



St. Mary's HOME FOR CHILDREN

Healing Lives, Restoring Hope – Since 1877

SUMMER 2022

The Doorway
A publication of St. Mary's Home for Children



Children's Friendship Award raises \$111,000

Thank you to everyone who attended and donated to our 2022 Children's Friendship Award Event! It was a beautiful evening at Harbor Lights where we shared the joy of being together in person and raised funds for the children and families we serve. We raised more than \$111,000 after expenses, all of which will go towards services for clients.



Mark your calendars for 4:30 pm
on September 20, 2022,
for our Annual Meeting!

Guest speaker will be Angela Gonzalez, a muralist who will complete a project at St. Mary's in spring 2023.

For information about attending in person or online, contact Susan at sgale@smhfc.org.



CLIENT STORY

St. Mary's makes parents part of the treatment team

Steve* and Jim* knew their adopted daughter was special. She did well in school, was an accomplished musician, a gifted athlete, a Girl Scout, a teen eligible for her Confirmation, a valued employee, a beloved sister to their son, and precious daughter to them. But then she began to change. She broke their house rules, tried alcohol and marijuana, participated in minor thefts, and most scary, began setting up online accounts in fake names on dating sites to meet older men.

They tried everything they could think of – working with her school, local counselors, different programs for teens, her pediatrician, local hospitals, and police. But their daughter knew how to say the right things to officials so that no one took the situation as seriously as Steve and Jim knew it to be.

Then their daughter disappeared with a man she met on the Internet. Steve will never forget the terror and desperation he felt talking to the police that night, begging them to help find the teen before something terrible happened.

Their daughter was found and at this point, the two fathers came into contact with St. Mary's Home for Children when their daughter began participating in the agency's Outpatient programs such as Equine Therapy. But it was soon apparent that their daughter needed more help and the fathers made the agonizing decision to entrust their teen to St. Mary's Residential Services.

Steve and Jim quickly felt that they became part of a team with many different St. Mary's staff to care for their daughter no matter how challenging her behavior became. They were impressed that St. Mary's designed a treatment plan around what she needed, not just what a particular therapy model might offer. And most of all, they felt included and informed about what was happening with their daughter at all times.

Today Steve and Jim's daughter still struggles as a work in progress but the couple knows that her time at St. Mary's made a difference and is a big part of the reason their daughter is still around to work on herself as a young adult.



Learn what happens at St. Mary's school during the summer months.



St. Mary's named a Recovery Friendly Workplace

St. Mary's has achieved the designation of Recovery Friendly Workplace through a Governor's Initiative designed to empower workplaces to support people recovering from substance use disorder.

"This is our commitment and pledge to be part of the solution," said Nursing Director Nicole Froment. "It involves having policies and trainings in substance use disorder. We want to lessen the stigma of this disorder and support the individuals struggling with it. We are looking at this as a medical problem. They need just as much help as someone with cancer."

Among the benefits of the designation is access to free NARCAN® which is a potentially lifesaving medication designed to help reverse the effects of an opioid overdose in minutes. St. Mary's will have four NARCAN Kits, which include instructions and a face shield in case emergency breathing is necessary, on its North Providence campus. In addition, St. Mary's is now more connected

to the network of services provided for substance use disorder, allowing the agency to better assist both clients and staff.

"Substance use disorder is so stigmatized that many don't know where to turn for help," said Froment, who added that it only takes six-to-seven doses of an opioid for the body to become dependent on it and some people continue to take the drugs to avoid withdrawal rather than to get high. "Because the opioid crisis is so prevalent, it can happen to anyone at any time. The road to addiction is different for everyone."



"We are giving them the experiences a lot of their peers get to do in the Summer," – Diane Long, school principal

Summer doesn't mean our school stops

Many schools can appear abandoned during the summer months but not the George N. Hunt Campus School where learning occurs year-round. This special education school serves children with social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Children from St. Mary's Residential Services attend as do Day Students from Rhode Island School District communities.

Each week during the summer is a different theme — from gardening and the ocean to sports. Students take field trips which provide life skills enrichment such as ordering from a restaurant, using money, patiently waiting for their meal, and trying out new types of food. Also included is making up class credits they may have missed due to trauma experiences or playing games that involve problem solving to continue to foster social-emotional learning with peers. Children also continue to have time with clinicians and attend social-emotional support groups.

"We are giving them the experiences a lot of their peers get to do in the summer," said Diane Long, school principal. "Our staff are getting to know the students through activities and they will be able to relate to one another through those shared experiences — so in class in the fall, they will have a good rapport."

St. Mary's donors make many things possible for the children we serve including by providing gift cards to area businesses, which are used to take the students places. The biggest issue faced during the summer months: access to transportation, said Long, who said the school hopes to seek funding at some point to purchase its own 16-person van.



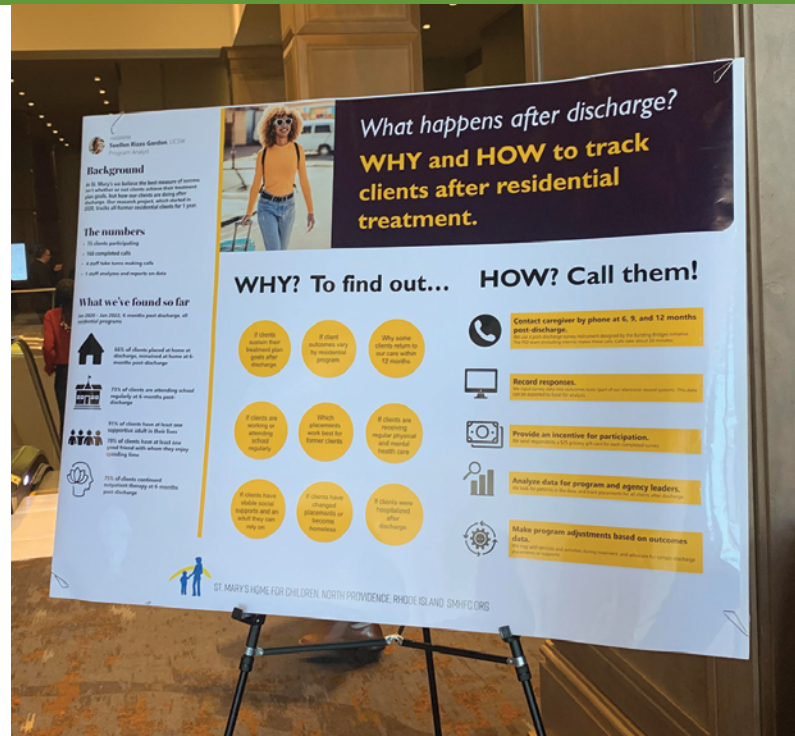
Measuring results to improve program effectiveness

Recently St. Mary's Performance Quality Improvement (PQI) Program Analyst Suellen Rizzo Gordon presented a poster at the Association of Children's Residential & Community (ACRC) Residential Services national conference about how St. Mary's measures post-discharge outcomes in our Residential Services interventions to help us improve program effectiveness. ACRC shares innovative treatments and best practices about Residential Services programs worldwide.

The poster summarized our process: Using a standard tool, we obtain outcomes data information in key domains (home, school, community, physical and mental health) at six, nine, and 12 months' post-discharge. We analyze this data, and combine it with information about the client's tenure at St. Mary's, including demographic data and details about their treatment.

"We got a very positive response to the poster," said Gordon. "Everyone said the same thing - we always talk about doing this but we can't seem to get started!" St. Mary's is very proud to have been chosen to present and we are happy we have helped other programs to better measure their outcomes so they can improve their services.

Another benefit of the conference was connecting with other residential agencies and learning about their best practices. We are not the only ones doing this type of project. An agency in Laramie, Wyoming, is doing very similar research to St. Mary's, and they have generously shared their research with us.



Your support needed

While we are enjoying the warmth of summer, St. Mary's is always thinking ahead to the next needs that will be experienced by the children and adults we serve.

First comes fall when our children will head back to school. Keep an eye out for a back-to-school wish list which we will publish by email, on our website, and on social media.

Quickly following back-to-school, comes the holiday season where we work to put together a set of five presents per child based on each child's exact wish list. Our donors and staff work together to make this happen. All this coordination is well worth it when the children are excited to receive the often modest gifts they have requested.

We seek presents for children in both our Residential Services and Outpatient Department as we work with many families who struggle to provide basic needs for their children, and can't afford even less expensive toys.

As the Holiday Appeal is wrapping up, we launch into our End of Year Giving Campaign where we ask supporters to make a tax-deductible donation to fund the level of services St. Mary's is renowned for.



To offer the kind of comprehensive, wraparound services that St. Mary's does means we are constantly looking for funding for the growing needs we see in our community.

We are so thankful to all of our donors and supporters for everything you do to help our mission and take care of the children and families we serve.

Thank you to Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island!



We'd like to recognize the amazing work done by one of our Children's Friendship Award winners – Episcopal Charities of Rhode Island! They provide food, shelter, and healthcare

to those most in need. Over more than 70 years, Episcopal Charities has been behind the scenes helping St. Mary's to financially meet the rising mental health needs in RI. The Award was accepted by **Director Betsy Fornal** during our live event on June 23, 2022.



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HOME FOR CHILDREN

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OUR MISSION

Partnering with youth, adults, and families, St. Mary's Home for Children fosters resilience and potential through a continuum of innovative residential, community-based, education, and prevention services.

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*Names and details in some articles have been changed to protect the privacy of clients.

A Letter from the Executive Director



Carlene Casciano-McCann
Executive Director

According to the Children's Defense Fund, a child is removed from their home every two minutes. Neglect is the most common reason for children entering the child welfare system, along with issues related to unsafe and substandard housing. Neglect, which is usually the result of poverty, disproportionately impacts children of color who are overrepresented in the child welfare system.

In our own deep dive into the youth we serve, we learned that many were removed from their homes when they were under the age of five. More often than not, these children experience multiple placements once they enter the child welfare system. Each disrupted placement is a new traumatic experience, which exacerbates a child's sense of loss and feelings of hopelessness. Make no mistake, these children are grieving.

At St. Mary's, we recognized that the system within which we provide services is not equipped to make the family connections that these children crave. Our Residential Building Bridges team made a commitment to engage in a unique "family finding" process. Our family finding team has connected youth with family members that the youth thought they would never see again – and what a difference this makes in the lives of these children! We have had success advocating for parents to have their parental rights reinstated so that they can work toward reunification with their child. People change and we would not be doing this work if we did not believe this to be true.

While we are honored to make these connections and I am proud of the team doing this work, we know that if society invested more in prevention and supporting young families, there would be significantly less need for children to be removed from their homes. I will always remember the words of a coworker when we were both Residential Counselors and talking about the impact of poverty on the children we served. She said, "I would rather live with my mother in a car than be taken away from her to live in a home with a family I don't know." No family should be punished for being impoverished.

Congratulations to our Children's Friendship award winner!

We want to say a heartfelt thank you to someone who has made a huge difference in the work of St. Mary's. **Elizabeth H. Ingraham**, known as Betsy, worked at St. Mary's for 47 years and now serves as Secretary of the Board of Directors. During many years Ingraham actually lived on the agency's North Providence campus where she was on near 24-hour call for the youth. Literally hundreds of Rhode Island children have better lives today because of her work. She is especially deserving of one of this year's Children's Friendship Awards!



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