Building A New Bridge

2016 ANNUAL REPORT
Dear Friends,

There is no doubt this past year tested our resolve, resources, and grit.

Across the state, epidemic levels of opioid addiction brought disruption to our communities, affecting families, causing a surge in related diseases, and ballooning healthcare costs. The Commonwealth has paid a heavy price-- thousands of lives lost to opioid-related deaths, totals that have grown five-fold over the past decade.

In combatting this epidemic, we were further challenged when, in October 2014, Boston’s Long Island, home to a significant portion of Volunteers of America’s addiction recovery and transitional housing programs, was closed due to safety concerns regarding the bridge that connected the island to the mainland. Our programs on the island were given mere hours of notice before evacuation. What followed in the ensuing hours, days, weeks, and months was a test to ensure that those in treatment continued to receive the stability and care they needed to stay on the path to recovery.

We could not have made it through this tumultuous period without your support. Volunteers of America Massachusetts seeks to “meet clients where they are at” as no two individuals we serve are the same. Your support allows us to also meet big challenges with determination and calm.

As you read the following pages, from the story of Long Island to those of clients like Donna and Alan, know that Volunteers of America Massachusetts remains a pillar of strength built out of a community of dedicated donors committed staff, program partners, and caring volunteers.

Because of you, we remain an organization unmatched in combining 100 years of experience with a mission that facilitates 21st century innovative care.

We are pleased to share this year’s Annual Report with you and are grateful for your support.

In gratitude,

Thomas Bierbaum
President and CEO
Our Mission

Volunteers of America of Massachusetts is a non-profit dedicated to serving those most in need, especially the vulnerable, the hardest to serve, and those facing multiple challenges.

Our work touches the mind, body, heart, and spirit of those we serve, integrating deep compassion with highly effective programs and services.

We provide programs for veterans and adults in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, elders in need of housing and health services, individuals in need of mental health treatment, and offenders reentering the community.

Programs & Services

**Massachusetts Bay Veterans Center** provides transitional and permanent housing to homeless veterans, while offering variety of resources to help support self-sufficiency. The program was made possible by The Home Depot® Foundation.

**Hello House for Men and Hello House for Women** are adult residential recovery programs providing a comprehensive, holistic treatment for those coping with drug addiction and alcoholism.

**The Turning Point Re-Entry Program** aims to help inmates re-enter society and break the crime cycle by providing a broad range of services and aftercare.

**Next Step Apartments** offer a reasonably priced sober housing alternative for women committed to the recovery process.

**Supportive Services for Veteran Families** focuses on preventing and ending homelessness among low-income veterans and their families, through case management services, financial planning, employment program referrals, healthcare and counseling referrals and financial assistance.

**Veterans Employment Network** provides much needed case management services to veterans, including connecting to employment opportunities, working on establishing career paths, and making referrals for counseling, housing and healthcare.

**The Family Center** offers mental health and substance abuse counseling for individuals and families in Quincy and Taunton.

**Face Forward** is aimed at helping court-involved youth between the ages of 16 and 24 overcome significant life challenges, endowing them with skills that will pave the way for a productive future.

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**Senior Assisted Living communities Nashoba Park and Concord Park** offer supportive and enriching lifestyles featuring both Independent Living and personalized Assisted Living. Additionally, Concord Park offers a Memory Support Neighborhood.
Clients of Volunteers of America Massachusetts’ recovery programs awoke to the routine that had shaped their stay on Boston’s Long Island – learning sober living skills through treatment plans towards a path to recovery.

That morning word slowly began to leak, clouded with uncertainty. Over the next few hours, uncertainty became a mandate without prior warning - the Island would close. Not in one year or six months. Not even six weeks. It was to close in less than six hours.

Imagine you are a woman in crisis. Years of drug addiction, perhaps homelessness too and previously unchecked disorders, have led to more than a lifetime of trauma and personal tragedy. Through your program you are moving along the hard journey towards recovery and independence. You have found staff and peers to create a foundation of stability and hope, in place of despair. Now, in a matter of hours, your life feels upended – again.

The Long Island Bridge – the structure that connected Long Island to land, was closed immediately by Boston officials due to concerns for the bridge’s structural integrity. Residents and workers of Long Island, nearly 1,000 in total, were given hours to evacuate.

You have little time to gather your belongings. In the rush, you leave behind a drawing from the child who wishes to see her mother again. You leave behind clothes, and other belongings. You have no idea what will become of you. It plays out like a scene from a movie. Hundreds at a time moving to a ferry that will bring you ashore. On the other side of the bridge is the side of many past relapses, where you had fallen again and again. Volunteers of America Massachusetts’ staff guide and bring comfort to you leaving the island.

On the morning of October 8th 2014, Volunteers of America Massachusetts’ Hello House on Long Island had 28 beds for women. Together with another service provider, with the Island closure, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts lost 45% of its entire state count of dedicated beds for women in early treatment. Many forms of crisis collided.
Volunteers of America Massachusetts’ comprehensive programming afforded opportunity.

Operating programming for men, woman, and adolescents, Volunteers of America Massachusetts had space to find everyone a safe place to sleep for the night.

In crisis, shelter is primary, followed by food and safety. All three were taken with great care by staff to ensure 23 women had a safe place to sleep and food to eat - and treatment programs intact. The women set up sleeping bags at our Jamaica Plain facility, a home for women transitioning towards independence. These women were many months ahead of the refugees from Long Island, who were early along in their treatment. And so, in Jamaica Plain, 32 women from two programs in 32 separate places along their recovery journey all merged under one roof... and somehow made it work.

And over the next hundreds of hours plans went into motion to move clients between the multiple programs ensuring women from the island-based program had a safe residence of their own. It is reasonable to fear that many upheavals – place, routine, etc…can unseat the fragile motivation towards personal change. Yet, with staff locked in step for step, and a treatment plan tied towards each client’s needs, amazingly there was minimal relapse.

Volunteers of America Massachusetts utilized its strong financial position and over the following months purchased and worked towards opening a new residence. Staff were retained through transitions and helped prepare for the new house while building community support.

And through it all clients remained safe.

By February 2016, Volunteers of America Massachusetts had remodeled existing sites and opened a new Hello House for Women in Dorchester. During this period of sixteen months of transition, less than 10% of our female clients relapsed. This is owed to a model program utilizing treatment facilitated by remarkably committed staff. Upon impending and unplanned crisis, we did not only pull our clients through, but thrived, grew to serve more women, and through this challenging period affirmed our ability to lift up those most in need.

While the Long Island Bridge may remain in ruins, Volunteers of America Massachusetts is more than adept at repairing immeasurably more important things – our families.
By the time I gave birth to my first daughter, my mother was dying from brain cancer. When my mom finally got to meet her granddaughter, she was too far gone to even recognize me. She passed away the following month. I was 19 years old.

I was so young and it all got to be too much for me. I got caught up in the club scene and drinking… then I got caught up in the drug scene.

After my aunt threw me out of the house, I went into detox to get my kids back. I didn’t think I was really an alcoholic or a drug addict-- if everyone just did things my way, everything would be okay. Of course, I relapsed and ended up getting thrown out of the detox program.

Then life spiraled out of control. Given the state I was in, I knew the responsible thing to do was leave my children in the care of my aunt and family. Having grown up as a ward of the state, I didn’t want my children to have to do the same. I also didn’t want them growing up around addicts like me.

Leaving them was the hardest decision I’ve ever made. It felt like my soul cracked in half.

For the next 16 years, I threw myself away… My alcoholism escalated into a heroin addiction. In the years that followed, I learned the answers to a lot of hard questions…
How does it feel like to wake up next to your best friend, only to find they’ve died from an overdose?

How does it feel to jump in front of a train because you cannot bare to face another winter on the streets?

These are questions that no one should ever have to answer. But, I did.

When I came out on the other side, I knew it was time to seek permanent help. Knowing that they had one of the few women’s treatment programs in the city, in March of 2016, I sought out Volunteers of America Massachusetts.

I went into detox and entered the Shiloh House for Women and spent all summer there. I committed myself to working a program of recovery. Compared to other facilities, Volunteers of America's programs place the responsibility on you—if this is what you want, you have to do it yourself. The Women’s Hello House will support you and help you, but you need to do it yourself. Ultimately, you appreciate your sobriety so much more because the Shiloh House pushed you to work for it.

My life started to change...

I felt better than I ever have—physically and spiritually. Soon I’ll be graduating the program, eight months sober. I’m already going back to school and have completed customer service training to pursue a career as an administrator. I’ve also began making inroads to re-connect with my children. None of this would have been possible without the Shiloh House and Volunteers of America.

Though the future is not set, I take it one day at a time, always grateful for my sobriety and for the Women’s Hello House, who taught me the skills to keep moving forward.
Forestdale Park Assisted Living and Memory Care

Coming in Early 2018

Forestdale Park Assisted Living is currently under construction in Malden, Massachusetts. It will feature Independent Living, Assisted Living, and a Memory Support Neighborhood for individuals facing memory loss and Alzheimer’s disease.
Twenty years before I was an ex-convict, I was in the Army Corps of Engineers. I spent the majority of my career stationed in South Korea. It was a great experience but not everything I learned was positive. There was no legal drinking age in South Korea and I developed a serious habit as young man that stayed with me long after my service was over.

I got out in ’91, met a girl, and we started a family. I worked in construction for a decade and was happy as a blue-collar family man. I would only get loaded a couple of times a week but I felt entitled to because I was making a good living and raising two great kids. However, after my wife and I divorced in the early 2000s, my drinking ramped up. On one fateful summer night, things came to a head…

I was by myself at a neighborhood party when a fight broke out between guests. Blackout drunk and armed with combat training, I let myself get swept up in the melee.

When I came to, I was in jail facing assault charges and prison time.

In some ways, prison was the best thing that could have happened to me—while incarcerated, I was able to get mental health treatment for my depression and anger issues, found my sobriety through A.A. and started taking college classes. I planned to continue pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree after being granted early parole, but one component was missing from the equation: housing.
People don’t think about where prisoners end up once they’re out.

The vast majority of ex-cons are released back to the same neighborhood they started, except now they’re either sleeping on the streets or living on a friend’s couch. This lack of basic stability is what leads ex-cons back to the path that got them locked up in the first place. As a recovering addict being treated for mental health issues, I was afraid for what a life on the streets might hold for me.

Thankfully, I found Volunteers of America and their Massachusetts Bay Veteran Center transitional housing program.

After explaining my situation to the program’s director, Anthony Joseph, I was accepted as a client. The residency afforded to me by the Massachusetts Bay Veteran Center has been one of the great blessings of my life. Through the resources provided by the center, I’ve been able to get the support I need to retain my sobriety, continue receiving mental health treatment, and find work. I’ve also been able to give back by mentoring my fellow residents, veterans who are struggling with similar issues.

After two years spent at the Massachusetts Bay Veteran Center, I will soon be graduating from university in the summer. I’ve also found permanent housing and will pursue a graduate degree in alcohol and drug counseling to help other veterans and reformed prisoners get the help they need before it’s too late.

Every day I thank God for Volunteers of America and the work that they do. Their work embodies the principle that unites all veterans—that no one gets left behind. Volunteers of America gave me a hand-up when I needed it most, a debt I intend to pay forward for the rest of my life.
This year, Volunteers of America Massachusetts bid a happy retirement to Michael Herron, Program Director at the Hello House for Men.

Prior to becoming an addiction specialist, Michael worked for 16 years as a railroad conductor. His personal journey to sobriety inspired him to walk away from the railway industry and to become a licensed chemical dependency counselor. Twenty years into his career, Michael’s work brought him to Volunteers of America Massachusetts. His innovative approach to addiction treatment—what Michael defines as “expecting the challenge”—helped continue the Hello House’s long standing reputation as a model of effective care.

Looking back at his experiences with Volunteers of America, Michael’s proudest achievement is having pulled together the Hello House for Men’s hard working, dedicated staff.

“They’re the ones who’ve been in the trenches and have had each other’s backs. Together, we’ve made a tremendous difference in the men’s lives.”
What Maud Knew...

Maud Booth, co-founder of Volunteers of America, knew the power behind the actions in her statement that—

“I will help you over the rough places but I will not carry you.”

And she inspired thousands to act... and share in this work.

We are grateful to you, our donor, and all our friends, old and new for sharing in this work.

We ask you to please stand with us again.

Make a Difference Today!

Send your Gift by Mail:
441 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
Or Make a Secure Payment Online:
www.voamass.org
### Statement of Financial Position

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<th>ASSETS</th>
<th>2015</th>
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Volunteers of America®

MASSACHUSETTS

441 Centre St, Jamaica Plain MA 02130
www.voamass.org
info@voamass.org
617.522.8086