

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Friends of Guest House Fall Newsletter. As I write this letter, Guest House is welcoming a new cohort of women into our resident family with baskets full of personal items to ease their transition (see page 2) while we celebrate 14 amazing Aftercare graduates (see page 3).

It's been an exciting few months for our organization. During that time, we've said farewell to our longtime Executive Director, Kari Galloway (see page 2) and after an extensive selection process, the Guest House Board of Directors selected me to step into this new role. As you may know, I've been with Guest House for over four years as the Director of Operations. When given the opportunity to become executive director, I didn't hesitate to accept. Simply put, I love the Guest House mission and was happy for this chance to grow professionally while continuing to support this important work.

Over the coming months, Guest House will continue to welcome new residents, assist women as they take the next steps in their transition back to our community, and support alumnae in times of need. I encourage you to join in this journey by subscribing to our digital communications (choose the eNews SignUp under Contact Us on our website), following Guest House on social media (see page 7), and making a donation today (see page 5). Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions about our work via director@friendsofguesthouse.org. As I always say, "We're all family here." - Sonja



CONGRATULATIONS 2022 GRADUATES!



Story on Page 3



GOODBYE KARI

In June we wished Friends of Guest House former Executive Director, Kari Galloway, well in her retirement during several community celebrations. Current Guest House residents, alumni, former and current staff, community partners, supporters, and volunteers were given opportunities to share their memories of Kari's 17+ years at Guest House.

During both our community event at Jack Taylor's Toyota and our more private BBQ at Guest House, attendees were able to come forward and share their thoughts and feelings on this momentous occasion. Kari's empathy, commitment to others, and resolve was continuously highlighted. Stories spanned from outrageously hilarious to touching tales of times Kari had changed lives.

Amidst the tears, hugs, and smiles Kari was wished a very happy retirement!

OUR MISSION

To provide formerly incarcerated women the structure, supervision, support, and assistance they need to move beyond who they were to become who they want to be.



WELCOME BASKETS

This Summer we put out a call for help to supply Welcome Baskets to women starting their journey at Guest House and our supporters responded meeting our goal of 30 baskets!

When someone arrives at Guest House we do our best to provide initial essentials like: shampoo/ conditioner, soap, towels, and lotion from the donations we receive.

With your support, we've begun distributing a Welcome Basket to each new resident. Not only do we want to make sure women have all that they need, but we'd also like to make sure that the welcome is as warm and exciting as possible.

CONGRATULATIONS 2022 GRADUATES!

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On October 1, 2022, we celebrated **14 alumnae** at our annual aftercare graduation. These alumnae had completed both the Guest House residential and aftercare programs and were honored with certificates, hand-made prayer blankets from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, golden stoles, and pearl earrings from the Kiwanis Club of Alexandria and The Nugget.

A pair of pearl earrings is given annually to each Guest House graduate by the Kiwanis Club of Alexandria and Mary Ehlers, who owns The Nugget. “Pearls represent wisdom,” said Mary. “And you wouldn’t be here graduating from Guest House unless you made a lot of wise choices the past year.” Mary also described how a pearl is made—an irritant entering an oyster, mussel or clam. “And those irritants all turned into something beautiful, just like you,” said Mary.

Heather Britt, one of this year’s graduates, spoke on behalf of the 2022 class. She reflected on her first days at Guest House saying “As we come into Guest House one of the first statements that we read on a sign out front reads ‘**Do not let your past define you.**’ It takes a lot of strength and courage to put your past behind you and stand up and say I will not let my past define me, I deserve to focus on my future.”

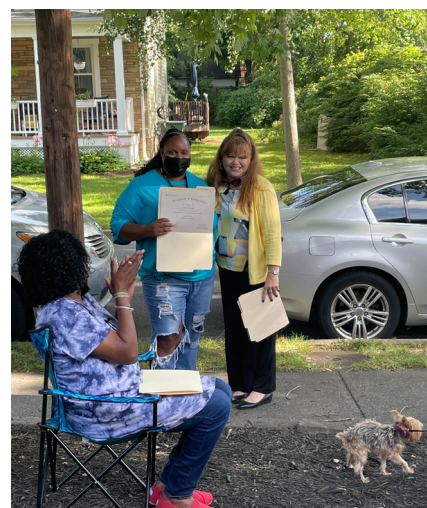
Heather’s sentiments echo the mission of Guest House and the belief in second chances.

Additionally, Deborah Adams, a 2014 Guest House alumna, was recognized for her immense accomplishments, including learning and teaching braille, becoming an ordained minister, gaining peer support specialist certification, and being employed with the Department of Corrections.

The ceremony was closed by Guest House Executive Director Sonja Allen, reciting and reflecting on the poem, **Guest House** by Rumi, the basis behind Friends of Guest House’s name. The poem is a reminder to not shy away from emotions and thoughts that pass through you, but to “meet them with courage, warmth, and respect.” Sonja reminded the residents to meet obstacles with the courage spoken about in this poem. The ceremony was closed with Sonja reminding the graduates, how loved, courageous, and deserving they are of their accomplishments, stating that “you are all family here.”

Congratulations to the Class of 2022, your dedication, determination, and optimism shine bright and we are so proud of you!





PEER SUPPORT AT GUEST HOUSE: USING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES TO HELP OTHERS

Peer Support Specialists are certified professionals who have broad experiences with either mental illness and/or substance use disorders. These trained individuals then provide support to others who can benefit from their lived experiences.

Guest House has now welcomed a FULL-TIME Peer Support Specialist to our staff. Peer support specialists offer individual counseling along with group classes, and are integral to connecting clients to necessary community programs. This is one phenomenal step towards our goal of providing comprehensive mental health services!

In addition to welcoming more in-house behavioral health support, we are encouraging our residents to become advocates themselves. This past summer, we conducted a Peer Support certification training program for current residents, aftercare program participants, as well as staff members.

In the coming year, we plan to host more of these trainings to empower all Guest House women.

THE NEED

At Friends of Guest House we provide reentry support that is both comprehensive and tailored to each woman's unique needs.

We do so by focusing on the "five pillars of livability": healthcare, employment, education, housing, and family/community reconnection.

Guest House is the **ONLY** group in Northern Virginia that provides 24/7 reentry support for women and is the largest reentry program in the state.



HEALTHCARE



EMPLOYMENT



EDUCATION



HOUSING



RECONNECTION

WAYS TO GIVE

Invest in the women of Guest House if you want to give second chances, help end systemic cycles of poverty and incarceration, envision a world where your past does not define you.

Your donation directly funds holistic programming with trained staff who motivate and empower our clients.

Large or small, your donations to Friends of Guest House deepen meaningful change in our local communities. Donors, like you, are committed to transformative community change joining our mission and believing that:

Every woman who has been incarcerated deserves the tools, education, and chance to become who they want to be.



DONATE BY MAIL

Return the enclosed remittance envelope with a check



DONATE ONLINE

Use the QR Code to be connected to our online platform, or visit our website at www.friendsofguesthouse.org

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

Monthly donors ensure every client receives the tools, education, and second chance she deserves. Use the QR code and make sure to select "Monthly."



STOCK AND IRA

To make a stock/ IRA Qualified Charitable Distribution gift, notify your broker/ financial advisor of your intention and Guest House via info@friendsofguesthouse.org.



BEQUESTS BY WILL

Many people choose to leave a legacy gift to Friends of Guest House so they can support second chances for women committed to change with the Legacy they leave behind. All it takes is a quick phone call to your lawyer to add Friends of Guest House as a charitable designation in your will. If you include Friends of Guest House in your plans. Our Legal Name: is Friends of Guest House, Inc., and our Federal Tax ID: 51-0201327.

GUEST HOUSE FEATURED IN FORBES



In August 2022, Executive Director, Sonja Allen and two Guest House Aftercare alumnae, Chasidy and McKenzie, were interviewed by Richard Fowler (@richardafolwer) on the needs and experiences of women post-incarceration. The women shared their experiences in reentry, and what they called their "ah-ha" moment when it came to making a change.

McKenzie detailed a clarifying moment watching her daughter crawl for the first time. "[I] watch[ed] her take her first step. And it was all through the glass. That was it for me. I had to figure it out."

Fowler's article highlighted the stories of other incarcerated women, Guest House, and the belief in second chances. As Sonja explained in the article, "**These women are us,**"

To check out the article see this link or find it on our social media platforms. <https://tinyurl.com/bdcjmjfc>

HEARD ART CLASSES

In 2017, Friends of Guest House began a partnership with Heard to provide an artistic component to our programming. And the results have been amazing!

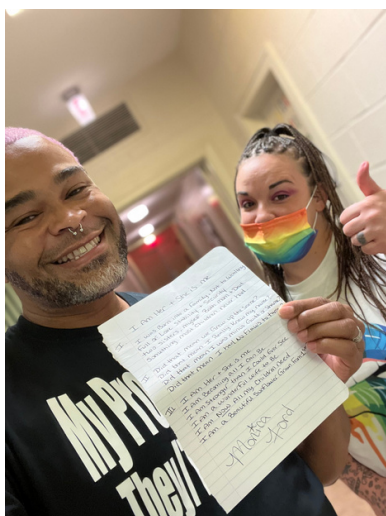
Every week, Monday through Friday 9-5, Guest House Residential clients participate in our Workforce & Life Development (WFLD) Program. There, they take high-immersion courses ranging from job hunting to on-the-job conduct, from healthy relationships to financial management.

But for one hour twice a week, the women get to let loose—in art class.



This September and October, WFLD is offering improv class on Tuesday mornings led by Keely Kirk. Improv offers the women an opportunity to develop listening skills and grow their creativity. Class participants have also gained confidence and report feeling more comfortable speaking to a group of people.

In August, WFLD offered a Spoken Word class led by C. Thomas. Residents. Spoken word poetry is characterized by rhyme, repetition, improvisation, and word play, spoken word poems frequently refer to issues of social justice, politics, race, and community.



We envision a world where
your past does not define
your future.

“What Others Think Of Me”

By: Fran McDaniel

I wear a mask to
Hide my pain
You look at me as if
I have everything to gain

The real me is hidden
Way deep inside
I can't let you see me
You'd probably run and hide

The walls I have built
To keep you out
Protect me from you
Opinions and doubts

The real me is filled
With pain and fear
I can't let you see me
That would mean
You're too near

I have to change my
Mask each day
For fear you will know
Me by something I say

I want you to help me
As I try to reveal
The real me, the one I
Won't any longer
Try to conceal

I'm trusting you with
All my mistakes & flaws
Help me as I deeply
Pursue this cause

Friends & Family Day

On August 6th, Friends of Guest House celebrated our first Friends and Family Day at Luray and Grace Brethren Church. Complete with a bounce-house, live DJ, face-painting, carnival games, and cotton candy, we gathered together for a day of summer fun.

A special thank you to Case Manager, LaTawsha Estell, for making this event possible! Thank you as well to our many volunteers and supporters who make celebrations like these possible their generous donations.

Residents, past and present, enjoyed a sunny day filled with laughs and smiles. Friends and Family Day, is the perfect example of our commitment to our livability pillar of "reconnection."

With respect to female reentry, family/community reconnection is one of the most important factors in successful reentry. Women who are reunited with their families, most notably their children, are less likely to return to prison. Friends of Guest House offers parenting classes so women can start to learn the tools and skills they will need to return to their children's lives. In addition, building a strong, supportive community helps women to succeed post-incarceration.

Residents were able to reconnect with their loved ones, connect more with new friends, and reconnect with themselves in a fun and safe environment!



Want to stay engaged in our work? Want to hear more great stories?
Connect with Friends of Guest House



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@FriendsofGuestHouse



@ReentryAdvocacy



@FriendsofGuestHouse

TAKE TIME TO SMELL THE FLOWERS

By Leah C. - Guest House resident

When I was caught up in active addiction the world around me was going so fast, but I was standing still.

Even though I was standing still, I was here, there, and everywhere except in the moment.

While I was incarcerated and had the blessing to get sober, I got the chance to see every season and what occurs during that time.

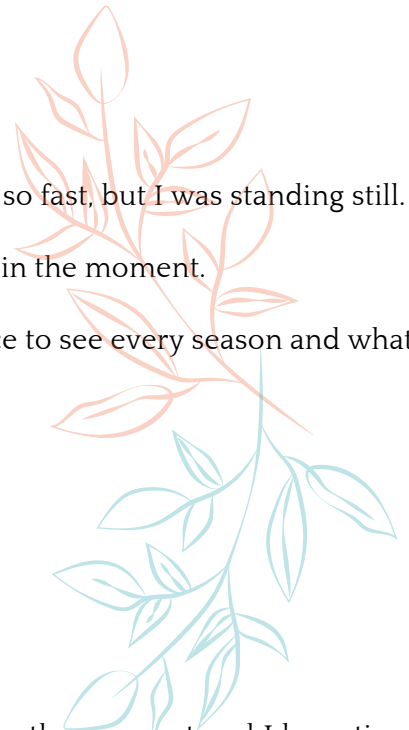
I watched the grass go dormant.

Watched it come alive in the spring.

Watched the leaves change colors.

Watched the tree become full of leaves.

Being sober is quite magical if you think about it because now I'm living in the moment and I have time to smell the flowers.



Friends of
GUEST HOUSE

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