SUSAN HESS Passes the Torch

The Women's Initiative thanks Susan Hess for her tenure since 2011 as Executive Director. "I count it as a great privilege to have served as Executive Director and have come to know this as a truly amazing organization. I will work closely with The Women's Initiative and partner agencies in my new role with Mental Health America. I am excited to continue working to provide access to crucial mental health services to people in our community," stated Ms. Hess.

During Ms. Hess' two years at the helm, we experienced great success. TWI more than doubled the number of clients served and started two new collaborative programs: one at the Charlottesville Free Clinic and the other at the Jefferson School City Center. We also moved locations, now occupying a larger office to support this increase in activity. "Sue has made some tremendous contributions to TWI," said Bebe Heiner, Board Chair and Founder. "We thank her for all the hard work and positive energy she provided that helped facilitate our organization's continued growth and success. We wish her the very best as she moves on to the next phase of her career."

ELIZABETH IRVIN Takes on Role of Interim Executive Director

Elizabeth Irvin, currently TWI's Program Director, has agreed to take the reins as Interim Executive Director. "We are very grateful for Elizabeth's willingness to take this on," said Bebe Heiner, speaking on the Board of Director's behalf. "We believe that her hands-on experience as an LCSW and her 4 1/2 years here at TWI puts her in an excellent position to provide direction and leadership to the organization and to make sure that we retain our current momentum."

Ms. Irvin has over 16 years of experience working with women, trauma and recovery. Throughout her career, she has provided services for women in a variety of settings, including domestic violence and sexual assault resource agencies, a primary care integrated medical setting and a comprehensive mental health and substance abuse agency for female offenders. She brings a passion and commitment to our work and a true belief in TWI's mission: that women have the strength and capacity to transform challenging life circumstances into opportunities for growth and positive change. In her position as Program Director, she has worn many hats, including program development, grant writing, supervision and management.

"I am very enthusiastic about the opportunity to be TWI's Interim Executive Director," Elizabeth said. "While I have loved my work as Program Director, I am excited to serve the organization in an additional capacity. I look forward to getting to know more of our supporters and continuing to build on the important work of The Women's Initiative."
The first nine months of operations at our satellite office at the Jefferson School City Center (JSCC) have been incredibly successful. Our Neighborhood Health Outreach Program is fully operational with a complete array of services that embody the mission of The Women’s Initiative, while addressing specific community needs.

Our walking groups and living well support groups have provided over 30 women the opportunity to focus on healthy lifestyle choices and weight loss. In our individual counseling program, women are tackling issues ranging from obesity to childhood trauma to depression. One exciting new program is our wellness walk-in clinic where over 40 women have received same-day assessment, brief interventions and referrals.

“The Living Well group has changed the direction of my life and given me a new way to be in the world.” – Support Group Participant

Our specific outreach efforts to reach underserved communities are working. Demographic reports show that 37% of Jefferson School clients are African American women compared to 10-12% at our anchor location. Over 80% of our clients are below 100% of the federal poverty line.

Our Neighborhood Health Outreach Program has been successful in large part due to JSCC’s the wonderful collaborations that occur on a daily basis with our fellow tenant organizations, like Literacy Volunteers, JABA and Common Ground Healing Arts Center. We are particularly grateful to Martha Jefferson Hospital for the opportunity to share space with their Starr Hill Center and collaborate closely on this new initiative.

If you haven’t been to JSCC yet, come for a delicious salad at JABA’s Vinegar Hill Café and stop by our office for a visit!

Join the Main Street Market Boutiques for GIRLS NIGHT OUT
An After-Hours Shopping Soiree To Benefit The Women’s Initiative
Wednesday, October 23 6-9 pm
Live Music - Local Food Vendors - Percentage of all sales will go to the women’s initiative

Women Artists: A Retrospective
10 Featured Artists:
- Randy Sights Baskerville
- Jane Surr Burton
- Linda Capaccioni
- Terry M. Coffey
- Sylvia F. Gibbs
- Lorraine Momper
- Janet Graham Nault
- Susan Patrick
- Carolyn Ratcliffe
- Jeannine Barton Regan
First Friday, October 4, 5:30—7:30 PM 1101 E High St

Integrated Care at CFC Treating the Whole Person

The Women’s Initiative and the Charlottesville Free Clinic (CFC) have just celebrated our first year of providing comprehensive integrated care for all CFC patients. This unique partnership places a TWI therapist, Liz Ramirez-Weaver LCSW, full-time at CFC to coordinate the program and provide direct services. In the first year over 1000 patients have been screened for mental health issues and 220 have received treatment as a result of this program. A psychiatrist from Region Ten is also co-located at the clinic to provide psychiatric evaluation and medication management.

“Our unique partnership is really on the cutting edge of healthcare. We know that at as many as 80% of all primary care visits have a mental health component. Now we are able to address those needs in the moment with our integrated care program,” says Erika Viccellio, Executive Director of the Free Clinic.

“We before saw you I didn’t know how to channel my negative energy into something positive. I felt like there was always something wrong me. Now I know that I am not alone, and not crazy. It gave me insight to myself and who I am as a person. This in turn helps me deal with every day life especially when dealing with other people.” - CFC Integrated Care Patient

We know this program is working. We use a depression measurement tool and are tracking A1-C levels and patients who access mental health treatment are seeing a reduction in both mental health and physical health symptoms. This is the true measure of success for integrated care! We applaud the CFC and the enormous efforts required to make this program a reality and look forward to continuing this exciting collaboration.
2013 Challenge into Change Essay Contest

Congratulations to all of the amazing women who submitted their inspirational stories into the 2013 Challenge Into Change Essay Contest. "It was extremely hard for our four judges to choose placements. All of these women are to be honored for their triumph over adversity," stated Liz Dorn, Development Director. This year our top three placements were Beth Gager "Walk Slow," Deborah Campbell "Momma Jean," and Myra Anderson "Dear God (A Poem)."

The 2013 Challenge Into Change Essay Contest publication will be available by December. Please let us know if you would like to purchase a copy (for a minimal fee that covers our expenses).

The Women's Initiative is deeply grateful for the energy, talent, and wisdom of writer and writing coach Lesley Foster, 2013 Essay Contest Coordinator. An essay contest cannot occur without a panel of judges who give of their time and talent. Thank you Pie Dumas, Peggy Plews-Ogan, Kerry Day, and Lesley Foster for your caring and thoughtful work and support of this event.

Selected Comments from Judges

"Your story conveys that your healing began with your choices: courage, compassion, gratitude, and a decision to heal. What gifts you give to the world. You "call everyone Sunshine," but it is clear that you are the "Sunshine" in this story."

"The author’s ability to radiate compassion and unconditional love in light of her past is a lesson for us all."

"Genuine and heartfelt, this essay reveals the story of a woman who has overcome an abusive past and miraculously retained her belief in the precious quality of "the innermost space of the heart.""

"Sharing such intimate stories fosters understanding, awakens compassion and reminds us of our similarities instead of our differences." - Lesley Foster, Judge and Event Co-Coordinator

"It was a privilege to be entrusted with people’s stories of challenge and change, and to be one of four judges. The contest serves as a reminder that words are the true currency of human exchange and that we must take time to tell and listen to one another stories."

— Lesley Foster, Event Co-Coordinator

"Isak Dinesen, who wrote Out of Africa, once said, "All sorrows can be borne if we put them in a story or tell a story about them." Ever since I first read that line, I’ve carried it with me. When women bond together in community in such a way that "sisterhood" is created, it gives them an accepting and intimate forum to tell their stories and have them heard and validated by others. The community not only helps to heal their circumstance, but encourages them to grow into their larger destiny." — Sue Monk Kidd, Author of Secret Life of Bees

Volunteer Spotlight: Lesley Foster

Challenge into Change Event Co-Coordinator

Our agency’s ability to provide caring, empowering programming is due to the dedication and compassion of TWI’s team of more than 40 volunteers. Each one of these extraordinary community members deserves our heartfelt thanks and recognition. This edition of the newsletter we have chosen to shine a light of gratitude and acknowledgement on our creative talent, Lesley Foster.

Lesley began volunteering with TWI in 2010 with a desire to share her passion for journal writing. For two years she led a monthly journal workshop, later adding a monthly women’s writing and discussion group into the mix. “Personal writing is a gateway to the inner self,” says Lesley. “It’s a low-tech marvel in a high-tech world.”

In 2013, Lesley became active in TWI’s annual Challenge Into Change Essay Contest serving as Contest Coordinator and one of four judges. She also led several lunchtime workshops coaching essayists on how and why to tell their story. For the 2014 essay contest, she will serve as Committee Chair.

A former communications professional from Washington, DC, and Portland, OR, Lesley is an experienced feature writer, copywriter, magazine editor and writing coach. She has been a journal writer since the 1970s. Today, she is the creative force behind Ink & Inquiry, a workshop-based program fostering personal growth through written inquiry. A mother of two and an incredible talent, we are so thankful for the many ways she has shared her gifts with the community as a TWI volunteer.
Sometimes we have to go slow. We have to walk step by step to where we are headed. We have to feel our feet on the ground and we have to look around us and breathe. Sometimes it feels like even with all those steps we are still in the same old place. We begin to wonder if the view will ever change. And then suddenly, one day, after our feet have carried us far, we find ourselves in a new landscape. All of those steps took us somewhere we weren’t sure we would ever reach. But then we look up and discover that we have actually arrived.

I am feeling like that these days. Like I have finally arrived. In a new place. A place I don’t have to go back from.

There was a time when my world shattered. I tried to find myself spiritually and instead I got very, very lost. I forayed into what we call mental illness. I had a complete break from everything that kept me in the world. I went as far away from what keeps us walking on the ground as a person could go. And then came the psychiatric hospitalizations and the consequences of that. And so not only was I lost but I lost everything in my life as well... my friends, my job, my children, my home.

The result was that for a long time after that I had to walk slow. For many years I got very heavy physically and mentally and spiritually. I slowly rebuilt my life step by step. I got back what I had lost. But I wanted more. I wanted not only my life back but also my most essential self back. I didn’t want to be heavy any more. I wanted to walk with joy in my step again. I wanted to remember what it felt like to have a connection with my spirit and with the earth and with the people around me. So I began walking differently. I began letting myself feel my heart again.

I literally began by walking. I walked in my neighborhood. I noticed the trees and the sky and I paid attention to how my body felt. I started doing yoga. I began to eat better. And I walked differently inside myself as well. I slowly, slowly began reconnecting to my spirituality. I began to meditate and pray. Every time I hit a place that was a scary reminder of where I had been I took a new step forward away from fear and toward beauty and love.

And now I find myself in a new place. A place where I remember but also where I can rest. I can walk when I want to. And I do want to. But I can also sit down under an old tree and enjoy what is all around me. I can be present in a quiet way inside myself. And that was worth the long, hard walk.

Judges Comments:

❖ The author’s voice is gentle and wise. Her essay reveals a hard-earned optimism and an ability to acknowledge the life’s shadows but also to swim in its inherent beauty & joy. ❖
❖ The image of “feeling the ground” is wonderful. ❖
❖ Excellent transformative journey! I was with you step by step. ❖
❖ Your beautifully crafted essay exudes a gentle wisdom and peaceful self-awareness clearly hard-won, but enduring and certain to inspire others. ❖
TWi is deeply grateful to all of the community members who came together to support women in need through our premier fundraising event of the season.

What an inspirational, fun, successful evening! Highlights include: the toddler tractor pull, a surprise appearance from a gorilla in addition to our favorite wrestling bear, a beautiful tree bearing the leaves of family generosity, and delicious food locally grown and given with love.

That our second annual Family Barn Party achieved its goal—raising a full course of therapy for 150 women in need— is thanks to our dedicated party committee. A special thanks goes out to our fabulous co-chairs Elizabeth Fennell and Erika Viccello!

This is truly a unique and marvelous event and we hope you join us in 2014!
THE WOMEN’S INITIATIVE CONTINUES OUR TRADITION OF PROVIDING CARING, EFFECTIVE SERVICES

As The Women’s Initiative has grown tremendously each year since our founding in 2007, our programs remain firmly anchored in our mission statement: **to provide effective counseling services, social support and education to empower women to transform challenging life situations into opportunities for renewed well-being and personal growth.** The numbers in the graph below show that more women receive our services each year as we continue to strive to meet the urgent need for care. While we have grown, we have continued to ensure the quality and effectiveness of our programming through careful evaluation and nationally validated measures. For instance, we know that over 87% of our individual mental health clients experience a significant improvement in emotional and overall well-being, as a result of receiving counseling services with us. Yet, more than these measures, we rely on our clients to share feedback with us and their works show the true measure of our success.

“Seeing my counselor every week, attending an hour to breathe and healthy relationships group got me through an otherwise very bleak time of unemployment, sleep disruption and family trauma. I’m in a much better place thanks to The Women’s Initiative. My counselor, Ariana Williams, was great! Very bright, attentive, full of helpful suggestions, she helped me with accountability to make actual changes.”

“I think it is a huge asset to have this organization happening in this town. I have a better mindset and catch myself when I fall into old behaviors.”

“You are doing an excellent job. I am able to recognize what is causing my anxiety and stop it from increasing.”

![TWI Episodes of Care Program Comparisons: 2010 - 2013](chart.png)