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## Out of the woodwork - Isaiah House provides firewood for the needy



**Dustin Kouns of Nicholasville kept the wood splitter humming along at Isaiah House in Willisburg. Kouns is a resident of Isaiah House, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center, and the wood is used as part of the facility's outreach ministry. - Photo by Jimmie Earls**



**Jonathan Giorgio of Bowling Green throws a log onto the fire at Isaiah House used to burn up soft wood. - Photo by Jimmie Earls**

By Jimmie Earls

The firewood ministry of Isaiah House in Willisburg is not only providing a source of warmth and comfort to their customers, but also providing a physical, emotional and spiritual outlet for the men on the wood pile.

Now in its fourth year, the firewood program got started when Mark LaPalme, executive director, spotted a sign for free firewood, placed by a man who cuts down trees for a living. LaPalme arranged to pick up all the wood from the man's jobs and has since added two more suppliers.

"Guys who cut down trees for a living call us when they cut it down and we go clean up the yard," said LaPalme. "Normally the wood is in three four-foot sections, so we bring it back and we cut and split it into something useable. That began our firewood ministry."

Over the past three years, the program has earned approximately \$30,000 for Isaiah House, which is a faith-based treatment center for men addicted to drugs and alcohol.

The firewood is sold by the rick at a competitive market price.

"We try to compete with everybody," added LaPalme. "It is a fundraiser for the ministry. We don't want to out-price ourselves. It's all cut and split, and we deliver and stack it. It's all seasoned hardwood, ready to go."

Isaiah House also donates a lot of wood to those in need who cannot afford heat.

For the men on the firewood crew, the ministry is a chance to start a new chapter in their lives.

"We're learning discipline," said Jonathan Giorgio, a resident from Bowling Green. "We've been doing stuff our way, now we're having to listen to somebody else. It's helping me for when I get back out into the real world I'll learn to respect authority."

Casey Flaughter, of Carter County, has been cutting wood at Isaiah House for close to three months.

"It can be stressful at times," said Flaughter. "But it can also be a stress reliever, too. It also helps on a mental level. There's a lot of things to deal with here. It helps get out some anger and aggression."

"It's a great form of detox," LaPalme added. "When these guys come in, many of them have treated their bodies extremely poorly. They've slept under bridges and not eaten well, so they may put on some weight once they're here. Most are young, in their teens, 20s and early 30s, and they're a little bit vain, so they like being able to work some of that weight off while they're out there."

"It's hard work," said Jason Blair, an Isaiah House resident from Mount Sterling. "But you get something out of it. We take care of a lot of families that can't afford heat, we donate a lot of wood."

Dustin Kouns of Nicholasville is also a resident at Isaiah House and sees the benefits provided by the firewood ministry.

"I think it's a good program," Kouns said. "It gets us outdoors and also helps to raise funds to maintain the Isaiah House. That's important so other fellows can have the same chance that I'm getting here."

The center sells firewood not only in Willisburg, but also in Boyle County where LaPalme resides. Whenever the crew picks up wood from suppliers in Boyle County, they deliver wood to LaPalme, so people in Danville and Perryville also have a chance to help the ministry.

Working with tree services in the area has not only benefitted Isaiah House's firewood ministry, but it also helps the tree services get in and out of jobs quicker.

LaPalme added, "When we show up with five to 10 guys on a site and are able to pick the wood up quick and get the yard cleaned up, they're able to get paid quicker. It seems like everybody's happy."

Soft woods such as pine, cedar or spruce are burned behind Isaiah House to help keep the men warm as they work outside in cold weather.

The firewood ministry not only provides the community with a valuable commodity, but also provides lessons in responsibility and self-respect to troubled young men looking for a second chance and a sense of stability.

Anyone interested in buying firewood from Isaiah House should call (859) 375-9200.