

2020 ANNUAL REPORT





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Letter From the Executive Director

Hi Friends,

It is so hard to believe that another year has passed, and what a year it has been! This time last year, we were able to hug the necks of those we loved, gather together for special occasions, and freely choose our accessories that were not face coverings! Yet, March was coming. Before we look at last March, let's look at last January. January 1, 2020, started with business as usual for Merryman House. We moved about in our "old ways" and served our enduring mission of saving, building and changing the lives of those affected by domestic violence. In my heart, I believed our word of focus for the year was "*connection*" - connection to our mission, connection to each other, connection to our clients, connection to our donors and partners, and connection to the community. I re-affirmed the intentional commitment to "connection" to our team, and we set forth to build our strategy to make that possible. Then March came. Suddenly, the greatest urgency for disconnection descended upon all of us, and Merryman House was not spared. In a matter of hours, our Board and Executive Leadership developed written pandemic response plans, strategized how to offer our services via telehealth, safely operate a 24-hour emergency shelter and crisis hotline, and support our staff and clients with this new, clear, and present danger. March brought

great obstacles, but we brought greater resolve.

"March" is symbolic of what our clients face daily: Danger, disruption of daily living routines, potentially lethal interactions, and chronic disconnection. Their "March" is not COVID-19. It is domestic violence. It is the cycle of violence. It is the potential for death and serious physical injury. According to the National Network to End Domestic Violence, "On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million." For victims, "March" represents difficulty, disruption and danger. That sounds a lot like March 2020 and COVID-19. So, for us, we battled two deadly pandemics - COVID and intimate partner violence. We heard our hotline calls intensify and listened to more severe stories of abuse. We saw rates of homicide rise. We witnessed clients become even more disconnected from resources, and more isolated from safe people and institutions. Their isolation increased, and their access to safety decreased. We had to act, and we had to act fast. Connection was critical.

Connection required creativity, adaptability and commitment. Over the past year, I am grateful to report that we have remained operational. We have moved digital. We have seen very few cases of COVID-19 amongst our staff and clients, and we have been strengthened in our resolve to continue

this work. We have adapted to the restrictions and have not compromised safety. We have been committed to creating meaningful access to those who need us. This has resulted in higher demand for resources, PPE, and responders. Yes, March came, but so did April, and May, and June, and ...*you.*

Yes, you came. You connected. You were creative, adaptable and committed to the mission we serve. You connected to us virtually. You connected to us financially. You connected to us personally. You connected to us generously. You offered food, PPE, prayers, donations, encouragement, and resources of time, talent and treasure. Without even realizing it, our disconnection resulted in powerful connection with you, our enduring partners. So, as we look over the accomplishments of this past year together, I invite you to consider how your connection helped us to save, build and change lives. And, I invite you to consider how you will connect to us this year, as we focus on resiliency to face the days ahead.

As always, we are better together, in "March" and every day we draw breath.

Your Partner in Service,

Mary Foley

Mary E. Foley, PsyD
Executive Director

Board of Directors Executive Committee



Judd Myers
Board Chair

KeeFORCE
Vice President of Support Operations
jmyers@keeforce.com
270.366.0658



Dr. Rheanel Tolar
Board Vice Chair

Premier Primary Care
Doctor, Internal Medicine
rheaneltolar@hotmail.com
270.554.4820



Catherine Fuller
Secretary

Kentucky Legal Aid
Attorney at Law
cfuller@klaid.org
270.450.7312



Sherry Newcomb
Treasurer

L.A. Miller, CPA, PSC
Associate I Senior Staff Accountant
sherry@lamillercpa.com
270.575.3444



Christopher Henderson
Member at Large

Progressive Insurance
Managed Repair Rep
chris_henderson@progressive.com
270.331.2357

Board Members



Dr. Ronald Kelley, MD
Kelley Psychiatric Clinic
Psychiatrist
kpc2@comcast.net



Carolyn Raney
VUE Magazine
Co-Owner/Publisher
craney@vuecommmedia.com



Elizabeth Neelley
WPSD Local 6
Local Sales Manager
eneelley@wpsdlocal6.com



Abbey Shelton
Rose Garden Florist
Owner
abbjones@gmail.com



Stacy Thomas
McCracken County Schools
Community Outreach and Diversity Coordinator
stacy.thomas@mccracken.kyschools.us



Carl Medlin, Jr.
Medlin Construction
Owner
medlinconst@comcast.net



Amanda Chandler
Swift & Staley
Account Executive
a_chandler0131@yahoo.com



Justin Lewis
Compass Counseling
Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist
justinplewis@gmail.com

Thank you to our dedicated Board of Directors! We could not imagine navigating 2020 without your leadership and unwavering support of our mission!

Thank You to Our Essential Staff

In March 2020, as our Board and Executive Leadership strategized and planned how to move our services to telehealth and our processes digital, we knew just one thing: The emergency shelter would remain open. The reality of making sure that happened, though, fell to our rockstar, essential staff.

While most staff were sent to work from home, our Crisis & Essential Services Department and our Operations Department implemented every Healthy at Work guideline, developed processes for COVID-testing and quarantining survivors off-site while keeping them safe, staffed our emergency shelter and area hotels, kept our food services running, and so much more.

Our essential staff operated, and continues to operate, a 24-hour communal living environment in the face of an unknown and invisible threat - all to keep our safe haven open for survivors who need it. If we were telling you this in person, we would ask for a round of applause and a standing ovation!

MHDCC spent more than \$170,000 on hotel costs alone, plus additional costs for PPE and implementation of other Healthy at Work guidelines. The 24/7 crisis hotline was answered every time it rang, and the stories from the other side of the phone became more severe in nature. Isolation is already a common tactic used by abusers, so 2020 made that even easier for those looking to exert power and control over their partners. Fortunately, our staff were able to speak with the more than 600 callers and provide them the resources they needed.

So, THANK YOU to our essential staff! You are literally life-savers!



Pictured Here: Steven Abernathy, Volunteer



Our department was able to stand strong and handle these events because we supported each other. We have learned how to navigate things to the very best of our ability even under less-than-ideal circumstances and still provide great client service.

Christy Anton



Pictured Here: Balinda Hudson, Client Care Center Specialist



Pictured Here: Marsha Millay, Nutrition Program Coordinator

I appreciate everything Merryman House has provided to ensure the staff is protected from the COVID-19 virus. From implementing a quarantine policy to providing the KN95 masks, I appreciate every effort to keep the staff and clients safe and healthy.

Balinda Hudson

Community Response

As an agency, one of the best parts of 2020 was watching our community acknowledge the strain the pandemic was putting on nonprofits and human services, and seeing you step up to meet each need.

From March all the way through the holiday season, our calls for supplies and requests for help were met with emails, phone calls, and Facebook messages, all asking, “When can I drop off what you need?” Each message was a blessing we did not take for granted.



Rainbow International of Paducah came in to deep-clean our emergency shelter consistently.



KeeFORCE moved our entire agency to work from home setups in less than a week, and continues to provide vital support and partnership!



The hospitality and restaurant industries helped us safely place quarantining clients in hotels, donated food as they were able, and answered our phone calls day and night. Munal's Donut Shop donated so often they became our Honorary Donut Sponsor of 2020!



Our funders were flexible and responsive in the face of the unprecedented challenges we all navigated. Thank you specifically to the United Way of Paducah-McCracken County, Kentucky Colonels, The Community Foundation of West Kentucky, the Mary Kay Foundation, and Emergency Solutions Grants-CARES Act (ESG-CV), for providing support and/or COVID-19 response-specific funds!



We can't let a shout-out opportunity pass for our advocates and administrative staff, either. Learning to provide telehealth services, keeping our clients connected, keeping our grants and financial commitments in line- wow! They have really done all that for 10 months and counting. This is Advocate Jennifer Wilson in her home office!

To you, our community—you sent donations, dropped off supplies, volunteered virtually, and sent us surprise donations through our Amazon Wish Lists all year long.

Thank you!

Expanded Services

Marshall County Resiliency Center Opens

On March 21, 2020, the Marshall County Resiliency Center was supposed to welcome the community in for its official grand opening. As we know, March and its restrictions spared no one. Instead of physically welcoming the community, MCRC pivoted to offering telehealth services on March 23.

In August, MCRC was able to physically open its doors for the first time with an Open House & Spirit Week! Since that point, the Center has offered mental health therapy for adults and children, yoga classes, therapeutic art workshops, celebration days for first responders and more.

Follow along with MCRC via its website and Instagram profile!

www.marshallstrong.org
www.instagram.com/mcresiliencycenter



Expanded Services

Staff Position Addition – Survivor Attorney

Survivors of domestic violence are faced with countless barriers, oftentimes including legal questions and cases not easily navigated without professional assistance and substantial financial commitments. For years, Merryman House Advocates have been present in Purchase Region courtrooms as advocates for our survivors. They have referred clients to Kentucky Legal Aid and other trusted partners as necessary to ensure no survivor stands alone!

However, as we saw the need for legal services grow, so did the desire to help meet some of that need ourselves. This year, our funding allowed us the opportunity to hire a Survivor Attorney for the very first time!

Enter Michelle Williams. Michelle brought years of experience as a practicing attorney and her heart for advocacy to the Merryman House, and it was a perfect fit! We asked Michelle a few questions:

What made you say “yes” when this opportunity was presented to you?

How could I not say “yes”? During my time as an Advocate, I became passionate about the mission of Merryman House: to Save, Build, and Change lives. I knew that one day I would have an opportunity to use my legal skills to represent Merryman House clients in the courtroom. When the day finally came, I was ecstatic and emotional. I am honored to be able to provide a voice for clients and encourage them to use their voices at no cost to them.

Do you represent survivors in both civil and criminal cases for clients?

I primarily represent clients in protective order cases (civil), but I also represent clients in family law matters such as divorce, custody, child support, adoption,

and paternity cases. I recently had one client sign a legal representation agreement for assistance in five different family law cases - that would cost a fortune if she hired a private attorney!

Why do you feel the legal services you provide are essential to survivors?

One of the biggest barriers that stands in the way of survivors exiting an abusive relationship is financial resources. Many of the survivors we serve have not been able to use their voices for a long time without negative consequences. I am able to provide free legal representation to clients. I encourage them to use their voice, and I am able to be their voice when they are not able. As an Advocate, I was not able to represent clients during hearings. I had to watch as clients were too afraid to tell a judge in front of their abuser what they had just shared with me. I now have the privilege of sitting beside them and walking them through that process.

In 2020, Michelle provided 1,355 services to survivors!

Criminal/Civil Justice System Assistance- **309**

Emotional Support or Safety- **223**

Info/Referral- **460**

Personal Advocacy/Accompaniment- **363**



6th Annual Paducky Derby



In late 2019, our Board of Directors and staff raised our duck adoption goal for 2020's race to 10,000 adoptions! Then, a month before our April race, the nation shut down and our largest fundraiser of the year was postponed indefinitely. Once the new date was set for October, we got to work on how to race rubber ducks ... virtually. Then, our Board and staff had to work to solicit more duck adoptions than we had ever had ... virtually.

We were the luckiest ducks of all! See, for us, our community stepped up and joined in the uplifting, silly fun of the PaDucky Derby! At 5 p.m. the afternoon before Race Day, we adopted out the 10,000th duck entry, meeting this goal for the first time in PaDucky Derby history.

On Race Day, our community showed up for us again. Paducah Power custom-built us a remote-controlled "Duck Drop Box" and made sure our ducks landed dramatically (and safely)

into Bob Noble Park's Montgomery Lake. The Paducah Fire Department gave the ducks the current they needed to get racing. Neal Bradley emceed our virtual stream of the race, and added "Voice of the PaDucky Derby" to his highly acclaimed resume. This year's virtual stream was coordinated by volunteer Caleb Buford.

The three fastest ducks won their adoptive parents these cash prizes:

\$2,500 Jennifer Jenks

\$1,000 Lora Croley

\$500 Tim Henschel

The race, which is hosted in partnership with GAME Fundraising, yielded more than \$50,000 for MHDCC and survivors of domestic violence!

We want to extend our deepest thanks and appreciation to everyone who adopted, and to the following sponsors and partners:

Taylor Motors

Strawberry Hills Pharmacy

**Kentucky Farm Bureau -
Ricky Greenwell**

Audiology and Hearing Center

Baptist Health

David Spicer Jewelers

George Bray

**IMAC Regeneration Center
of Paducah**

HB & Co

Atlas Equipment Services

Brightmore Home Care

Williams, Williams & Lentz

BFW Engineering & Testing

Marcum Engineering

Denton Law Firm

Riddle Insurance

Peel & Holland

Universal Compressor Solutions

Paducah Barge

L.A. Miller & Associates

Craig Johnson Construction

West Kentucky Rural Electric

Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 184

Mattress Market

**Dannenmueller Blinds,
Shutters, Closets**

Socially Present

REB Architects, PLLC

American Quilter's Society

WKYQ

Electric 96.9

WPSD Local 6

Running Boards Marketing Paducah

VUE Magazine

Paducah Power

Paducah Fire Department

AAA Stow-A-Way Storage

The 2021 race will take place in October during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Follow our Facebook page for updates: www.facebook.com/PaDuckyDerby.



Common Ground Growth

Common Ground is MHDCC's in-house training and economic empowerment program that allows clients to be employed and placed at Merryman House in part-time, temporary positions. Common Ground employees benefit from competitive wages and a safe work environment while acquiring skills that will help them become and remain successfully employed in the job force after their Common Ground placements end.

The program is funded locally by the United Way of Paducah-McCracken County and the Ray & Kay Eckstein Charitable Trust, and through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). In 2020, nine survivors were offered and accepted Common Ground positions and worked more than 1,600 cumulative hours!



Common Ground staff are placed within the Merryman House garden (see pages 16-17), Nutrition Services, Facilities & Maintenance, and may also be placed at a partner agency work site. A Common Ground participant recently completed her program placement and was offered permanent employment with the partner agency with whom she was placed! She gave us permission to use her words about Common Ground and her journey:

*"I know I have grown and regained so much confidence in myself. I feel blessed, I truly do. This opportunity will help me to build the life I always knew I could achieve. In life, we sometimes put our faith in the wrong people and that can destroy so much of ourselves. Thank God for the Merryman House for you gave me refuge in my hour of need. **The Merryman House saved my life.** My time there had its trying moments. People gathered and did what they could to help. I would like to say thank you and to many. It was not me nor one person alone that helped me through one of the worst times of my life. It takes a village and the village was there for me. I had NO life prior to Merryman House; I was merely breathing. Thank you isn't enough, it doesn't say what I feel. I feel so much gratitude. You all gave me an opportunity to be me and saw me for me.*

*[Employer] is an amazing teacher. She always made sure I was comfortable in my position. Even when I was doubting my own abilities, she was ALWAYS there cheering me on. **She believed in me until I could believe in myself.** That just doesn't come along every day, sometimes not at all. I feel so fortunate. In my life I made choices and obviously not the best ones and I hadn't forgiven myself. I was abusing me as much as he was. I didn't think I deserved any better. I thought I deserved everything he did to me. I struggled with addiction and sent my children to live with their dad. Even though I completed treatment and turned my life around I still punished myself for failing as a mother. Almost 7 years clean and I gave myself no credit. I apologize for going on and on but as I said, "thank you" doesn't seem enough.*

*I hope someday I am able to repay all I have been given. Thank you all so very much for seeing me. It is such a liberating feeling. **There is a fire within me now to grow, accomplish, and become.** None of this would be possible without you all. Thank you for believing in me. I will work long and hard to make you all proud."*

Common Ground Growth Garden

It is easy to see a fresh bouquet of flowers or to eat a fresh summer vegetable and not think about the work and care it took for those items to get to your table and plate. However, it is in the work, and in the daily commitment, and in loving care, that we can find some of life’s most beautiful lessons.

The Merryman House garden is unique, too, in that we have just one, permanent staff person leading the work, Farm Manager Dr. Jim Gould.

The rest of the hours put in are by Common Ground employees and very, very dedicated volunteers. When we say dedicated, we are referencing the 900 hours of volunteer hours logged in 2020! Thank you in particular to Leigh Smith and Joyce Casper of the El Arbol Garden Club.

The work put in by all not only goes into growing a garden, but also into the soil of survivors’ lives helping them to yield fruit for years to come.

“It can be metaphorical,” says Director of Operations Amy Abernathy. “The planting, the weeding, the cultivating. It can be the same with our domestic violence victims. They have to learn how to get their soil right, get their weeds out and give themselves what they need to grow.”



“ The planting, the weeding, the cultivating. It can be the same with our domestic violence victims. They have to learn how to get their soil right, get their weeds out and give themselves what they need to grow.”

In 2020, the garden produced:



Additionally, the garden team cultivated local buyers to sell Merryman House Garden products! Partners include **Midtown Market, Artisan Kitchen, Flower + Furbish, Seeds ‘n Sow,** and **Rose Garden Florist.**

More thank yous go out to all who purchased from our inaugural CSA (community supported agriculture), and to the partners who donated starter plants and seeds! We cannot wait to get started in 2021!



Housing & Stabilization Successes

Finding safe, stable housing for survivors can be a road filled with barriers in a normal year. Roadblocks can look like funding restrictions on utility payments, lack of funding for furniture and basic household items, difficulty finding landlords who will accept third party rental assistance and will rent to us and allow us to sublease to clients, difficulty finding landlords who will accept Section 8 rental assistance, and more.

“Despite normal barriers and all the new ones that came with COVID-19, I am proud of my Housing team’s work in 2020- we moved 10 survivors/survivor families into new housing and were able to keep 40 survivors/survivor families on our housing assistance programs!” says Director of Housing & Stabilization Stephanie Hook.

Additionally, MHDCC received a new grant from HOME TBRA (Tenant-Based Rental Assistance) of more than \$160,000! This funding has allowed the agency to offer financial assistance to more survivors of domestic violence to cover housing costs such as rent, utilities and deposits. TBRA participants also receive ongoing case management to ensure they are able to successfully sustain their housing at the time that TBRA assistance ends.

If you know of a landlord or rental entity who would be willing to work with MHDCC to safely and stably house survivors, please contact Stephanie! Her contact information is on page 23.

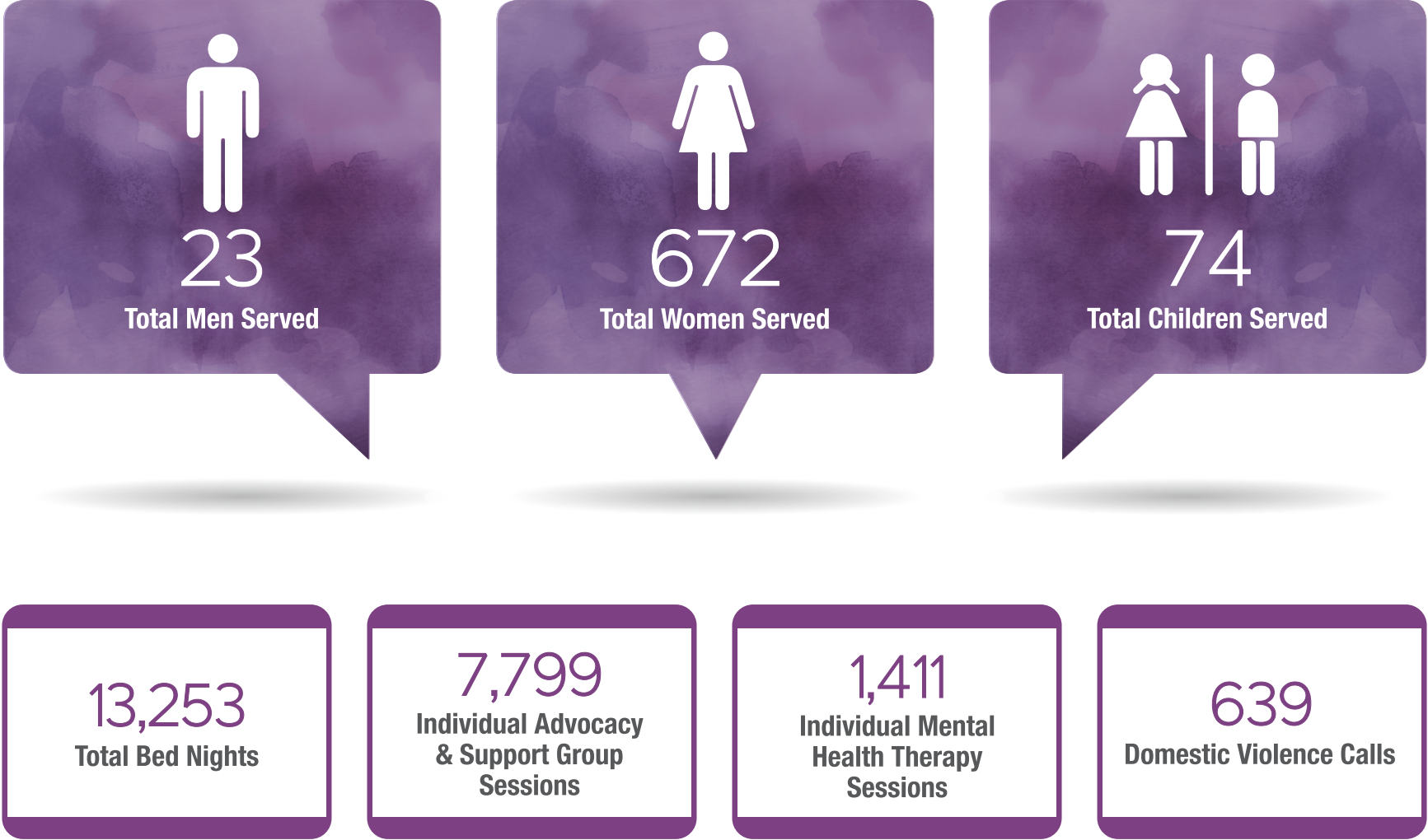
Thank you to all of our donors who have contributed to our Housing clients! Shown on the right is the Ricketts family, who donated new supplies to create “Welcome Home Buckets” for our clients moving into new housing!

Number of Clients Newly Housed in 2020 through our Housing Dept- 10

Number of Clients in our Housing Programs Total for 2020- 40



Lives Touched





Financial Sustainability

We work to instill in our staff the importance of stability and consistency. By simply showing up for a survivor, day after day, and week after week, we are building trust and modeling what healthy relationships can look like. From the service level to our administrative team, it is our goal to continue to be that safe, stable and consistent support for survivors for years and decades to come. We want to make our mission sustainable.

If you're reading this, you have likely already taken the first step toward helping us do so by giving of your time or money. **Thank you!** We ask that you continue your commitment by pledging to give on an annual basis, which allows our agency to budget and financial plan in a more responsible way each year.

By giving at least \$100 over the course of one year, you meet the threshold to be a member of the Merryman Giving Society! The Society has five pre-set giving levels, shown on the right. We ask members to pledge to give at their desired amount on an annual basis. Additionally, we invite your gifts to be broken down however it is easiest for you - monthly, quarterly or annually.

To enroll, please contact Dr. Mary Foley or Kayla Myers! Their contact information is listed on page 23.



Enroll Today Merryman Giving Society Levels

LEVEL

100+

Partners in Courage

LEVEL

250+

Partners in Compassion

LEVEL

500+

Partners in Advocacy

LEVEL

1000+

Partners in Empowerment

LEVEL

5000+

Partners in Transformation



In life, we sometimes put our faith in the wrong people and that can destroy so much of ourselves. Thank God for the Merryman House for you gave me refuge in my hour of need. The Merryman House saved my life. Paying it forward is my responsibility now.

—MERRYMAN HOUSE CLIENT

Get in Touch

Leadership Team

Dr. Mary E. Foley
Executive Director

maryf@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8056

Dr. Brooke Jacobs
Staff Psychologist

brooke@merrymanhouse.org
270.538.9834

Colette Buford
Director of Finance

colette@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8057

Faith Rutland
Director of Crisis & Essential Services

faitho@merrymanhouse.org
270.538.9517

Kayla Myers
Director of Community
Engagement

kaylam@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8071

Maressa Young-White
Director of
Advocacy & Empowerment

maressa@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8070

Amy Abernathy
Director of Operations

amy@merrymanhouse.org
270.442.3712

Stephanie Hook
Director of Housing & Stabilization

stephanie@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8063

Brianna Weitlauf
Director of Grants & Compliance

brianna@merrymanhouse.org
270.448.8053

24/7 Crisis Hotline

800.585.2686 / 270.443.6001

