Dear Friends:

We know that access to effective, evidence-based counseling is crucial to women who are struggling. And we also know that cost is what prohibits so many women from getting the mental health care they need. That’s why we’re here, offering therapy on a sliding scale, as well as walk-in clinics and support groups that are cost-free. Your support is so vital to our ability to care for our community. Every donation ensures that we can keep our doors open to all women.

As the Executive Director of The Women’s Initiative, I am guided by the knowledge that there are still thousands of women in our community who need mental health care but aren’t receiving it. This is what is on my mind as I guide our agency through a time of expansion. Our staff is growing; our footprint is widening. I am excited to tell you this—and invite you to read more about it on Page 2—because it means the one thing that matters most: our capacity to serve women in our community is growing. Whatever language they speak—read on Page 3—whatever their history of trauma—read on Page 4—we are proud to be where women turn for mental health care as we approach our tenth year in Charlottesville.

As a recent client shared, “I feel better today. Life is possible again today. Thank you.”

Here, healing is possible, and it happens every day. It is our privilege to work with women as they build their inner strength and improve their lives. Sometimes that manifests in something big: a move away from an abusive relationship; a job interview in a new career field. Sometimes it is something that sounds small although we know it isn’t: finally letting yourself take a minute or ten at the end of the long day to sit quietly and reflect and relax. Other times, we are literally helping a woman choose to live another day.

With your help, we will continue to make these milestones possible for all women in our community.

With love and gratitude,

Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW
Executive Director

At TWI, Women Regain Their Ability to Parent, Work, and Thrive

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<th>Reduce/Eliminate Symptoms</th>
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Our clients have come to regard The Women’s Initiative as a place for healing in part because of the safe and welcoming atmosphere of our anchor location at 1101 East High St.

As our organization moves toward its tenth year, our mental health services for women regardless of ability to pay have become a cornerstone in this community. Our strategic planning process revealed that we are now a primary provider of mental health care to low-income women.

That is why we are doubling our space at our anchor location by expanding into the lower floor.

Bob Gray, of Shank and Gray Architects, has generously donated his time and expertise as architect for the renovation.

“Time after time, our clients talk about how healing is possible at The Women’s Initiative because of the safe and welcoming space that we’ve created,” said Executive Director Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW. “We are thrilled that we are able to expand at our current location, working with Bob Gray’s thoughtful drawings to assure that those core requirements for effective therapy of safety and a warm, welcoming environment are sustained.”

We have three strategic goals in mind as we renovate and expand our office:

1. SERVE MORE WOMEN

We’re proud of the work we’ve done in helping women in our community to heal, yet we know there is more work to do, and many thousands more women to reach.

We’ve expanded our staff as well as the number of people serving as volunteer (pro bono) therapists. With five additional offices, we’ll be able to schedule more clients every day, shorten our waitlist, hold more social support group offerings, and provide care to more women in need.

2. MEET THE NEEDS OF WOMEN IMPACTED BY TRAUMA

As we develop a comprehensive trauma program, we are creating a more holistic treatment environment for women who have experienced traumatic life events. Our new large group room will enable us to offer movement-based healing activities that are known to help release trauma that is stored in the body.

3. DEVELOP OUR CLINICAL TRAINING PROGRAM

It is our goal to increase the entire community’s capacity to treat women in need. That is why we are focusing on becoming a home for clinical training with an emphasis on clinical excellence and growing a diverse clinical workforce.

The new large group room will be a space where we can host clinical trainings for our staff, pro bono therapists, trainees, and others in the community.

Our expanded space will also include therapy offices designed to enable tech-assisted and live supervision to ensure the highest quality of training.

Thank you for supporting our work during this exciting time!

Welcome New Staff

We’ve welcomed five new staff members to The Women’s Initiative in 2016.

Get to know the newest faces of vital mental health care for women in our community.

Donna Dean, LCSW
Title: Clinical Services Director
Education: BA, University of Virginia; MSW, Smith College School for Social Work
Hometown: Waynesboro
Best thing about working at The Women’s Initiative: It is really special as a therapist to be able to provide this service to women who otherwise wouldn’t be able to access therapy and support.
What do you do for self care? I practice yoga every day.

Sarah Medley
Title: Executive Assistant
Education: BA, State University of New York at Geneseo; PhD in Natural Climate Variability from University of California Santa Barbara
Hometown: Born in Louisiana, grew up in upstate New York and New Jersey
Best thing about working at The Women’s Initiative: I think working with all the staff is the best part—everyone is so supportive. It’s a nice environment to be in. Also: helping to get the work done that’s so important in our community.
What do you do for self-care? Take time to maintain friendships.
Access to Therapy for All—in Any Language

The Women’s Initiative has long been a community leader in offering vital counseling and support groups in Spanish through our Bienestar program. Now, we’re making sure that we can serve women who speak almost any other language.

WHY IT MATTERS

As a refugee resettlement site, Charlottesville has welcomed 3,000 refugees from thirty-two countries since 1998, according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

As a population, refugees have a higher incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and there are only limited ways for them to access mental health treatment. That’s why The Women’s Initiative is prioritizing access through the use of interpreter services.

“We are deepening our mission and extending our service and care to women in need who traditionally are underserved,” said Social Support Coordinator Leigh Freilich, LCSW.

IT STARTS WITH A PHONE CALL

In 2016, The Women’s Initiative implemented a phone system that allows us access to interpreters in over 200 languages over the phone. Propio enables our clinical and administrative staff to communicate with almost anyone who calls or walks in the door seeking support.

“The interpreter line has been an important step,” said Bienestar Coordinator Ingrid Ramos, LPC. “Now, as a staff, all of us are involved in opening the lines of communication to people with limited English proficiency.”

PARTNERSHIP WITH IRC INTERPRETERS

In order to offer therapy to clients with limited English proficiency, The Women’s Initiative has partnered with the IRC. IRC trains and supports interpreters that speak twenty different languages and are able to come directly to our offices to assist with appointments.

The IRC recently trained our staff on how to work with interpreters in the therapy setting, and our agency is now capable of seeing clients using IRC interpreters in the room, in addition to phone interpreting through Propio.

“Our services should be accessible to all women in our community,” Freilich said. “Interpreter services and translated materials are an important step in the right direction.”

EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

The Women’s Initiative is also working to improve refugee mental health beyond the walls of our agency.

Shelly Wood, MSW
Title: Mental Health Therapist
Education: Bachelor’s of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Virginia; MSW, Virginia Commonwealth University
Hometown: Charlottesville
Best thing about working at The Women’s Initiative: Everything. My coworkers, the population we serve, everything.
What do you do for self-care? Monthly massages; stolen mindful moments throughout the day; exercise; music and meditation.

Amanda Korman
Title: Communications and Outreach Coordinator
Education: BA, Williams College; MFA, University of Virginia
Hometown: Cleveland, OH
Best thing about working at The Women’s Initiative: I love that my job is to spread the word about our services so that more women in our community can access mental health care.
What do you do for self-care? Go for walks, read, pet my cat.

Patricia Sanders
Title: Client Support Specialist
Education: Bachelor’s of Law, Universidad de San Martin de Porres (Peru); Master’s of Law, American University Washington College of Law
Hometown: Lima, Peru
Best thing about working at The Women’s Initiative: To work with amazing, fun, passionate, selfless people—and being able to speak in Spanish is a plus!
What do you do for self-care? Take long walks, exercise, talk to friends, do breathing exercises, and spend time with my cat.
Healing From Trauma

Traumatic experiences negatively impact all aspects of a person’s health, and they’re more common than you think. Here’s how your support helps The Women’s Initiative lead a community effort to change the way we treat this serious public health problem.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is most commonly associated with war, but soldiers back from battle aren’t the only ones suffering from PTSD and other debilitating effects of traumatic experiences.

For so many women in our community, past traumas impact every aspect of their lives.

“People with trauma are in lots of pain and are involved in habits that continue their suffering,” said Donna Dean, LCSW, Clinical Services Director.

That’s why The Women’s Initiative is at the forefront of a local effort to make trauma-informed care the standard in Central Virginia.

Since its early days as an agency, “The Women’s Initiative has made sure that we have EMDR and other trauma treatment as a component of our work, recognizing the prevalence and severity of trauma in women’s lives,” said Executive Director Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW, who is on the steering committee of a new Trauma-Informed Care Network made up of care providers and community leaders in Charlottesville.

This local movement is part of a broader national shift toward trauma-informed care. A landmark study in the 1990s established the fact that traumatic childhood experiences such as physical, sexual, and emotional abuse have measurable adverse effects on many aspects of physical and mental health, even leading to early death.

As a part of its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, The Women’s Initiative is committed to creating a comprehensive trauma program. That means creating greater awareness of all the ways to heal trauma—including therapy, movement, groups, and education.

“We’re building this program in such a way that clients and the community understand the holistic nature of the impact of trauma and the healing requirements for trauma work to be successful,” Irvin said.

“The best part of this approach is that there is hope,” Irvin added. “Healing from trauma is possible.”

Many adults have histories of childhood trauma

28% report a history of childhood physical abuse

21% report a history of childhood sexual abuse

Source: Adverse Childhood Experiences survey of 17,000 adults, 1995-1997

Volunteer Spotlight

Meet One of Our Wonderful Pro Bono Therapists, Emily Lewis, LCSW: “There’s a very high quality of care here.”

In addition to our nine staff therapists, The Women’s Initiative has a dozen talented pro bono therapists who volunteer their time and expertise treating clients. Their work enables us to see many more women in need.

Emily Lewis, LCSW, joined The Women’s Initiative as a pro bono therapist after forty years as a therapist in Washington, DC, California, Indiana, and Virginia. She has worked in private practice as well as in emergency departments doing crisis intervention. She began using Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, or EMDR, in 1998 and brings her years of experience with the evidence-based PTSD treatment to her clients here at TWI.

Why did you want to volunteer as a pro bono therapist for The Women’s Initiative?

I’ve had such success with using EMDR in trauma recovery with clients, and I just felt I shouldn’t let that experience go to waste.

How would you describe EMDR?

It’s a process that can break mental, emotional and physical patterns, and it helps the client separate past trauma from present experience. EMDR is the therapy that I find clients respond to the most quickly, and they really like the results. The clients get resolution of their issues more quickly.

What do you like about working at The Women’s Initiative?

I can say without reservation that this is the best place I’ve worked clinically, because attention is paid to the continual improvement of therapists’ skills through training and case discussion.

There’s a very high quality of care here. There’s also very high quality and reliable support from the board and the community. I’m really impressed that there is such a large and generous community of people who support this program for women.

Staff Trained in Evidence-Based Trauma Treatment

As of this fall, all of the full-time therapists at The Women’s Initiative are trained in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a primary evidence-based protocol for PTSD.

“EMDR is becoming a sought-after treatment by people in the community,” said Clinical Services Director Donna Dean, LCSW. “They know what it is, they say, ‘My friend did it, and she felt better.’”

Part of what clients appreciate about EMDR is that it is simply a way to treat trauma more succinctly.

“That’s part of why it was developed: because treating trauma is excruciating,” Dean said. “This is an attempt to treat trauma more humanely, more quickly, more safely, in a way that’s less triggering, in a way where the trauma is healed in a controlled environment.”

“When people are traumatized, part of the brain gets frozen in that trauma,” said Clinical Coordinator Aisha Hayat, LPC, “which is part of why it’s so hard to heal: when people are triggered they can easily become stuck in the past and might relive traumatic memories. EMDR seems to literally rewrite the brain, helping that trauma network to resolve and move in a different direction.”
Together Our Community Raises $100,000 for Vital Mental Health Services for Women

This year’s 5th Annual Family Barn Party raised $100,000 to bring vital mental health services to women in need.

The Women’s Initiative Board and staff are so grateful to the many incredible individuals who invested hundreds of hours of creativity, thought leadership and boots-on-the-ground hard work. A special thanks to our new Party Co-Chairs Kristin Cory, Barkley Laing, and Holen Lewis. We can’t thank you enough.

And this important fundraiser would not be possible without the generous support of Cynnie Davis and the Bellair Farm crew. Thank you!

IN-KIND DONORS
THANK YOU for your generosity!
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Greenies (Vegetarian Buffet)
Gropen (Signage)
J W Townsend (Family Tree)
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Monica Prichard  Mary Rekosh  Emily Westlake

Children greet our infamous wrestling bear at the 2016 Family Barn Party, right. Above, a partygoer brushes Foxboro Farms’ miniature donkey!
I was in a very bad, beaten down state when I contacted the office. I was hopeless and felt I had lost everything. TWI handled my case promptly, which gave me hope ... I’ll always feel indebted to TWI for providing such a worthy and effective public service. You can count on my support.

—TWI Client

2016 community writing contest celebrates women’s voices

The Women’s Initiative is seeking short essays and poetry for its annual writing contest honoring women who have transformed life challenges into opportunities for change.

The 2016 Challenge into Change Writing Contest is accepting entries of 500 words or less about a woman (yourself or someone you know) surmounting a difficult situation in her life.

The deadline for entries is December 15, 2016.

Winners will receive cash prizes, and all entrants will have the chance to be published in our Challenge into Change book and will be honored at a ceremony at the 2017 Virginia Festival of the Book in Charlottesville.

Entries can be in various languages. For full submission guidelines, visit www.thewomensinitiative.org/change or call (434) 872-0047.

In 2017
The Women’s Initiative will celebrate 10 years of providing vital mental health care for women regardless of ability to pay.

Your support makes it possible for us to continue this work for women in our community. Thank you.