

## A Blessing Called Sanctuary

Jan Richardson

You hardly knew  
how hungry you were  
to be gathered in,  
to receive the welcome  
that invited you to enter  
entirely—

nothing of you  
found foreign or strange,  
nothing of your life  
that you were asked  
to leave behind  
or to carry in silence  
or in shame.

Mary and Elizabeth.  
Tentative steps  
became settling in,  
leaning into the blessing  
that enfolded you,  
taking your place  
in the circle  
that stunned you  
with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again,  
to move without fear,  
to speak with abandon  
the words you carried  
in your bones,  
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing  
is that it will not leave you alone,  
will not let you linger  
in safety,  
in stasis.

The time will come  
when this blessing  
will ask you to leave,  
not because it has tired of you  
but because it desires for you  
to become the sanctuary  
that you have found—  
to speak your word  
into the world,  
to tell what you have heard  
with your own ears,  
seen with your own eyes,  
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved,  
precious child of God,  
beautiful to behold,  
and you are welcome  
and more than welcome  
here.





# SPRINGTIME IN REVIEW

by Laura Menze, Occupational Therapist



Just before Spring began, we said goodbye to Meridith, as she headed to The Sisters of the Transfiguration Convent for three months of rest, reading and study. For a short time, life continued as normal, and our biggest question was "how do we distribute the many tasks Meridith once held." In late February we hosted

to serve on the Hamilton County Commission for Women and Girls, at a ceremony downtown.

In mid March, schools closed, we learned the phrase "social distancing," and plans quickly disappeared from our calendars. We pivoted to reading every morsel of information that came out from any

news source, trying to decide how to run a family shelter in a pandemic. With advice from many health professionals, we moved all of our families into independent apartments and prepared to reset our shelter into separate units, complete with kitchenettes. Our final shared community dinner included a sending celebration for 2 families, a baby gender reveal and a going-away for a staff member. We rushed to get it all in! By the end of March, we'd discontinued meals together, cancelled future parties, and began writing many protocols that began with the words "COVID-19."



a fabulous 80's prom Mardi Gras party and danced to Prince, indulged in a photo booth and shared pizza and soda with current and former guests. We continued working on advocacy, particularly around changing debt payback structures at the housing authority. Mary Ellen, Jill Stoxen and I began training in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, with hopes of bringing this Montessori religious education to the Lydia's House families. Bethany and Meridith received training as doulas in Bloomington, IN. We were proud to attend the public recognition of one of our tenants, selected







Lydia's House always dances between the worlds of professional organization and intentional community. While we closed common life at the shelter, rather than isolating as individual employees, the Lydia's House core community chose to function as a single family unit or "tribe." We leaned into intentional community and shared nightly meals with one another to maintain our footing and care for each other well. In our small group, we enjoyed dinners of curried lentils of all varieties (not a guest favorite), entertainment provided by Mary Ellen's children, and brief windows when we did not speak the word "coronavirus." April was challenging but we'll remember fondly our gatherings, our Easter Seder, Sunday worship, a backyard banjo session by Honna, and Sam's tiny living room piano recital.

Through the months of April and May, we deeply missed meals shared with guests around our long dining room table. We missed coming into Lydia's House to see guests cooking for one another and socializing. When we filled the new "apartments" we noticed that children did not love Lydia's House, as they usually do. They didn't know they missed ice cream on the front porch, games in the backyard, and elaborate birthday cakes, but we missed these cornerstones for them. We struggled to hold the tension between public health orders and the fact that ministering to the isolated and lonely cannot be replaced by Zoom or phone calls.

In this season of distilling, we remembered more how much we love to celebrate. Throughout spring our celebrations looked different, but they existed. We threw a birthday parade for a 6 year old tenant at



Virginia Coffey Place, celebrated volunteer/ temporary staff member Jill Stoxen at our backyard labyrinth, prayed over a tenant marking the conclusion of her lease, and celebrated Mary Ellen's birthday with a park picnic catered by the soon to be top-chef Honna Brown (aka our volunteer coordinator).

As all of the world shifted, we continued to faithfully serve our mission – offering shelter and affordable housing to female headed households. So far in 2020, we have served 9 families, including 11 children and supported 4 pregnancies, at the Lydia's House shelter. We launched a landlord partnership program with our first landlord partners, Jessica and Nate Cinefro, supporting them to rent to two of our families. We've continued management of Virginia Coffey Place, with all 8 units rented. We supported former guests





## SPRINGTIME IN REVIEW (CONTINUED)

to apply for unemployment and offered significant rent and utility assistance.

Children continue to be central to our mission and we've manifested this priority through supporting home school efforts: e.g. delivering cardboard rocket ships to color, dropping off age appropriate work books, hosting one on one tutoring sessions turned dance parties, and checking in on each family through regular phone calls. We also purchased and distributed many laptops so students can continue to access education.

By the end of April, Meridith returned (early) from sabbatical. With her help and guidance, we decided to follow the lead of our state's mandates, and begin returning to normal-ish. When the dining room was reset this week, we all breathed relief, feeling our footing coming back. Going forward, we plan to eat most meals outdoors with temperature checks and hand sanitizer as our newest table companions. An elaborate rubric of red/yellow/green protocols will determine how open we are depending on conditions in our house and community, but we have a road map to return to a more robust service paradigm.

Just as we have missed community gatherings with our guests, we have deeply felt the absence of our volunteers around our table, in the living room, and in our yards. We learned in this season that just as much as guests are a part of our community, so are our volunteers with their wisdom, graciousness, and deep wells of generosity. Many of our volunteers are older and more vulnerable to the virus, so we look forward to the day when they are able to re-join us.

In the month ahead, we'll also look forward to a small gathering to check in (in person) with former guest families. We'll continue a regular rhythm of attending protests in support of Black Lives, while also praying regularly for a change in policing practices. We'll continue hosting more regular backyard church services with a specific emphasis on the Pentecost season. We'll also celebrate Ben Eilerman turning 40!

As usual, we'll hold injustice and hospitality and heartbreak and beauty all at the same time. In that way, many things about our life, mission and vision have not changed.



# LET THERE BE LIGHT: MYSTICS OF SOLAR PANELS

*In 2019 Lydia's House raised funds to install solar energy panels on Virginia Coffey Place and our office building at our annual Women for Women fundraiser. Maria Krezski gave the following reflection at the event.*

You may want to ask: Isn't it extravagant to fundraise for something that is perhaps not intuitively perceived as a basic necessity like food, beds, diapers or housing?

What is so exciting, mystic and religious about the Solars?

They are not painted glass windows with biblical scenes which lift us up to heaven in the cathedrals. They are not paintings of Madonna with Jesus that guide us to contemplative painting prayers. Rather, they are a technological development, a product of engineers thinking in a very concrete, technical manner... not spiritual artists who translate the mystery of God for the rest of us.

Yet, what the Solars do is more mystical than any of the art we can think of. They translate the everlasting overabundant energy of the Sun, that God in His love for the world initiated by saying "Let there be Light," into the electricity that runs our households, allows us to read at night, cook and heat or cool our houses, and even, most recently, to drive.

The generosity of God has no limits. Five loaves of bread and a two fish fed thousands and there were 12 baskets of leftovers. The load of fish the disciples caught was tearing the nets. It is by this generosity that the disciples recognized Jesus. Similarly, the annual potential of solar energy is estimated between approximately 1,500-50,000 exajoules, and that is just a fraction of the total solar energy absorbed by the earth which is 3,850,000 exajoules. A joule is a basic unit of energy. The exajoule is 10<sup>18</sup> joules, 18 zeros added after 1. The total world energy consumption was estimated at 500 exajoules in 2012. God wishes us to receive this generosity.

Who is more entitled to God's free solar energy than people living in poverty? There is a term called "energy burden" that describes how much income households allocate to pay their electric and gas bills. It is disproportionately higher for the low income families. Middle class families spend 5% of their income on energy, while low income families spend 10%, and people in poverty may spend even as much as 20% income. Once the electricity is disconnected, the eviction will follow. Isn't it a basic human right in our contemporary society to access affordable, clean energy? Shouldn't it be first of all available to those who cannot afford to pay for it?

The spiritual message of the Solars for us is clear. It is our call to arms to live our lives translating the overabundance of God's grace into concrete acts of goodness: to become the vessels, the funnels, the tunnels, the translators, the interpreters, the tools, the instruments, the adapters, the



decoders, the transformers of God's abundant grace. Today, we are asking that through your generosity you allow us to transform solar energy into light at Lydia's House.

But there is another message here. This fundraising for the Solars is the true harbinger of the future. The decision to dedicate tonight's event to raise money for the purchase of Solars is an act of courage, a prophetic voice of Lydia's House pointing to what should and will happen in the future. Imagine all public houses equipped with solar panels, imagine they become cheap and common. This is the new. This is the new wine in new wineskins. Let's drink it. The new is coming. Let's be part of it. The old is screaming and kicking but it is already part of the past and into the dust.

We all know St Francis prayer "Lord make me the instrument of your peace." For the purpose of today we can paraphrase it:

Let there be Light  
Lord make me the Solar of your grace  
Let me find the light inside me  
Let me shine the light around me  
Let there be light in Lydia's House  
Let there be light in the world  
Let there be light

Please be radically generous.



# IN DEFENSE OF BEAUTY

by Honna Brown

*In mid March our volunteer coordinator turned her attention from coordinating volunteers for meals and house duty to beautifying and restoring our houses and yards.*

*In late May, she then pivoted again, turning her attention to attending the protests defending Black Lives in our region. She writes here about the work of creating beauty and returning again and again to tasks that never seem done.*

To say that our lives have changed is an understatement. In this moment, we are wrestling with two socially life altering events: a pandemic and the eruption of the boil of race and inequity that has been festering since the inception of our nation. It's no wonder we find ourselves vacillating up, down, and around with our emotions, reactions, and understanding. What grounds us? This is a question we have all had to find our own answer to as our rugs have been ripped from beneath us.

At Lydia's House, life has looked very different through the pandemic. We've stripped away our communal rhythms, leaving gaping holes that guest interactions used to fill. These changes left us time to ponder our work. What makes Lydia's House a unique place for families to settle for a time and reenter their lives? How can we provide recognition, support, and love?

During the past months, I kept hearing the echo of one of the first statements families exclaim when they enter Lydia's House for the first time, "This is a beautiful house!" As they cross the threshold, their mouths open into a small smile, an expression of surprise that speaks, "This isn't what I expected."

For those who have visited Lydia's House, I wonder what experience you have when you enter the house or the yard? A wonderful thing happens in the body when we find ourselves in a beautiful place. I often notice when I'm in the presence of beauty my body feels lighter. I experience a stronger sense of clarity and smiling seems easier. Needless to say, we hope that coming into our space creates that lightness for guests, volunteers and visitors alike.

With the newfound gaps in my schedule, I had more time to spend in the outdoor spaces of Lydia's House and more energy to maintain and further the beauty of our home. I was also blessed with the help from some friends (Thank you Georgia, Dennis, and Carol!).

Together we touched up paint, repainted chairs and stairs, organized long forgotten spaces, and reclaimed the yards, particularly the prayer labyrinth and edible gardens created at the Jean Donovan House a few years back.

One thing I have learned along the way is that the kind of beauty we strive to cultivate at Lydia's House both inside and out isn't easy; it takes consistency, attention, and a love that propels us to keep returning to the work. Often when you pull up saplings and other weeds, they return at the same height the very next day. However, if you continue to show up and faithfully do the work, you can keep the weeds small. The intended flowers and trees eventually grow taller and stronger, bearing blossoms and fruit of unimaginable joy. From the tart, bumpy honey berries to the fleeting burst of our peony bushes, each one calls us to a different way of appreciation. This quiet and consistent effort to prioritize beauty communicates something to our guests: that this place was specially prepared for them, and that the experience ahead of them matters. Our work to keep our space beautiful reflects our belief in their inherent worthiness and joy and gives witness to the small way of God.

I pray in the months ahead, despite great uncertainty, we continue to find ways to show up and do this work; the weeding, yes, but also the work of imparting our belief to the larger world that those who are forgotten are God's chosen, that they deserve the first fruits. When it seems like the things we don't want keep coming back, and the blossoms and fruits of the future are difficult to imagine, I pray that we find ways to tap into love that helps us move through challenges, and ultimately, bend toward creating changes that make our world a more beautiful place for all people to live.



# INTRODUCING THE ATRIUM

BY MARY ELLEN MITCHELL

My children attend a Catholic Montessori school and it's been a great pleasure of my life to watch them learn about our faith in such a beautiful and gentle setting. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a religious education paradigm created out of Maria Montessori's educational framework, offers children as young as 3 an opportunity to delve into spiritual questions and wonder about God's mysteries. It's long been a hope of Lydia's House to offer a more robust spiritual life to our guests. While basic needs have always been central to our provided services, we know that many families often long for a deeper sense of meaning and belonging. Out of this hope, three of our core community began training to become catechists in the Good Shepherd methodology. We're excited to be creating a small "atrium" for religious education in the Lydia's House living room and hope to start introducing basic parables, practical life activities and the story of the Good Shepherd to Lydia's House kids this fall.

If you have any Catechesis of the Good Shepherd materials you'd like to donate, please contact [Maryellen@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:Maryellen@stlydiashouse.org)



# WELCOME TO THE BOARD!



Jalonda Williams is the newest member of the Lydia's House board.

Ms. Williams currently serves as supervisor of Talbert House's Community Link program,

where she oversees operation of the services provided to Hamilton County Job and family services TANF customers (specifically customers ages 18 to 24) including orientation, testing and making referrals to other community programs and resources.

Prior to working with Talbert House, Jalonda worked 17 years with the Cincinnati Job Corps center as a Residential advisor, Counseling Manager and Programs Director. She also worked as the Social Development Director at the Paul Simon Chicago Job Corps center. Throughout the course of her career she developed, maintained and supported a myriad programs that focused on teaching career readiness, social/ interpersonal development, multicultural awareness and assisting young adults with gaining marketable certifications and advanced trainings.

Jalonda earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Iowa State University. She also maintains certification in First Aid and CPR. Jalonda is a problem solver who absorbs information quickly and provides a rational approach to dealing with difficult situations. She is a dedicated professional with extensive experience in facilitating group and individual sessions to encourage, inspire and move individuals towards goal attainment. Jalonda is passionate about assisting young adults on their journey through adulthood and self-sufficiency.

Welcome Jalonda! We're so pleased to have you supporting Lydia's House in this important way.





# WORK, HEALTHCARE, AND HOPE

by Meridith Owensby

One late summer morning, eight years ago this month, I was waiting at a railroad crossing and pondering my next steps. Plans for Lydia's House were well underway by now, and Mary Ellen and I had identified a house we wanted to purchase. On the radio, Diane Rehm talked on in the background of my thoughts as I waited for that train to pass, weighing my future. I knew I was working hard to make Lydia's House a reality. I knew I would need to devote more hours every week once the house opened. And I knew that reducing my paid hours at my nonprofit job would render me without insurance, a situation that I, even as a healthy 31-year-old, did not want to risk.

It was into these machinations that the possibility of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) entered. After its passage in 2010, it had slowly made its way through rounds of legal challenges. The Supreme Court heard arguments in 2012, and their decision would ultimately determine its potential for change. On the line were features



like the Marketplace, a sliding-scale option for the uninsured to purchase insurance privately.

Back at the railway crossing, Diane suddenly interrupted her radio guest. She announced with unveiled glee that the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of the ACA. I snapped to attention, whooping with joy over the train's whistle and pumping my fist with enthusiasm. Never before had I yelled and danced with victory in my car while listening to NPR, and never has it happened since, but at that moment my future path opened before me. I had a new way to proceed that wouldn't make me choose between my hope and my health.

I've thought back to that moment repeatedly during this pandemic, as widespread unemployment has caused millions of Americans to lose their employer-provided insurance. This loss has come to visit us at our Norwood office, in the form of a neighbor I'll call Ed. Ed is the 57-year-old father of one of our former Lydia's House guests. After I helped his daughter file for unemployment, she asked if I could

do the same for her father, and I agreed to meet with him.

Ed told me his story at our first meeting, where he limped to his chair, grimacing. He had worked at the same manufacturing job for the past ten years when he was laid off in the early days of the Coronavirus shutdown. Not only had Ed struggled to get his unemployment claim through, but he had also failed to obtain Medicaid when he had received in the mail the notice of a phone interview after the date had elapsed.<sup>1</sup>

Ed told me that his leg was numb and had been for several weeks, but he had not gone to the doctor because of his lack of insurance. With his income of zero he was well below the Medicaid threshold, and within a week we were able to get him qualified. He plans to see the local primary care physician as soon as they can fit him in. All I could think while working with Ed through this tedious, unnecessarily complicated process was, "This is a hell of a way to run a system."

Many of us are like Ed: one lost job away from a complete loss of insurance. Insurance is not merely a pleasant job benefit to receive; it is a necessity to maintain access to ever-increasingly expensive basic medical care. There is no sound reason in our current situation to link insurance to work. In fact, as the present moment proves, making coverage dependent on employment



<sup>1</sup>It is not uncommon for our local job and family services provider to belatedly mail notices in this manner. Truthfully, Ed still could've still completed an interview within a 30-day window of his scheduled date but most applicants don't find this detail in the small print of their notification letters and give up the attempt. It took me several years of case management to realize the option to call after the scheduled date was available.

<sup>2</sup>At least it did. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine recently announced a \$210 million dollar cut in Medicaid funding in light of recent economic losses, and it remains to be seen where those cuts will manifest.

<sup>3</sup>For example, our local Children's Hospital does not accept any Marketplace plans, a fact Mary Ellen discovered when her son Sam broke his arm and the search for a local doctor quickly turned into a nightmare.





renders many people vulnerable to every economic fluctuation.

Amid the many, many losses of this pandemic, I urge us to consider how tenuous our connection to insurance is as American citizens. For the very poor, like many of our Lydia's House guests, Medicaid proves decent care.<sup>2</sup> For those above the 135% poverty line who do not have employer-provided insurance, the Marketplace continues to exist on paper, but the reality is that years of cuts and continued legal challenges have rendered it nearly negligible.<sup>3</sup> Obtaining a Marketplace plan is also difficult to do, requiring savvy navigations of systems and multiple phone calls, feats that may not be realistic following a sudden job loss. How many people now are without plausible insurance options today because coverage only works for the very poor and the very wealthy? Why is this the system that we continue to support?

I got to pursue my dream of Lydia's House fearlessly because insurance existed independent of my employment. Today, I worry about all those who find themselves without insurance and with no clear way to obtain or afford it, especially the suddenly, unexpectedly unemployed. This is a hell of a way to run a system. Let's change it for the better.

Resources for Healthcare Reform:  
Physicians for a National Health Program (pnhp.org)  
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (rwjf.org)  
Support Medicare for All bills: HR 1384 (House) and S 1129 (Senate)

## JOIN OUR TEAM

We're hiring a maternal care advocate to live in our main property and support homeless mothers as they prepare for childbirth, labor, and new motherhood. Ideally the maternal advocate would serve as a friend and companion as women learn to care for babies and young children, understand female and child health needs, parenting on a budget, and developing coping skills. The maternal advocate will offer physical and emotional support and guidance for mothers as they work toward stability and grow in wholeness. The term of service is a minimum of one year (with possible extension).



**Qualifications:** Advocates will be challenged with a job that includes direct service, program planning, administration and political activism. Advocates should be strong communicators, self-directed, and have previous experience working with individuals or families in crisis, particularly in a setting that involved parenting or prenatal care. Experience as a live-in staff person with program planning responsibilities is also very helpful. Advocates will be expected to do 20 hours weekly of on-sight duty at the main shelter property, which will include guest accompaniment, meal preparation, house management, transportation, and childcare. Occasional overnights or childbirth accompaniment/ hospital accompaniment is likely.

**Compensation:** Each advocate receives a monthly stipend, all food, housing, and transportation and a generous self-care allowance including counseling and retreats. Maternal Advocates will also receive doula training and certification as part of their one year commitment. Applicant should be passionate about living alongside the poor and living simply. For more information and the application, visit our website at <http://stlydiashouse.org/associate-program/> or send a resume to [maryellen@stlydiashouse.org](mailto:maryellen@stlydiashouse.org).





## DESTINY'S STORY

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My name is Destiny

My life hasn't been the easiest, even as a child. I often feel like my childhood and upbringing set me up for failure. I was the oldest of 6 children. My mother was young and never really stable. I constantly moved around different schools, different states. There were times we were homeless as kids. My dad murdered two people when I was nine years old and that is when my life changed drastically. I always looked out and cared for my siblings. I was the oldest and they needed someone to care for them. My mother seemed to always have a new boyfriend and alcohol, drugs, and violence was the norm in the household.

When I was about 13 the violence got to be too much to handle. I tried to find my way out. I got a job as a waitress and was living in a shelter for teens; it was a very uncomfortable situation. Then I met Mat at a grocery store one day. He was much older than me (in his 20s) and had a job and stable housing. So when he asked me to be with him and move in with him, young and naive me sensed no danger. Soon, it seemed the household and violence I was running away from was recreating itself. There was so much abuse and control and I wanted to leave. At 14 I had no way out and that's when I found out I was pregnant but it didn't seem real. Depression set in so deep I felt like a failure and a zombie each day, just going through the motions.

My baby was a stillborn. I was in deep pain. After the baby died, I tried to pick myself back up and protect myself and my future, but that didn't go well with my partner at all. Soon I was pregnant again. I was so determined to be the best



mother I possibly could. I went to high school in the morning and was working my hardest to graduate early. I worked nights to save up money for the baby.

The further I got into my pregnancy the more I realized I was sharing a house with a monster, and I was

scared like I never had been before. I was scared for my life and for my baby. Fast forward several years. I have two more children and have been sabotaged by Mat in so many ways. I eventually dropped out and got my GED. I was constantly trying to find a way to get out for me and my kids, but he would always do something to prevent it. I enrolled into college and I hid my money. I packed all our things and moved into an apartment a few towns over. I was working at a bank during the day, a gas station at night and going to school. I've never been so tired in my life. I would catch myself falling asleep on my way home and I missed my kids so much. I was barely keeping my head above water. I was alone, in debt and so exhausted. Months passed and my second child, a son age 14 months old, was diagnosed with cancer.

He was suffering and this was a new kind of hurt for me, a new kind of helpless. I quit my night job and took many days off to be with my son. He needed me to be there with him for his procedures like bone marrow biopsies and blood draws. I held my baby in that hospital bed.





He was burning up with a fever from the blood transfusions.

I ended up losing my job and shortly after losing my apartment I had nowhere to go so I moved in with a new boyfriend. Time went by and he decided that this life was too much too soon. It was a lot to take on: going from being a 20 year old single guy to being responsible for several kids, including one with cancer. We broke up. I again had nowhere to go. I found a women's shelter. It was very temporary. Me and my kids shared a room with 12 people. After 30 days they told me I had to leave. During this time I found out I was pregnant again, but we were already broken up and he said he couldn't take all of the responsibility

I am sad to say it but I moved back in with Mat and it was even worse than before. Not only was his alcohol problem out of control but he had a new drug habit.

One day things got extremely bad. He had found out about my pregnancy and about the guy I was seeing previously. He assaulted me in many ways, while my children hid. This was the day I said I'm getting us out. The fear in my kids faces was stuck in my mind and broke my heart. So I left and we lived in our car. I went to nursing school and to work and kept trying to push forward and make a way. No one wanted to rent to me because of my eviction.



I was getting further along in my pregnancy and scared. I sent my oldest daughter to her first day of school from our car and I cried that entire day. I was struggling to make the car a survivable experience with the heat. My oldest was having severe anxiety and I enrolled her in a community based therapy program.

One day in therapy I tested the waters and for the first time I told someone our situation. A few weeks later she told me about Lydia's House and truthfully I was so discouraged. I had bad experiences with shelters. I had tried everything but couldn't get into housing due to my \$8,000 eviction. I had no choice, though, but to give it a chance.

Mary Ellen interviewed me at their office and after just a brief interaction I could sense that this place was run very differently from the other one. She asked me what my story was and what led me to

homelessness. I didn't know where to start. When I thought about the answer I was flooded with emotion but kept my composure. After the interview I went back to my car. I doubted they would accept me.

Later, they called and said I could move in shortly. I couldn't believe it. Something good hadn't happened in so long that I was scared and skeptical but I had to give it a chance for my kids sake. I moved into Lydia House 4th of July weekend. This was actually my first time seeing it. I was surprised. It didn't look like an office or a jail. It looked like, well a home. There were toys and strollers, coats hanging up, a dinner table with high chairs and a big fenced in yard and a swing set. Laura gave me a tour and explained how the house ran and the rules. Finally we got to my room. At this point I was overwhelmed and it seemed everything I had been holding in for months came pouring out in the form of tears. I kept trying to hold them back and they kept coming. I was confused. I hadn't had a bed or a room for so long. The room was beautiful. It was clean and cozy. It had a crib and changing table for my 9 month old, and a desk for my 6 year old to do homework. There was a card on my bed from Honna welcoming me. I couldn't believe how nice these people were. I didn't even comprehend it. I kept asking myself why would they do this? Why would they help me? What do I have to do? God had blessed me beyond measure that summer of 2019. I found hope. I was drowning and they saved me.



*(Continued on next page.)*

*(Destiny's Story continued.)*

A month or so later, I moved down the street to Virginia Coffey Place. Around this time, my 1 year son Michael got pneumonia and was flown by helicopter to Children's ICU. I held him for 20 hours straight trying to keep him from pulling out IVs or tubes. I kept having contractions, as I was a week from my due date. I hadn't slept, showered or eaten. You know who was there for me in this desperate time? Lydia House! Meredith looked like a saint or an angel walking through that ICU door. She brought me a meal and let me talk. She let me cry. She held him so I could shower.

Shortly after I was induced with a high risk pregnancy. Lydia's House staff was there every step of the way to support me emotionally and physically. Helen, the doula, supported me to labor naturally.

Shortly after bringing my baby



home my whole house got the flu including myself. Meredith and Helen picked up the prescription and brought us food. I was still recovering from birth and adjusting to having four kids on top of the entire house having the flu.

I cannot express how much they have done for me. They are the family and friends I never had and the support I desperately needed.

They restored my hope and my faith. They changed my life and my children's future. If you're a part of Lydia House in any way and have ever wondered if you're making a difference, I'm here to say you 100 percent are making drastic changes. I've found peace, I've found God, I have found a home. I've found a future for my kids and it's all thanks to Lydia's House and those who support them. I am forever grateful.

## WHY HOUSE DUTY?

Imagine arriving at a home after you have been homeless. Now you are a guest, with your children, in your own bedroom. Everything is clean and what you need to be fed and safe is available to you. You and others families live together, and slowly you become part of the community that is Lydia's House.

A "Women for Women" fundraising event introduced me to Lydia's House and its role as a shelter and a home for young women, pregnant or with children. Financially supporting this endeavor was an easy decision, as I was so impressed by the young women who founded, direct, and serve on the staff, the community of people who have made Lydia's House possible, and by the story of the young mother whose life changed thanks to her time at Lydia's House. That positive regard made choosing to serve at the house easy too, and my months volunteering at Lydia's House have confirmed my impression that these women have dedication, generous hearts and deep faith. I'm honored to be a part of it, even for a few hours a week.

House Duty is about the house. Out of necessity, organizational systems are built into life in a multi-family home, so my job is simply to make sure everything gets put back clean and where it belongs. Different chores are assigned to different days and Honna (the volunteer coordinator) may have a special task that needs to be done, like resetting a room after a guest family moves out.

I might cross paths with some of the guests, but daytime many are at work and the children are at school or day care. Occasions to interact with Meredith, Mary Ellen, Laura, Honna and Bethany are always a treat. They have awakened my own desire to do more to help with the shortage of low income housing in our city. Spending time in such a special place, even if it's mopping a floor, is an honor and a privilege.

*Carol Carlin began volunteering for Lydia's House as our Wednesday morning House Duty Volunteer in 2019. She has been a consistent and wonderful presence around the house. We are grateful for her cleaning super powers, thoughtful information sharing, homemade COVID-19 mask donation, knitting lessons, welcoming laugh, and gardening care wisdom. Thank you, Carol! We look forward to working with you for many years to come.*





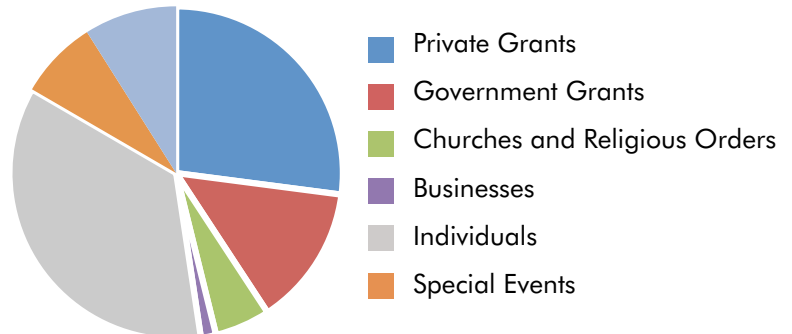


# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

## INCOME 2019

Private Grants	156,800
Government Grants	79,350
Churches and Religious Orders	31,215
Businesses	8,544
Individuals	207,198
Special Events	52,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>579,382</b>

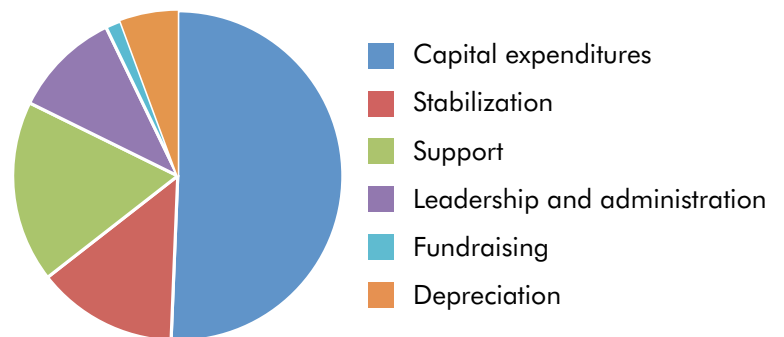
## INCOME 2019



## EXPENSE 2019

Capital Expenditures	328,233
<i>(Expenses related to Virginia Coffey Place )</i>	
Stabilization	89,533
<i>(includes program expenses, utilities, food, bus passes)</i>	
Support	115,502
<i>(includes expenses related to guest support personnel)</i>	
Leadership and Administration	68,443
<i>(includes office expenses and supplies, software and hardware, accounting professional expenses, admin professional expenses, insurance)</i>	
Fundraising	9,848
Depreciation	36,521
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>648,080</b>

## EXPENSE 2019





2019 was a full year for Lydia's House! Through relationships with current and former guests, we continued to learn of the strengths of and challenges facing single mothers experiencing poverty. We also built on the advocacy efforts of 2018 to champion for system change while doing much hard work to establish affordable housing in our neighborhood for former Lydia's House guests.



### **As a result of this work and prayer, the fruits of last year included:**

- Building stronger relationships with our elected representatives on a local, state, and national level, including meeting with Senator Sherrod Brown's staff to discuss holes in the social service safety net
- Joining the Hamilton County Continuum of Care as a "non HUD funded" representative on their local board
- Applying for and receiving a competitive county "HOME" grant for affordable housing
- Completing construction on our 8 unit apartment building ; hosting a community wide grand opening where we christened the building "Virginia Coffey Place" in honor of local civil rights leader Virginia Coffey
- Partnering with Azalea Montessori to open a mixed income preschool in one of the building's commercial spaces and recruiting local artist Elizabeth Hatchett to open a design studio in the second space
- Developing a tenant training module to educate current Lydia's House guests on best practices in renting and maintaining an apartment
- Filling all 8 units of our new building with former Lydia's House guest families and creating a community culture complete with house meetings, parties, and new on-site life skills and occupational therapy services
- Introducing "Abundant Life" grants to allow former guests families autonomy in choosing how Lydia's House can best support them financially in the aftercare program
- Continuing our partnership with Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority to utilize designated Housing Choice Vouchers to stabilize families who successfully complete their stay at Lydia's House
- Strengthening our pregnancy-postpartum trajectory through creating the "maternal care advocate" position, connecting staff to more birthing education opportunities, hiring a doula, and creating specific birth and after-birth protocols
- Advancing our in-house evaluation system and working with a software design firm to create an Access data base for tracking of progress and outcomes
- Creating the "volunteer coordinator" position and strengthening volunteer recruitment and training
- Partnering with the Sisters of Mercy to become a placement site for their volunteer year program
- Receiving a TogetHER Rising grant of \$50,000 to fund our nature play space; working with our neighborhood on a collaborative design process to integrate nature play into the Montessori pre-school and the lives of Lydia's House families
- Strengthening arts and culture programming in the house, including taking guests to a variety of Playhouse in the Park plays, festivals and public events
- Continuing anti-racism work, including sending staff to training in Washington DC to be trained in anti-racism by the Mennonite Central Committee "Damascus Road"
- Developing a landlord partnership program and hosting our first landlord training with 8 attendees



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# Lydia's House 2019 Year in Review

88 Individuals Served

## Emergency Shelter at Lydia's House



21 Families were provided Emergency Shelter for stays between 2 and 30 days

90% Continued into Transitional housing or Safe Stable Housing

### Each Family Received:

- On-Site Staff Support
- 24/7 Shelter Access
- Nutritious Meals
- Weekly Enrichment Activities
- Private rooms
- Case Management Services , including Applying to Housing and Benefits Navigation



### Women Served:

- Average Age = 24 Years
- Average ACE\* Score = 5.3
- 52% Experienced Domestic Violence in the Past Year
- 48% Spent time in Foster Care as Children
- 48% Had a Mental Health Diagnosis
- Average Age of Children = 4 Years

## Transitional Housing Program at Lydia's House



15 Families Continued onto Lydia's House On-Site Transitional Housing Program\*\*

54%

### Cited Improvements in Coping Skills



"I manage my stress better...  
I have more patience in navigating my problems...  
I've learned how to better process my grief and think things through more. I'm less emotionally reactive."

62%

### Cited Improvements in Life Skills



"I'm better at filling out forms...  
I've learned how to grocery shop and what I need to buy...I keep more organized schedules."

69%

### Cited Improvements in Interpersonal Skills



"I've learned to try friendships again...  
I've learned how it feels to have real support...  
I think before I speak."

46%

### Cited Improvements in Parenting



"I've learned new approaches to parenting,  
like discipline and strategies for mealtimes....  
I've learned how to put my kids to bed on time."

\*\* Transitional housing is offered for those that stay in shelter longer than 30 days





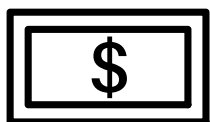
Average Total Length of Stay:  
76 Days  
100% Moved into  
Stable Housing



53%  
Supported in  
Pregnancy



47%  
Enrolled in a  
Job Training  
Program



33%  
Obtained and  
Maintained  
Employment



40%  
Received  
Legal  
Assistance

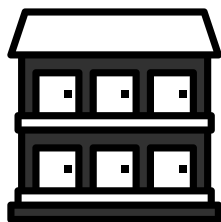


87%  
Obtained  
Government  
Benefits or  
Needed Legal  
Documents



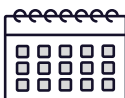
87%  
Received  
Needed  
Mental Health  
or Medical  
Care

## Virginia Coffey Place Permanent Supportive Housing



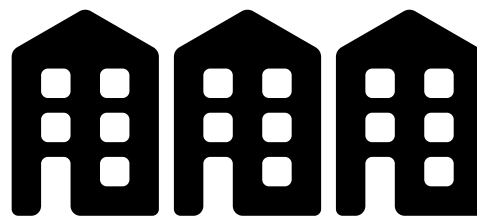
8 Families Housed,  
including 13 kids

- 15 Staff-Led Events for Tenants
- 8 Tenant-Led Social Events
- 3 Tenants Supported in Pursuing Schooling, including 1 Tenant Graduating with an Associates Degree
- 2 Accompanied through Healthy Baby Birth with Lydia's House Support (Including 1 High Risk Pregnancy)
- 244 Hours Provided in Resident Support /Occupational Therapy Services
- \$6,000 Provided in Rental Assistance
- 7 Lydia's House Children Enrolled at Azalea Montessori Preschool



- 3/2019: Building Blessing
- 5/2019: First Tenant
- 10/2019: Full Occupancy

## Scattered Site Aftercare Support



18 Scattered -Site Former Guest  
Families Supported

- 3 Large Social Events (Mother's Day, Back to School, Easter)
- \$12,000 Provided in Financial Assistance
- 7 Families Supported through Case Management
- 4 Families Supported in Health Interventions
- 4 Women Supported in Pregnancy
- 3 Families Supported with Occupational Therapy Services
- Countless Dinner Invites, Milestone Celebrations, and Drop in Visits at Lydia's House
- 7 Families Attended Camp or Utilized Child Enrichment Opportunities

\*ACE = Adverse Childhood Events, A tool used to assess traumatic events individuals experienced during childhood, higher scores correlated with negative health outcomes, Score 0-10

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## HELP US FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

In the enclosed envelope you'll find an opportunity to support low income families with high quality childcare: Funds raised this season will specifically go to off-set rent costs for our pre-school partner, Azalea Montessori, located in the commercial space of Virginia Coffey Place. Because of changing regulations regarding class sizes and student to teacher ratios in early childhood centers, they were particularly hard hit by Covid 19. We deeply value their work and want to support them to provide authentic Montessori education to Lydia's House children and other children in financial need. Checks can be written to Lydia's House but will be used specifically to offset their rent costs for the mandated space expansion.

