



DARKNESS WON'T OVERCOME LIGHT

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Life isn't about how much money you have or how many followers you have, it is about who you help out of the darkness and into the light. Norma Okonski has brought many people out of the darkness by founding and working at Oakland Hope food pantry. Norma has been through people stealing from her, assaulting her, and almost getting killed. Norma has a passion for helping people. Norma Okonski is virtuous and determined to help as many people as she can while inspiring others to do the same.

Norma and a string of churches in Michigan have put together a food pantry and thrift store behind a grocery store in Pontiac, Michigan. Giving 50-60 families food every day. That was until one day when there was a robbery next door to the pantry. During that robbery, two people were killed. That day, Norma knew she could not keep the food pantry at that location. For the safety of others, a decision was made to move the food pantry to a new location. Norma flipped the page and started over again. During Covid, things only got harder, but Norma was determined to help people every day no matter what they had to do. For them, it was putting garbage bags over their clothes, wearing hairnets, two masks, and long latex gloves. Being the only food pantry open in Oakland County wasn't easy. They were giving 40-50 thousand pounds of food away every month, and those numbers have only increased over the last two years. Since food prices have skyrocketed due to war, it has been difficult to give away so much food.

Norma has also been assaulted and robbed because, as she put it, some people are hurting and stuck in a place of darkness. But no matter what, Norma has always shown light and love to those who have hurt her or stolen from her. Norma knows that people go through hardships and just need kindness. The first time I volunteered, the food pantry had been open all day. But after closing, a woman came to the door and was visibly upset. The woman screamed at us because we could not give her food after we closed, but Norma still showed her kindness and told her we

are open every day so she could come back tomorrow. Norma kept trying to get her to calm down until the lady punched her. Unfortunately, she was banned from the store. My hero is a person who puts their blood, sweat, and tears into helping other people.

Norma's favorite quote is from Nelson Mandela, and it says: "Poverty is not an accident like slavery or apartheid, it is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings." This quote not only depicts her life, but the image she puts on others that follow her. Norma has helped me become a better person, and I am grateful for everything she does. Norma is my Michigan hero.



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