

# Inside Guest House

## Challenges posed by Covid add to tough road to recovery.

By Shirley Ruhe  
Gazette Packet

**K**ari Galloway, Executive Director of Friends of Guest House in Alexandria says, "It's hard. Our clients feel like they just got out of prison and then they come here and get quarantined for two weeks in their room." Guest House is the only residential women's facility for recovering non-violent offenders in northern Virginia, and the largest in the state. Currently it serves 30 women in the six-month residential program and 17 in the transitional After Care.

Loneliness is a real enemy of addiction recovery, says Galloway. Women can feel desperate and isolated. Usually the strong support system at Guest House helps pull people through, but during COVID the therapy sessions, case work and AA meetings are all by Zoom and for the first two weeks they are quarantined. "We know the prisons and jails they come from are hot spots."

Shauna Creek, a case manager at Guest House explains, "In addition, under normal times we have a strong support system of alumni who come back to mentor, take clients out for a cup of coffee and find a sponsorship to help them keep clean. This is a serious and delicate relationship. But nobody is coming in because of COVID." There are Zoom meetings but it's not the same.

Galloway says, "human connection is so critical for our women."

Creek says most of the women in the After Care program lost their jobs when COVID hit. "I had three women relapse. They couldn't handle the time without being busy; they needed constructive outlets. Losing their jobs distressed them."

Creek continues, "Relapse is a part of recovery but without support they feel so alone trying to get their lives together."

Liz Royall says she had just graduated from the residential program a couple of weeks before COVID hit. She went into After Care where she had a job at the front desk at Hampton Inn. Royall got laid off when the pandemic hit. But five months later they were able to hire her back. Now she has her own apartment, gets up, goes to work and attends her AA meeting "like I did today." She spends time with her nine-year-old son Grayson.



Guest House "Writing and Rhythm" class on Mondays gets everyone going for the week. In-person classes have just started again with social distancing.

Royall had entered Guest House after her fourth parole violation for using fentanyl. She was facing prison time. She says it is great at Guest House; it's like a big family. But she says you have to change everything about yourself at once and there is a completely new structure. "It's hard juggling it all."

She adds, "There is so much wreckage from my past. I got overwhelmed all at once and there were a lot of days that were really hard. It seemed better to go use and stop the emotional pain." But she feels like all of the support changed everything. But now the support is on Zoom and while helpful, it isn't the same.

There have been ups and downs and days when she didn't think she could make it. Royall just got her driver's license back. "That's huge."

"Time heals and distance puts you further away. People are starting to trust me again," and most important she can see her son Grayson unsupervised again. "He was con-

fused about it. He just wanted his mommy."

Galloway says Guest House scaled back the program by about half at the height of COVID. Then slowly they added back from 15-17 women. Now they are full again with no open beds anticipated until June or July. During that time revenue was off and in addition women in the After Care program lost their jobs and had to seek rental assistance. Help came from a number of sources such as the City of Alexandria, ALIVE! and the Federal government.

Two-thirds of Guest House funding comes from the Virginia Department of Corrections and the remainder from grants and community support. "We're doing pretty well. We always need some things and with more money we can do more. But the community has been supportive and generous." Galloway adds whenever they needed something, "oh my goodness; an angel would show up with Clorox wipes or toilet paper."

The daily routine now involves scrubbing down high touch surfaces every two hours

including tables and computers, wearing masks and physical distancing. She explains the beds are six feet away from each other and women sleep head to toe." Women who are in quarantine for two weeks have food delivered to their room. These times are tough with no contact with their families and a completely new set of life expectations.

Galloway says they have had only a few test positive for Covid and nobody has been really sick. "We have been super vigilant about cleaning and not touching faces. "I think maybe some of this is good and may never go." Galloway adds, "I'm happy to report the Alexandria Health Department has knocked themselves out to help get everyone vaccinated. We live in a big congregate setting."

Galloway says once they have been able to get back into a 9-5 routine again, it will be huge. The structure is important. Guest House is moving in that direction, renting space in a local church to hold in-person classes. This just started last week but the efforts move slowly as they find instructors who are vaccinated and comfortable with the face to face classes.

Today Creek is on the way back from the food pantry with three of her After Care clients. "They are in need. They still have to be responsible for feeding themselves and most still don't have a job back. Ninety percent of my clients had to receive some kind of rental grant." Other days, Creek may be visiting the transitory houses to check in on the women who live there. "I may do a urinalysis or a quick case meeting to check on how they are doing with their goals. I check to be sure they are ok with food, their finances." Or there could be an immediate need for medications that they can't pick up after work.

Creek says, "It's all about the women, the transformation from when she first comes in when the world can't get any worse as she figures out who she is. It's remarkable." Creek continues, "My heart has been broken into pieces so many times but just because you fall down doesn't mean you have to stay down. Can you make better choices?" She tells them, "As long as you fight, I'll fight with you."

Galloway adds, "We want so much for the women to see the possibilities they don't see in themselves."

PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

## BULLETIN BOARD

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Rotary Club of Alexandria Grant Program provides financial support to nonprofit organizations that advance literacy for children and adults and/or improve the lives of children, youth, seniors, and others with special needs within the city limits of Alexandria. The Rotary Club of Alexandria provides funds for specific programs and activities that strengthen core programs; provide seed funding for a new program, program elements or initiative; or support capital expenditures. Collaborative projects with other nonprofits are accepted, with a single grant made to the lead organization. Usually, grants for

ordinary operating or maintenance expenses are not considered. Applicants are encouraged to include how last year's gift helped your organization deal with the effects of COVID-19 and how it has helped shape this year's request. Applications should be filed no later than March 5, 2021, and grant decisions will be announced on or about May 1, 2021. Contact the Contributions Committee at alexrotarygrants@gmail.com.

### SEEKING COMMUNITY INPUT

The City of Alexandria Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities will redesign the existing Colasanto Pool, closed since 2010,

at 2700 Mount Vernon Ave. The City has selected and hired a design team led by LSG Landscape Architecture through a procurement process, which concluded at the end of 2020.

The City invites the community to provide input on the project through a virtual meeting on Thursday, March 4 at 7 p.m. Input received at the meeting will be used to direct the project, which will go through an iterative community design process.

For questions, see the project web page or contact Bethany Znidersic, Acting Division Chief, at bethany.znidersic@alexandriava.gov or call 703-746-5492.

### COLLECTING FOR GEORGE FLOYD'S MEMORY

In the wake of the tragic murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the Alexandria Black History Museum put out a call to the local community to record their feelings, thoughts, artwork, photographs, and objects. The Museum sought to document the legacy of the community's response to this tragedy and the wave of peaceful protests and vigils, posters, signs, and sidewalk messages that appeared across the region, to preserve this story for the future. The Museum staff received and collected objects, such as Black Lives Matter masks, pins, signs, artwork and t-shirts.

They also received a large volume of digital photographs capturing vigils, marches, signs, and the empty plinth of the Appomattox statue that was removed from the City center. The collecting initiative is still active and as we reach the anniversary of George Floyd's murder, the Museum encourages the public to leave their comments and images of possible donations to the Museum's collection via the online form available on the website. Visit alexandriava.gov/BlackHistory.

### CITY OF ALEXANDRIA STREET SWEEPING PROGRAM

Each year towards the end of the winter.

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