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### A letter to Director Kari Galloway Says It All...

Dear Kari Galloway,  
I am so sorry that I have not written sooner. First of all, I would like to say how much of a pleasure it was to attend graduation this past weekend. It was truly inspiring to witness other people's success stories. I just wanted to let you know how grateful I am to be a part of the Guest House family. For the first time in twenty years I have hope in my life that I will become a contributing member of society and a mother to my nine year old son. As you know, I have been to prison several times and to jail countless times. Each time I was released I didn't know what to do with myself so I immediately went back to using drugs and breaking the law. Coming to the Guest House enabled me to be super-

vised in a structured environment and taught me the skills I needed to go out and become a part of the workforce again. It wasn't easy at times but I eventually felt pride in my accomplishments and my determination to stay sober. I now want to do more with my life. Because of my criminal record I feel that I would be stuck working a dead end job, so I have enrolled back into college starting August 24th so I can make a better life for myself and my son. Because of my undying gratitude to the Guest House I just want you to know if I can ever be of any service to please know I will do whatever is asked of me. It is the least I can do for giving me my life back. Please take care and I hope to talk to you soon.  
Jennifer Shelton

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# The Guest Register

A newsletter of The Friends of Guest House, Alexandria, Virginia

Fall, 2009



Torrey Ellis rides Pierre at NVTRP

her destructive ways. Torrey knew that her parents loved her even though they didn't find the words to tell her. She never blamed her family for her behavior but she didn't understand how seriously dangerous her behavior had become.

Torrey made several bad decisions and landed in prison. Her parents both dead, her family unable to help, she knew that when she left prison she would be doing it alone. Torrey didn't start her journey with a positive attitude, she hated the people around her and yelled at them that her parents were gone and no one could boss her around. She soon realized that her attitude was keeping her from moving beyond the world she had created for herself and decided to change.

Torrey started taking classes that were offered in prison and received numerous certificates to include Guiding Lights as a Big Sister, Healthy Relationships, and Women in Prison: Your Way Out to Stay Out, Electricity, Plumbing and Building Maintenance, Laundry, Linen and Tailor Services and Nonviolent Alternatives to Violence Project. Torrey earned a total of 60 certificates while in prison. When she was released from prison she truly was a different person with a different outlook on life. Torrey moved into Guest House immediately upon release from prison and stayed at Guest House for four months. Torrey credits the people and experience for helping her to become the woman she is today. She believes the second chance Guest House provided her with and the way the people believed in her made a huge difference in her life. Torrey now works two jobs, is going to school, owns her own car and lives in a nice apartment. She loves making good decisions for herself and trying things that she missed out on during her seventeen years of incarceration.

Two of Torrey's wishes in her new life were to go horseback riding and fishing. With the help of Guest House and The Northern

See TORREY on page 2.

**It is human nature** to look for the good or the bad in every situation in which we find ourselves. We want to know why and how and where and who. It is no coincidence that those are the facts that every reporter looks for, as an incomplete story is written without them. When we find something so positive or so negative we ask how that happened, what made the difference? I found myself asking that when I spoke with Torrey at Guest House last week. Her story is long and involved and full of regrets and bad decisions but in the end it is a story of hope and resilience.

Torrey was raised by two loving but extremely quiet, private people. She was always a shy child, afraid of making mistakes and wanting to fit in with her peers. Unfortunately the people most accepting of Torrey were not the kind of people who nurtured positive feelings but ones who introduced her to negative ways of feeling empowered. She started drinking as a teenager in eighth grade, smoking pot and getting what she wanted with intimidation and anger. She was on the path of self destruction. Torrey had trouble in school and her parents didn't know how to help her or what to do to change

### Horse Therapy

Horse therapy is a relatively new but effective method for teaching teamwork, communication, and problem solving. Horse therapy utilizes horse handling techniques along with riding to help the rider reflect on their unconscious way of relating to others. Riders often face down fears and increase their confidence and self-esteem in this natural setting. Horse-assisted therapy provides a safe context for addressing emotional blocks and developing new ways of relating in social settings. As issues arise the riders have an opportunity to work toward the understanding and healing of many issues. Riders find the experience highly social, challenging, and fun, yet therapeutically powerful and often life-changing. The bond formed between horses and riders-even those unaccustomed to or even afraid of horses-is nothing short of transformative.

TORREY from page 1.

Virginia Therapeutic Riding Center she was able to fulfill one of those wishes. In late July with a grant from Booz-Allen, Torrey and three other women from Guest House spent an unforgettable day at the riding center. They learned the basics of horse psychology from Bree Bornhorst and watched a horse leading exhibition by Maryrose Bornhorst. The women learned to lead the horses and the basics of tacking a horse. And then the moment they had all been waiting for, the riding. The smiles on the women's faces told the story. They connected with the horses and felt a sense of compassion and freedom that is difficult to explain. Torrey said that she wanted to ride fast and jump over the fence. She said that she thinks about her horse Pierre often and a smile comes over her face as she remembers the thrill of the ride. She wants to thank all the people at NVTRP for making the day happen. The women untacked the horses and brushed them and gave them a carrot treat and then enjoyed a picnic lunch with staff and volunteers. It was truly a perfect day.

Maybe we'll go fishing next!

### Going to Court Isn't Easy But You Can Make It Easier!

Have you ever gone to court for any reason? I suspect all of us have at some time whether with/for someone else or for ourselves. Going to court even for a small reason can be an intimidating experience. Just think how it would be if you had been incarcerated and had appeared there for reasons too scary to think about! Well, some residents have to go back to court, and they are not going to be incarcerated this time, but it's still an experience fraught with lots of emotion.

We think we have found a solution to help alleviate some of that emotional trauma. And you can help. Is there anyone out there who would be willing to go along with residents or Aftercare women to court? It doesn't happen very often, but when it does a friendly face would surely be welcome. There is really nothing to do except give your time and moral support to get someone through a trying experience. Also, sometimes our women must go to the courthouse to do research on their cases, or to get information. They could use your help to do that too.

If you can help, please call Guest House at 703-549-8072 and ask for Audrey for more information or to volunteer.

Thank you in advance for your caring spirit and helpful hands.



Guest House alumna Terry Garrett and Governor Kaine during the legislative session in Richmond 2008.

**This year Guest House received a \$5000 grant** from the Social Justice Fund of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington (UUCA) to support the growing advocacy work of our Speakers Bureau.

The Speakers Bureau primarily is an educational opportunity to share about our clients' lives and the work of Guest House. It is important in terms of advocacy work to address prison reform and re-entry issues and is a great tool for helping educate young people about the perils and pitfalls of substance abuse, entering a life on the streets and the criminal justice system.

It is also a powerful healing mechanism for the women themselves to know that sharing some of their personal experiences is changing lives and potentially, especially with legislative advocacy, helping change the system. The women receive public speaking coaching.

We are unaware of any other program like our Speakers Bureau, and we would like to become a role model for other groups that seek to make changes in the criminal justice system and in our communities.

We will report more in the next issue of the newsletter, but if you would like more information on this part of the Guest House program, either to volunteer or to have us come speak, please contact Kari Galloway at [director@friendsofguesthouse.org](mailto:director@friendsofguesthouse.org).

### Additionally at Guest House

**Thank you to Terri** at bone sigh arts for her abundant generosity in donating gorgeous art for the house and the women in our programs! [www.bonesigharts.com](http://www.bonesigharts.com)

**Watch for our updated website**...should be online by the holidays...[www.friendsofguesthouse.org](http://www.friendsofguesthouse.org)

**Beading Frenzy**- Guest House alumni create unbelievable pieces of art...that you can wear! Story in our next issue (and where you might buy some for your holiday giving!).

**In our year-end issue a special THANK YOU** to all of you who give so generously to make Guest House a truly great place to live and work!



Aftercare graduates with staff Emma Waller and Kari Galloway in July ceremony

### Note from the Deputy Director

On Saturday, July 18, Friends of Guest House honored the graduates of its Aftercare Program in the Chapel of the Alfred Street Baptist Church. Ten beaming women lined up to receive the certificates signifying successful completion of the Guest House program – truly a step in the right direction. “Congratulations Graduates” was the theme as the ex-offenders, many of whom had never experienced a commencement ceremony, paid tribute to the improvement Guest House made in their lives.

Guest House Board Member Dick Schwartz, elated with Guest House's growth, initiated events by lauding staff for their commitment to providing a safe haven for program participants. Moments of the ceremony were emotionally charged; current GH resident Lorri Carter's performance of Michael Jackson's "Will You Be There" prompted one graduate to remark on this as being the "best day of my life." The women spoke of the transformation that occurred during their time at Guest House, whose curriculum acts to assist females recently released from confinement with a strong desire to break the cycle of incarceration.

In his keynote speech, the *Honorable Darrell E. Graham* (EEOC) encouraged the graduates to remember this transformation through their commitment to positive change and challenged them to move forward in LIFE: Live It, Improve It, Face It and Embrace It. Participants and attendants of the ceremony included Guest House Executive Director Kari Galloway, Deputy Director Emma Waller, Beverly Hills Community United Methodist Pastor Sarah Mellon, attorney Marina Schneller, Virginia Cares' James "Beaver" Green, Probation and Parole Officer Jennifer Male, KI Services' Yvonne Williams and several members of the Alexandria Kiwanis Club (longtime Guest House supporters). Many Guest House staff, volunteers, current residents and Aftercare, alumni and family members were present as well. Following a Guest House graduation tradition, Kiwanian and owner of Nugget Jewelry, Mary Ehler, closed the ceremony as she has for the last 4 years with a presentation to the women of each their own handmade pair of pearl earrings.

A reception followed the graduation with more than 100 community supporters and volunteers in attendance.

Emma Waller  
Deputy Director

### Try Volunteering!

I know you are saying to yourself, I have tried it, I do it. Why is she asking me to try it?

What I am asking you to try is a kind of volunteering that is really difficult, really can break your heart and most of all really give you the most rewarding experience of your life.

Volunteering at Guest House is neither easy nor a cinch to do. It takes time, effort and a "stick to it" attitude that can reap countless rewards-for you and the residents of Guest House.

Can you show people how to write resumes, look for a job, dress for success, learn how to interact in business and social life, eat healthy, change their attitude from negative to positive, take someone on a field trip? Of course you can. This is stuff of everyday life for many people. But if you have had an abusive background, been neglected most of your life, no chance for education, and have been incarcerated then this is not the stuff of everyday life. And at Guest House this is what we are trying to help people learn so they can realize their dreams of being productive members of society.

If you love a challenge, want flexible hours and a fulfilled feeling at the end of the day call me any time - Audrey at Guest House at 703-549-8072.



Lorri Carter singing at the Aftercare Graduation ceremony in July

On September 5, 2009, Director Kari Galloway and several residents from Guest House had the unique opportunity to watch one of their own perform at the Kennedy Center on the Millennium Stage. "From Prison to the Stage" was a collection of 6 one act plays written by current and former prisoners. The evening's events were organized and hosted by Safe Streets Arts Foundation. Lorri Carter (a current Aftercare participant) sang in the production of "I Am

a Woman on Death Row" written by Kathleen O'Shea. Lorri was introduced to the opportunity by Marga Fripp, Director of Empowered Women International. Lorri had not performed on stage for several years and considers singing at the Kennedy Center in such a moving play a true privilege. Lorri has been singing gospel and jazz music her entire life and considers Sarah Vaughn and Jill Scott two of her inspirations. All of the staff, board members and residents of Guest House are so very proud of Lorri and wish her well in her new endeavors.