm. This month, practice observing your surroundings and identifying subtle situations where intervention might help. Every moment you notice and act, no matter how small, strengthens your ability to protect others and creates a community culture where violence is less likely to thrive.

For questions or to schedule a Green Dot Training at your business or organization, email greendot@encouragecenter.org



Hearts and Flowers: When Gestures Become Part of the Cycle

Working with people who cause harm fundamentally shifts how you perceive seemingly ordinary occasions like Valentine's Day and its traditional gifts of hearts and flowers.

In domestic violence intervention work, the phrase "hearts and flowers" carries an ominous meaning. It refers to a specific stage in the cycle of abuse—the period immediately following a violent incident when the abusive partner works to "patch things up," both figuratively and often literally.

The Quick Fix That Doesn't Fix

"Hearts and flowers" represents one of many attempts at a quick fix without real, substantive, enduring change. It comes with expectations of instant results: instant trust, instant forgiveness, instant reassurance, instant affection—both verbal and physical.

But the hearts and flowers routine amounts to a band-aid on a compound fracture. It doesn't respect the severity of the harm inflicted, the damage done, the extent of necessary repair, or the lengthy healing period required.

The Difference Context Makes

Hearts, flowers, and sweet gestures in a happy, healthy, safe, nurturing relationship are icing on the cake—celebrations of an already solid foundation.

In a relationship marred by abuse, where one partner's goal is not equality and reciprocity but domination, power, and control, these gestures are the shiny side of the same abusive coin. They're part of the abuse itself—the part that keeps the person being harmed stuck in ambivalence, both wanting to leave and wanting to stay.

The Cycle Continues

These quick fixes soon give way to the tension-building phase, where the partner being harmed does everything possible to manage the other's emotions and behaviors, walking on eggshells to keep them calm and happy, desperately trying to avoid provoking their wrath.

This phase cycles into the eruption—the fresh instance of verbal, emotional, and mental abuse, or outright physical or sexual violence.

And then what follows? More hearts and flowers. Perhaps one really good Valentine's Day date amid days filled with fear, pain, threats, injury, loss, and a desire for permanent change—hope against all odds, all evidence, all reason that such change will ever happen for real.

An Invitation

If this describes your experience and you identify with the person being harmed: Call enCourage at (402) 463-5810. Trained advocates are ready to support you in whatever way you need.

If you identify with the person enacting this cycle of abuse: enCourage's Rebuild DVIP can be the start of a genuine long-term solution. Call us today to speak with a facilitator about scheduling an intake.



- Wanting to volunteer at enCourage? If interested in volunteering, please call 402-463-5810 and ask for Shawna.
 - We also always accept donations of clothing, household items, gently used toys, kitchen items, toiletries, size 3 and up diapers, laundry detergent, and unlocked, working cellphones.
 - We are currently looking for individuals who would be available to foster pets for survivors fleeing violence. If interested, please call 402-463-5810 and ask for Shawna.
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Each Tuesday from 4:30 to 6 pm, enCourage hosts a peer support group. This group provides attendees with an opportunity to connect with other survivors. In this half-hour, we discuss current life happenings and identify ways to help one another. Then we switch gears from 5 - 6 pm into an educational group called Healthy Healing. Through this group, we discuss and practice new skills that help attendees recover and thrive after violence. We discuss what healthy relationships look and feel like. Learn healthy ways to manage obstacles and overcome the insecurities that develop from trauma and end the cycle of violence. Email jazmin@encouragecenter.org for questions or to let her know you would like to attend groups.



- Every Tuesday from 4:30 - 6 pm, we offer a Support Group at enCourage Advocacy Center and a Healthy Healing Educational Group from 5 - 6 pm.
- Each month on the 3rd Wednesday of the month from 1 - 3 pm, the Nebraska Aids Project will be at enCourage Advocacy Center providing Free and Confidential HIV and STI Testing.

Contact Heather for an appointment by emailing HeatherB@nap.org. Walk-ins are also welcome.

- 2026 Mint Gala, our signature fundraising event, will be held on Saturday, February 21st, 2026, at Lochland Country Club.

If you are interested in purchasing tickets to the 2026 Mint Gala, please visit www.encouragecenter.org and click the News and Events drop-down, and go to the Mint option in the drop-down menu.



The local Celebrity Mixologists are Colleen Williams, Dave Griek, and Laura Beahm. We will have Amy Sadd as our survivor speaker, and our Emcee for the evening will once again be Greg Allen-Pickett. Join us for an amazing evening supporting local survivors of intimate partner violence.

Below are the trips that we will have available for you to bid on for our Live Auction.

The Barbados trip is for 4 guests over 5 nights. You will stay in a Townhouse tucked away in a private community. There is an exclusive Clubhouse and Beach House amenities, including an ocean view pool, poolside restaurant and bar, and private beach access. The bidding begins at \$3,100 on this amazing tropical experience.



The Mexico trip is for 2 guests over 7 nights. You will have the choice to stay at one of six luxury resorts (Nuevo Nayarit-Vallarta, Riviera Maya, Acapulco, Puerto Penasco, Puerto Vallarta, or Mazatlan). Each luxury resort has upscale amenities which may include a sprawling swimming pool, world-class dining, waterparks, spas, golf courses, and more. Each resort includes exclusive on-site entertainment, wellness center access, and preferred rates on golf. The bidding begins at \$1,000 on this getaway.

A promotional graphic for an in-home chef experience. The background is blue with the text "IN-HOME CHEF EXPERIENCE" in large white letters. On the left, there are four photos of different dishes. On the right, there is a photo of Chef Thomas, a man in a white chef's uniform. A list of benefits is in the center:

- A 30-60 minute in-home consultation with Chef before your event, so we can walk your space, talk through your vision, and make sure every detail is set for a true Feast experience
- A chef-curated gourmet menu by Feast, built around bold flavors, comfort, and intention—because a Feast isn't just a meal, it's a moment meant to be shared
- This Feast in-home chef experience serves up to 10 guests, bringing the heart, hospitality, and abundance Feast is known for straight to your table
- This experience is a retail value of at least \$750

At the bottom, there is a logo for "FEAST by Chef Thomas" featuring a stylized flame.

And if a trip is not for you, we are also offering an In-Home Chef Experience that brings a fine dining experience into your home for you and up to 9 other individuals. Details of this amazing deal are below. We will start the bidding at \$700 on this amazing deal.