

Keeping Up with Friends

of the Alexandria Mental Health Center

FRIENDSOFAMHC@GMAIL.COM



ABOUT FRIENDS

OUR MISSION

Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center (AMHC) provides financial help and hope to Alexandrians receiving City services for mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and developmental disabilities.

OUR APPROACH

Friends is a non-profit organization founded in 1984 with the knowledge that community makes a significant difference for those living with a mental health condition, developmental disability, or substance use on their path to recovery.

Friends' primary goal is to provide a financial safety net for Alexandrians receiving mental health services from the City's Community Services Board (CSB). Friends uses donations to provide help and hope to these individuals and their families for special and emergency needs, such as housing, medicine, dental care, transportation, social and educational activities, and basic life necessities.

Additionally, Friends supports the City and other partners working to advance mental health throughout Alexandria—those who strengthen the safety net; improve mental health awareness and advocacy; reduce stigma; and enhance training for CSB staff.

40 YEARS OF FRIENDS!

In 2024, Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center turns 40! Founded in 1984 by Lois Van Valkenburgh, Friends worked in partnership with the "Alexandria Mental Health Center," led at the time by Judith Krasnow who served as Executive Director of the Mental Health Center from 1978-1994. Friends' mission both then and now is: to provide financial help and hope to Alexandrians who participate in City services for mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and intellectual/developmental disabilities. Lois and Judith understood how critical financial stability is when a person is coming out of crisis. Their devotion to the well-being of all Alexandrians gave birth to Friends and is the foundation of our quiet success. As we enter our 40th year, we ask that you please consider a donation in multiples of 40.

\$40 pays for senior transportation to needed medical appointments

\$80 pays for swim lessons for a child

\$120 pays for a utility bill

\$160 pays for medicine

\$200 pays for dental work

\$240 pays for groceries

\$400 pays for back-to-school clothes for three children

\$800 pays for rent

\$1,600 pays for specialized youth opioid addiction treatment

\$2,000 pays for a co-pay for residential treatment

CONSIDER FRIENDS FOR END-OF-YEAR GIVING!

It's the end of the year and time for planning end-of-year donations. We hope you will consider Friends!

Three ways to give:

- Mail a check to Friends of the AMHC, 4850 Mark Center Dr, Room 8107, Alexandria, VA 22311
- Donate on our website: www.friendsofamhc.org
- Donate through MightyCause Giving Tuesday on November 28! For 24 hours, residents, families and even out-of-state supporters can donate to Friends.



Please take this opportunity to support Friends. Early giving will begin on Tuesday, November 14, and run through Tuesday, November 28. Please consider giving early to Friends! Our goal is to raise \$10,000.00 for our MightyCause campaign

*Thank
You!*

For those who give to Friends, **thank you** from the bottom of our hearts! If you are just hearing about Friends, we hope you will include us in your charitable planning.

ABOUT THE CSB



The CSB oversees the City’s publicly funded services for Alexandrians participating in mental health, developmental disability and substance use services. The CSB is part of the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS).

FRIENDS BOARD MEMBERS

- Anna Dvorchik, Co-Chair
- Mary C. Ray, Co-Chair
- Kedryn Berrian, Social Media
- Adam Bloom-Paicopolis, Social Media and Web
- Rebecca “Becky Bradford, Online Fundraising, Grant writing
- Afewerk Eshetu, WEWC Liaison
- Elizabeth A. “Betty” Livingston, Outreach
- Angelica Medina, Grant Writer
- Vladimir Reilly, Consumer Liaison
- Ian Ring, CSB Liaison
- Monica Rusk, Treasurer
- Vera Sarkis, Outreach
- Hon. Allison Silberberg, Outreach
- Jeremy Thompson, Secretary

FRIENDS ADVOCACY GOALS FOR 2023-2024

Friends’ main goal for the 2024 legislative session is to advocate for more psychiatric bed space and crisis beds in Northern Virginia. INOVA is building a new hospital in Alexandria, but they have been silent as to bed space for local residents. Write your legislator, call the City Council and Mayor Wilson and advocate for bed space here in the city.

A secondary issue is a dire need for affordable housing and rent relief. Friends is not intended as a solution to the eviction crisis. We help where we can, but with the needs we are seeing our coffers will be completely drained with housing assistance requests. Please reach out to your legislator, council member and Mayor Wilson and let them know that more funding needs to be appropriated to housing issues in the City.

VOLUNTEER REP PAYEES NEEDED

DCHS is actively looking for volunteers to serve as representative payees for clients who have been deemed by the Social Security Administration (SSA), incapable of managing their funds, or who are taken advantage of. Payees register at the SSA, then open a payee bank account on behalf of the client to receive automatic monthly disability payments from the SSA. The payee uses the funds to pay the client’s bills each month—typically three bills total—and sends the client spending money. Volunteers work through a case manager; no direct client contact. To learn more, please email jennifer.cohen@alexandriava.gov or call 703-746-3484.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PEOPLE SERVED

Fiscal Year 2023 was an unprecedented year for Friends. We received and fulfilled requests from Community Services Board (CSB) and Court Services Unit (CSU) case managers totaling \$118,126.76. We received donations of \$73,726.33 during that period. The need has not abated in the first three months of FY2024. Friends has spent \$29,848.17 and taken in donations of \$18,810.43 to serve city residents. Without your generosity, many City residents would be without housing, dental and medical care, food, appropriate clothing, job training, and specialized substance use disorder treatment. Here are some highlights of the clients we served:

- Alex is a youth involved in the court system whose mother has serious health problems. Friends paid a bill that was causing additional stress to the family. His mother sent a note to Friends: “Thank you all for helping me and my son. I didn’t know how I was going to pay that bill and you all swooped in and took care of it. I wasn’t even expecting it. You are my Angels. Thank you for everything.”
- Nancy, a single mother of three children, had the opportunity to help her family become more independent from system support by attending school to become a Certified Nurse’s Aide. The program cost \$1,699.00 and financial aid was not available. Friends agreed to pay the tuition to support this family in their journey towards stability and financial independence.
- Sally, a young woman participating in mental health services, needed help to pay for swim lessons to help her overcome anxiety. Friends paid for swim lessons at Chinguapin Recreation Center. Sally’s therapist reached out to Friends to thank us for always coming through.
- Justine, a senior client, needed significant help with apartment utilities and cleaning. Due to this client’s significant and emergent needs, Friends helped with utility bills and cleaning bills to help ensure that Justine was in a safe and healthy environment.

Rent and housing-related assistance continue to be the majority of requests that are sent to Friends, followed by medical and dental assistance.



COMPLETE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING ONLINE IN 2023

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training teaches the initial help given to a person showing signs of a mental health crisis. City of Alexandria residents can complete the two-session eight-hour course virtually. Sessions will be held on Nov 13 and 14, and on Dec 13 and 14. The course teaches risk factors, warning signs and symptoms; the effects of the illnesses and an overview of treatments; and a five-step action plan for helping someone until they are linked to professional support. Visit alexandriava.gov/DCHS to register.



Need Help in a Crisis?
Call 24 Hours a DAY

- Adult Protective Services**
703.746.5778 or **APS State Hotline** | 1.888.832.3858
- Child Protective Services**
703.746.5800 or State 1.800.552.7096
- Substance Use Disorder Residential Treatment**
703.746.3636
- Domestic Violence**
703.746.4911
- Emergency Mental Health Services** | 703.746.3401
- Sexual Assault**
703.683.7273
Get Help Now: Suicide Prevention Resources
- CrisisLink:** 703.527.4077 or text “CONNECT” to 85511
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1.800.273.TALK (8255). Virginia relay 711 then 1.800.273.8255
- Red Nacional del Suicidio:** 1.888.628-9454
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Veterans Crisis Line:** 1.800.273.8255, Press 1, or text 838255, or chat confidentially online 24/7
- The Trevor Project, LGBTQ Youth:** 1.866.488.7386 or text START to 678-678.

SHARE FRIENDS!

Before you recycle this newsletter, please help us enlarge our circle of Friends. Pass it on to a friend, neighbor or family member who may wish to support Friends’ mission.

HELP US BE GREEN!

Send us your email address at FRIENDSOFAMHC@GMAIL.COM



SPOTLIGHT ON THREE CITY EMPLOYEES

Friends could not function without the work and advocacy of the CSB case managers and therapists who serve city clients. This fall, we spotlight three wonderful workers: Canise Robertson, Lauren Bronzo, and Sandra Canas. Thank you Canise, Lauren, and Sandra for your contributions to our city!



CANISE ROBERTSON

Where do you work in CSB? I work with Aging and Adult Services/ Older Adult Mental Health.

Tell us a little about yourself. I am a woman who courageously advocates for individuals without a voice. I have a Master's in Social Work, am a Qualified Mental Health Profession, and I have a certification in Addictions Counseling. I enjoy what I do as a social worker and a concerned human being.

What do you find most rewarding about what you do? The most rewarding part of my job is successfully serving my clients and being able to address issues they face and their concerns.

What is the hardest part of your job? The hardest part of my job is not being able to make immediate changes to improve my client's life and well-being.

How do you use Friends in your job? I utilize donations from Friends to assist my clients with their financial needs.

What effect has Friends had on the residents you serve? Friends has a positive effect on aging adults in the City of Alexandria. I personally interact with Ms. Betty who rapidly responds to requests for assistance. We are grateful for Friends and the service they provide.



LAUREN BRONZO

Where do you work in CSB? I am a Bilingual School-Based therapist based at Alexandria City High School in the Teen Wellness Center.

Tell us a little about yourself? I have been working in social services since 2010 and as a Social Worker since 2013 in various cities, including Denver, Chicago, and Alexandria. I specialize in the treatment of trauma. Outside of work, my main passions are rock climbing, salsa dancing, running, and baking.

What do you find most rewarding about what you do? I find it rewarding to be the person that someone can be vulnerable with and open up to. Creating a space where someone can trust me enough to work on their healing feels special.

What is the hardest part of your job? The toughest part is dealing with the frustration of imperfect systems that create barriers to the growth and success of our clients.

How do you use Friends in your job? I look to Friends when the families I am working with are facing a financial crisis or are unable to afford something that would enrich their lives. **What effect has Friends had on the residents you serve?** Friends has been an amazing community partner in helping my clients to meet their basic needs and to achieve their therapeutic goals.



SANDRA CANAS

Where do you work in CSB? Child and Family Behavioral Health Services as an Intake Coordinator/Community Services Program Coordinator.

Tell us a little about yourself? I am incredibly proud of my Latina roots, and my country of origin is El Salvador.

What do you find most rewarding about what you do? My work is gratifying because I can be part of what makes a difference in the families' lives, and it helps their youth to thrive despite their circumstances.

What is the hardest part of your job? My work can be challenging, especially when it comes to decision-making or allocating resources. A program like Child and Family Behavioral Health Services helps close gaps and offers inclusion for diverse populations that have grown exponentially in the City of Alexandria.

How do you use Friends in your job? I have had the opportunity to refer families with different needs who faced economic challenges, and these precarious situations worsened or triggered mental health symptoms.

What effect has Friends had on the residents you serve? Partnering with Friends has been incredible! Friends contributes to helping improve clients' circumstances and makes them feel hopeful.



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4850 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22311