

New Workforce and Life Development Program Center Opens

At the start of the pandemic, Friends of Guest House quickly pivoted all of its programs, including the Workforce and Life Development (WLD) program, to a virtual format. WLD classes were held via Zoom and conference call format. Instructors shifted from teaching in-person to the virtual format, and, thanks to supporters like you, Friends of Guest House invested in new and upgraded technology and equipment to ensure clients could continue to receive the services they needed to successfully reenter the community and reunite with their families.



As the pandemic wore on, it became clear certain classes and services were best delivered in-person. For example, our parenting class (Parenting Inside Out) is experiential and intimate; it did not translate well to a virtual platform. Other classes that required specific supplies and hands-on assistance from instructors, like beading, Project Knitwell, expressive arts, Yoga and fitness classes, were also difficult to hold virtually. When Northern Virginia transitioned to Phase 3 of re-opening, staff returned to teaching some classes onsite, but volunteers remained virtual. With limited space, this set-up quickly became difficult to navigate while maintaining physical distancing.

In January Guest House secured funding for a new, larger space to host WLD classes in a physically distant manner. After negotiations were finalized, Guest House moved the WLD program into the new space on February 8, 2021. The program will be located in Grace Brethren Church, which is conveniently located near Guest House's headquarters. There is a large open space to hold classes in and two staff offices. One for the WLD Program Coordinator, Unique Campbell, and the other for case managers to meet with clients onsite, in-between classes.

Unique is excited about the new location for the WLD program. "Many of our women struggled to be attentive or connect with instructors virtually. More in-person instruction will help the women be more attentive and engaged." Also, previously, classes were divided between our two homes. Unique said, "I'm most looking forward to the women from both homes being able to interact."

Thank YOU for making this possible! Want to help outfit our new space? Check out our Amazon Wishlist <http://bit.ly/foghamazon> for needed items like binders, folders and fitness equipment.

Vaccinations Administered at Friends of Guest House

On January 29, 2021 Friends of Guest House partnered with the Alexandria Health Department to deliver 40 vaccinations to Guest House clients, staff and on-site volunteers. Pharmacists from **Del Ray Pharmacy** were on site at Friends of Guest House's Old Town Alexandria location to administer the first dose of vaccines.



As a congregate living facility, Friends of Guest House clients, staff and on-site volunteers were included in priority group “1B” for vaccinations. Some staff members have already received their vaccines at community vaccination sites. This vaccination event was specifically to ensure clients easy access to the vaccine. Pharmacists returned on February 26, 2021 to administer second doses.

Thanks to supporters like you, Friends of Guest House has endured through the Covid-19 pandemic. For almost a year we’ve adhered to strict protocols as advised by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Alexandria Health Department and provided our clients with as much assistance as possible to support them during this crisis.

Juggling Many Responsibilities, Darian Starts College this Winter

Four days after being released from jail, Darian Royal was once again moving back into her parents’ house for the third time post-incarceration. She had a choice to make: continue to do what she had always done and probably land herself right back in the same place - incarceration - or try something different. Of her own accord, she chose Friends of Guest House. Darian wanted something different for her future. She wanted to be normal.



“I spent a majority of my 20’s behind bars,” Darian admits. “I didn’t do anything that 20-year-olds do. I actually spent most of my time avoiding what 20-year-olds do.” Darian comes from a loving, involved family, but at that time, she couldn’t even accept a simple dinner invitation because her addiction told her not to part with her money or her time, and because she was just too embarrassed to let them see who she was.

Darian came to realize that her family couldn’t help her through this. “When you are an addict, you are a master manipulator of those who love you. The Guest House staff and residents taught me to do things for myself. And slowly but surely with every small accomplishment, my confidence grew,” explains Darian. She credits Guest House with strengthening her *life muscles*. Every time she was forced to do the heavy lifting of sticking to her schedule, keeping her appointments, managing interpersonal relationships in a healthy way - she was building her life muscles and building a new, “normal” life.

Now in the Friends of Guest House Aftercare Program, Darian lives in an apartment with two roommates. She works at Sweet Green in Old Town Alexandria. Many employers in Alexandria are familiar with the hard working, reliable women of Guest House, and Sweet Green is no exception. They were happy to hire Darian and have been accommodating of the demands of her four online classes through Lord Fairfax Community College. She is studying Social Work and Human Resources. “I am so lucky to have the support of Guest House, my family, my employer, and my professors as I align my life with my goals.”

These days, Darian is trying new foods, looking forward to a vacation post-pandemic with her family, studying, working, and enjoying the “normal” so many of us take for granted. She is excited to one day nurture a career that utilizes her degree, and to celebrate, she plans to take her family out to



McKenzie, Transformed

McKenzie Stickley came from a loving, supportive home. “My parents raised me wonderfully. But I was sheltered in their very strict home,” recalls McKenzie. This lack of exposure to managing life’s bigger challenges led McKenzie to turn to substances to help navigate unfamiliar emotional strains. Her parents had no experience with addiction and were woefully lacking in the skills necessary to help their daughter overcome her disease and find better coping mechanisms. McKenzie’s struggles with addiction landed her in jail and placed her one-year-old daughter in the custody of her parents.

McKenzie heard about the Guest House program while in jail from other women who knew of the program and also longed to be accepted. After pressing her lawyer, she was given the paperwork to apply. Those same women helped her dot every “i”, cross every “t”, and by encouraging her to be honest, helped her to overcome the embarrassment of needing to tell her story in order to get the help that could change her life.

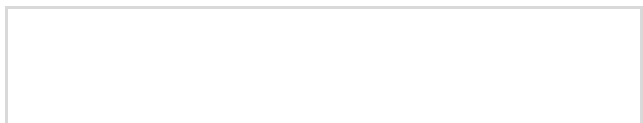
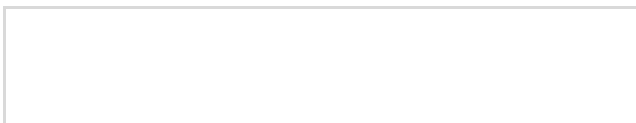
McKenzie had heard the phrases, “Guilt by association” and “You are who you surround yourself with” her entire life from her parents and the authorities. But it wasn’t until she saw this in a positive light that she was able to internalize the message. Much like the women in jail who encouraged her to get help, McKenzie was bolstered by the immediate sense of safety, support and fellowship she experienced with the Guest House residents and staff. Nervous to once again put herself out there, it was her Guest House roommate that referred her for an interview at Nando’s Peri-Peri and was her personal cheerleader throughout the interview experience. McKenzie started in an entry-level position and has since been promoted to Shift Leader and Certified Trainer.

“I am not the same person I was two years ago before coming to Guest House. I am transformed!” She exclaims. She has been sober for two years, completed every class assigned to her from probation and Guest House, and has successfully graduated from the Guest House program in 2020. She is in the process of regaining her custodial rights to her daughter and her loving parents are in full support. She knows now that surrounding herself with positivity and those that have her best interests in their hearts for her life is a non-negotiable for her continued success. She credits these two years and all of the wonderful people who were always in her corner with teaching her to be a rational, patient communicator who is breaking the cycle of addiction and using her experiences as the foundation of a relationship with her daughter.

“I am no longer fearful or embarrassed about telling people what I have been through. Mine is a story of survival and growth. I plan to tell my daughter the truth about myself and what I have overcome and what I am able to accomplish,” she says proudly. She wants to instill in her daughter that good people are everywhere, ready to help, when you are ready to let them. McKenzie understands the importance of being one of those positive and supportive people to others, and she and her family are eternally grateful for the donors, volunteers, staff and residents of Guest House who profoundly changed her life and the lives of everyone she touches.

[DONATE](#)

In Case You Missed It...



DID YOU KNOW?

Almost **half** of
our clients
have spent
time in juvenile
detention



Almost **all** of our
clients were
suspended or
expelled from
school



Read our blog post, **A Promising Future for Criminal Justice Reform?**



We honored **these incredible Black female criminal justice reform advocates** as part of last month's celebration of Black History Month.

Friends of Guest House
www.friendsofquesthouse.org

