Friends Helps Social Workers Hold Safety Net
Meet Asta Lynch, LCSW

Since 2000, Asta Lynch, LCSW, Adult Intake and Mental Health Outpatient Team Leader at the Department of Community and Human Services, has worked with thousands of low-income Alexandrians with mental health conditions. She has seen firsthand the challenges of not only providing therapy, but trying to piece together funds and support for the basic life needs of some of our city's most vulnerable residents.

"Friends is an important safety net," says Lynch. "We're trying to connect people to the resources they need to recover and thrive, and unfortunately, there are things we just can't cover — whether it's transportation or unanticipated medication or help with utilities or housing. That's when we turn to Friends." Lynch oversees a team of therapists who provide one-on-one counseling to more than 500 people a year. The majority of people they treat have been determined by the state to have a "serious mental illness." This could be major depressive disorder, schizophrenia or other highly challenging conditions that have severely impacted their income and basic quality of life.

Lynch also supervises the City's Adult Intake Unit, which assesses those who come in for care and refers them to the right services. The team meets about 1,000 clients a year. It would seem to many an overwhelming job, yet Lynch says after all these years it's still "endlessly fascinating and fulfilling."

We asked Lynch for a few examples of how Friends' support makes her job easier and her clients' lives better:

- **Access to medical care:** Clients often have other physical health conditions in addition to mental health, which can have a dramatic impact on their recovery and overall well-being. Those who are uninsured and underinsured can only get access to specialists by traveling down state, so Friends helps cover transportation.

- **Getting and keeping jobs:** The City may help clients find employment, but they often lack funds for the right clothes or transportation to and from work. So they call Friends.

- **Supplementing housing costs:** Disability funds may pay for rent, but not a security deposit. Friends helps bridge the gap.

- **Medications:** Medicaid covers some but not all medications or deductibles. Again, Friends is there to fill the gap.

"One of the things we most appreciate about Friends is that we can get the funds within 24 hours of making the request," says Lynch. "When someone is struggling or about to lose out on an opportunity, that can make all the difference."

Luckily for Alexandrians in need, Lynch and her team are also there year after year to ensure they get high quality support.

Make your holiday gift giving especially meaningful this season by joining us on Thursday, December 6, from 7-9 p.m. for a shopping event at Ten Thousand Villages, 915 King Street. The store will donate a percentage of every item sold that evening to Friends of the AMHC. Please help us expand our visibility by telling others and by bringing friends to the event. We'll be there to welcome you with light refreshments and stories of how your generosity makes a difference.
Providing alternative medicine for a patient in need

A 91-year-old Adult Services client was suffering from crippling peripheral neuropathy. She couldn’t continue conventional medication, because it made her dizzy and tired and at risk of a fall. Her primary care physician suggested an herbal medication, lipoic acid, with which his patients had experienced success. The bottle costs $75 and lasts two months. The client was eager and hopeful to try this medication, so Friends made it possible.

Helping a client bridge the gap on the way to a new job

A client receiving services from the Comprehensive Recovery Team was hospitalized, lost her job, and was left unable to pay her rent. After being discharged from the hospital, she obtained another job, and yet still needed to cover the rent in the interim. Together with several other donors, Friends helped subsidize her rent, keeping her employed and on track in her recovery.

Supporting Recovery

A client in the Substance Use Outpatient Program recently lost her job of 11 years. She is currently in recovery and actively seeking employment. Friends was able to fill the most basic need for a bus pass to attend therapeutic meetings and continue her search for employment.

Support Friends on Giving Tuesday

Giving Tuesday is a global day of giving that harnesses the collective power of individuals, communities and organizations to encourage philanthropy and to celebrate generosity worldwide.

This year’s Giving Tuesday is on November 27th, the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. It kicks off the giving season by inspiring people to give back.

To show that mental health is a priority, donate to Friends on this national day of giving. Send a check payable to Friends of the AMHC, 720 N. Saint Asaph Street, Alexandria, VA 22314 or donate online at www.givegab.com/campaigns/FriendsoftheAMHC.