

THE GAZETTE

WOMEN FIND HOME AT "GUEST HOUSE"

By Marlene Miller

Dec. 16, 1974 ... "Betty McConkey of Alexandria, a parolee herself, has decided to try and offer an alternative to these women paroled from prison. She has opened a home for delinquent women, known as 'The Guest House,' on Commonwealth Avenue in Alexandria.

"I spent 18 months in confinement myself and I know what they're going through when they get out," Miss McConkey told the Gazette. "My people stood behind me, but so many women have no one to turn to.

"I have a real concern to help those who have been in prison. So many of them are repeaters because no one cared."

"Miss McConkey cared enough to go out on her own and rent a large house so she could take in up to seven recently released women convicts. **Since she opened the house in September ...**"



1974 • 2014

Friends of Guest House Celebrates 40 Years

The year 2014 marks the 40th anniversary of Friends of Guest House: a labor of love and community spirit that began in 1974, when Betty McConkey, a parolee, was released, returned to Alexandria, saw the insufficiency of services for women like her and decided to do something about it.

Over the years, Guest House has grown in budget, number of women served, program scope and reputation. We offer three tiers of service—Residential, Aftercare and Outreach—that “provide non-violent female ex-offenders the structure, supervision, support and assistance they need to become self-sufficient and responsible members of the community” (our mission statement). Guest House provides that help *comprehensively* (including a 24/7 residential component) and *through a gendered lens*—and is the only such program in Northern Virginia. We now serve about 150 women a year, also benefiting their children. Our track record shows that the Guest House program works:

- The program reduces crime. Nationally, **70%** of ex-offenders who receive no re-entry support re-offend within two years; in contrast, just **7%** of Guest House graduates re-offend.
- A child with an incarcerated parent is five to six times more likely than other children to spend time in prison at some point. Helping mothers today, Guest House helps prevent the “creation” of the next generation of offenders: their children.
- Guest House saves taxpayer dollars. For one person for one year, the Guest House program costs **\$12,500** as opposed to **more than \$26,000** for incarceration in Virginia. Guest House is a **one-time cost**, because 93% of our graduates never re-offend. Incarceration is usually a **recurring cost**, with repeat multiyear sentences adding up to many millions of dollars if ex-offenders receive no re-entry assistance and the cycle of crime continues.

“I want to commend you and your staff on the 40th anniversary of the Friends of Guest House! Guest House is an important partner with the Department of Corrections as we seek to increase public safety by transforming lives. The services offered to women at Guest House in areas of housing, case management, mental health, substance abuse and employment are critical to the reentry success of former offenders.” —Harold W. Clarke, Director, Virginia Department of Corrections

“Guest House is amazing. Thank you for all you do for our community.” —Allison Silberberg, Vice Mayor, Alexandria

Meet our clients! On the back are just some of the 2,000 women Guest House has been privileged to serve since 1974.

1974

Friends of Guest House is founded. “The” house at One East Luray Ave. is rented; residential, other services begin. Incorporated, Alexandria, 1975.

1981

With help from the City of Alexandria and the Old Presbyterian Meeting House, **Guest House purchases the house** at One East Luray Ave.

2004

The Guest House completes a **dramatic renovation**, thanks to \$300,000 in donated labor, materials, furnishings and design services.

2005

The **Aftercare Program** begins, continuing intensive services to women for six to nine months after they graduate from Residential.

2007

The **Outreach Program** begins. This non-residential program serves women transitioning directly from incarceration back to the community.

2008

Launch of the **Speakers Bureau**. Guest House alumnae give talks, share their stories to help the community understand re-entry and ex-offender issues.

2012

Expanded assistance to justice-involved women. Not incarcerated themselves, they have family or other involvement.

2013

Residential Program nearly doubles, now serving up to 17 women at a time (previously, 10). Outside residential space is contracted.

2014

As Residential graduates increase, Aftercare also expands. **The one-year Residential-to-Aftercare continuum grows by 60%.**

40 years

2,000 women served. And our graduates succeed! Their re-offense rate is just **7%** vs. the **70%** average without re-entry help.

(November 2014)

"They loved me when I couldn't love myself. They gave me my life back, when nobody else would give me anything."



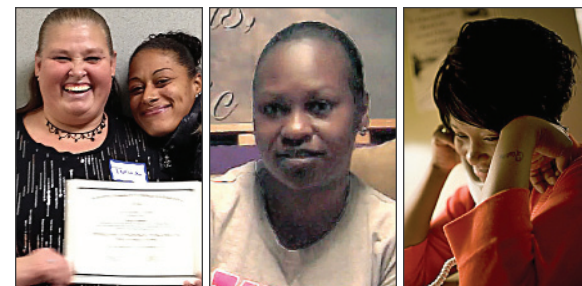
"Guest House helps you dig deep and look at yourself. Without their compassion, without the teachers, without the love that gives us hope, there is no way that anyone who has lived the life that we have lived can grow."



"When I came to Friends of Guest House, I couldn't read or write, never had a job in my life and had been a heroin addict for 27 years. Today I'm general manager of [a pet daycare]. And I owe it all to Guest House. This is a safe place."



"It takes time to get back to the people we were. What we've done and what we've gone through are not who we really are."



"This is more than just a house, this is a sanctuary. My life has changed, I am living proof of what the miracle of recovery can be."



"Guest House is a wonderful place. I feel it has given me the opportunity to go further in my future. It's opened the door for me to get the help I need as far as jobs, as far as housing. It's just a very good program."



"The help that Guest House provides is priceless because it gives women the foundation upon which they can start rebuilding their lives. Guest House has given me an opportunity to change my life."



"I have a real concern to help those who have been in prison. So many of them are repeaters because no one cared."
—Betty McConkey, Guest House founder

