Dear Friends,

As I sit down to type this letter, I am struck by the fragility of life. My cousin’s baby is fighting for his way in this world and has proven to be a miracle of strength and resilience. I can say the same thing about the women we serve at The Women’s Initiative. While we do not share particular client stories in order to protect the confidentiality of each woman’s treatment, here is what I can share. Every day our clients are taking heroic actions to reclaim their lives. Whether working with her therapist on a safety contract to prevent suicide, doing EMDR therapy to heal horrific childhood traumas so she can be more present as a mother or overcoming paralyzing anxiety so that she can return to work, all of our clients are striving to regain their inner strength and rebuild their lives.

This newsletter focuses on our mental health counseling program, the heart of the work of The Women’s Initiative. **Our services are designed to reduce barriers, such as cost and stigma, so that ALL women have access to vital, life-saving treatment.** Our free walk-in clinics assure that everyone can be seen within days of reaching out for care. We offer on-site childcare and specialize in providing culturally responsive counseling for underserved women.

Our clients repeatedly share that they feel welcomed and safe in our space. This security is critical to ensuring a successful treatment outcome. Over and over we hear, “You are the only place I can go for help.” **452 women have accessed care through our counseling program so far this year, more than this time last year.** When we include women who have accessed our education and outreach programs, this number jumps to over 1405. As the need for care has grown, you will see in this newsletter how we have met that need through hiring talented staff and pro bono therapists.

While it is true that life can be fragile, I remain inspired by the resilience I witness each day as our clients journey towards healing and growth.

With deep appreciation,

Elizabeth Irvin, LCSW
Poverty and financial hardship are decisively correlated with mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and other common mental disorders. According to the World Health Organization, the relationship between poverty and mental illness is cyclical: poverty increases the risk of mental health disorders, and having a mental illness increases the likelihood of descending into poverty. Women are also more likely to suffer from mental issues than men at every age. This is especially critical for those without proper insurance or access to mental healthcare due to financial strain.

The vicious cycle of poverty and mental disorders

Studies also show that improving mental health causes financial well-being to increase. Researchers compared the impact of direct cash transfer programs to the impact of mental health intervention programs, and found that improving mental healthcare offered serious economic returns to households, while direct cash transfers provided no discernable change in mental welfare. Given this fact, it is especially important to overcome the stigma of seeking mental healthcare, and also to provide healthcare that is accessible to everyone, no matter their ability to pay.

In Charlottesville, poverty and income inequality are huge problems. A startling 25% of people in Charlottesville live below the poverty line, compared to 11% in all of Virginia. 50% of Charlottesville schoolchildren qualify for free or reduced lunch, which exceeds the state average by 16%.

The Women’s Initiative is working to address this cycle of poverty and mental illness. By providing evidence-based, quality services, no matter one’s ability to pay, The Women’s Initiative strengthens not only the mental health of the community, but also combats the problems of poverty and financial difficulties that plague Charlottesville. As one client stated about her mental health treatment with us, “I am now more equipped to move forward into my future. Each session helped me with vital support.”

“I was able to work through the depression and anxiety I was feeling to concentrate on finding employment” - TWI Client
New clinical staff provide increased access to care

Leigh Freilich, LCSW
Therapist and Social Support Coordinator

Leigh has been a social worker in the Charlottesville community since 2006. She has experience providing therapy and counseling services to individuals, children, and families. A strong commitment to human rights, social justice, and equality anchor her work. She especially enjoys working with women, refugee and immigrant populations, and members of the LGBTQ community. Leigh obtained a Master of Social Work degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and has specialized training in the treatment of trauma utilizing EMDR and Trauma-Focused CBT.

“I feel incredibly fortunate to be welcomed into The Women’s Initiative community. The sincere care and compassion for women and for their ability to make changes has been evident since my first day.” - Aisha

Aisha Hayat, LPC
Therapist and Clinical Coordinator

Aisha received her master’s degree in Counselor Education from the University of Virginia. Aisha first began her commitment to promoting and empowering women during her internship at the UVA Women’s Center. Since that time, she has been providing counseling and community support to women and their families as they overcome barriers and manage mental illness, trauma, and grief. Aisha approaches counseling from a person-centered, strengths-based framework, and she regularly incorporates elements of family systems and mindfulness into practice.

“I feel incredibly fortunate to be welcomed into The Women’s Initiative community. The sincere care and compassion for women and for their ability to make changes has been evident since my first day.” - Aisha

Hilary Steinitz, MSW
Therapist

Hilary received her master’s degree in Clinical Social Work from VCU. She has worked as a clinician with Region Ten Community Services Board, where she has provided assessment and therapy to clients diagnosed with severe mental illness and struggling with a range of issues, including loss and trauma, addiction, and disordered eating. At The Women’s Initiative, she is committed to helping women heal amid challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and relational stress. She draws from a number of treatment modalities, including ego psychology, brief dynamic practice, and mindfulness. Hilary also holds an MFA in Creative Writing (fiction) from UVA, and her interest in story and the creative process bears upon her clinical work as well. Additionally, a yoga teacher since 2000, Hilary brings to her therapeutic work an appreciation for the connection between body and mind.

Liz Ramirez-Weaver, LCSW
Therapist

Liz has over 13 years of bilingual Spanish professional experience as a social worker, both in New York and the Charlottesville community. Liz worked as an Early Intervention Specialist, forensic social worker and as the Integrated Care Coordinator through The Women’s Initiative’s collaboration with the Charlottesville Free Clinic. Liz supports the Bienestar program as a therapist providing services in Spanish and English.

“Kirsten is fantastic and I am so grateful I got to work with her. She allowed me a place to come to look at difficult emotions and anxiety with acceptance.” - TWI Client

“Hilary helped me learn to express my emotions and deal with the grief of losing my daughter.” - TWI Client
TWI focuses on four key strategies to ensure clinical excellence: the recruitment of high quality staff and pro-bono therapists, training in best practice care, supervision and quality assurance, and client feedback and evaluation. This article highlights a few of the evidence-based training opportunities staff and volunteers have completed recently.

Clinical staff and volunteers attended an intensive training in Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) to treat clients presenting with trauma. EMDR works to reprocess and reduce the pain associated with memories of traumatic events. Carolyn Schuyler, LCSW, board member and local trauma expert, has provided our team and other community therapists with ongoing consultation in this highly effective treatment approach.

Karen Ingersoll, PhD with UVA’s Behavioral Sciences Department, has served as a consultant to our clinical team this year. She is a member of the International Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers and will be offering a two-day training to TWI clinicians in August. Motivational Interviewing is an evidence based practice that promotes healthy behavioral change.

Additionally, TWI clinicians attended a 12-hour training in Brené Brown’s The Daring Way, an approach to work with shame and vulnerability with empathy and compassion. This training gave our staff and pro bono therapists an opportunity to find new interventions to enable our clients a more profound healing experience.

We are very fortunate to have a wealth of highly trained and talented professionals who contribute to the excellence of our clinical practices, as well as a clinical team that is dynamic, creative, innovative and effective. As Dr. Lewis Weber of Dr. Lewis Weber and Associates shares, “I am very grateful to have The Women’s Initiative as a very important member of our mental health community. They provide quality services to a population of women that have frequently been forgotten.”

What is EMDR?

EMDR psychotherapy is an evidence-based treatment approach to trauma. EMDR is designated as an effective treatment by the American Psychiatric Association, the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense, and many other agencies. The goal of EMDR is to process the traumatic experiences that have a lasting negative effect and interfere with one’s life. During trauma, the brain cannot process information normally, and thus remembering the trauma can be as painful as experiencing it for the first time. Through EMDR, normal information processing resumes, and remembering the negative event becomes less painful.

Our treatment has proven results

- 84% of clients experienced increased well-being
- 83% of clients had improved interpersonal relationships
- 81% of clients had improved social interactions
- 92% of clients obtained coping skills

January—June 2015

“You saved my life and therefore the lives of my children.” - TWI Client
Girls’ Night Out

What an evening! Women coming together to support women is a powerful formula for change. Together we raised nearly $50,000.00, funding 940 hours of counseling sessions.

We are grateful! Thank you to our fabulous party committee, party-goers and our local artists. The Amazing Woman Silent Art Auction raised 160 hours of one-on-one counseling sessions.

We are also grateful to our headlining sponsor, Signature, for believing in our mission and supporting women in need in our community.

THANK YOU! The Women’s Initiative is a community-based, grassroots agency. We are deeply grateful to all of you in our community who help women regain their ability to parent, work and thrive through your important financial support. Last year individuals contributed 70% to our total revenue. Community-minded businesses contributed nearly $100,000 in sponsorships and corporate gifts. Local grant makers provided another 22% of revenue.

Together you strengthen our community. As the need and demand for our services grows, so does our need for support. Your contributions help us deepen and expand lifesaving care to women. Your financial support and leadership, in-kind donations and volunteerism is incredible and incredibly important. Thank you for giving from your heart.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Earth laughs in flowers.” Our thanks to Hedge for beautiful arrangements for our events and donating a percentage of proceeds from their recent “Helping Hands” bouquet to The Women’s Initiative.

By Liz Dorn, Development Director

We are a grassroots agency, locally supported

Charlottesville Multisports Jefferson Sprint Triathlon / Duathlon

For the past four years in July, Charlottesville Multisports has selected The Women’s Initiative as its Jefferson Sprint Triathlon/Duathlon beneficiary. "I have experienced and witnessed the impact physical exercise and nutrition has on the mind. It's my passion to help people have fun and enjoy life through endurance sports," says owner Kate Lucas. Kate's Jefferson Sprint "Tri & Du" draws a great high-energy crowd from seasoned area triathletes to beginners such as Peyton Tochterman whose loss in the race to a close friend Dr. Martin Katz turned into a great boon for The Women’s Initiative. Tochterman and Katz had made a bet: whomever came in second of the two in the race, would don an adult-sized Hello Kitty Onesie. The loser would put on the costume and walk from the Pavilion to the Omni and back one night at Friday's After Five. Inspired by the race, and with a natural "big heart," Peyton not only honored the bet but continued to raise money for The Women’s Initiative on the Mall and during the concert. Thank you Kate, Peyton, and Dr. Katz for your amazing ingenuity and compassion for our community!

“I would not have been able to afford a therapist.” - TWI Client
The Women’s Initiative provides vital mental health services for women regardless of ability to pay.

Each year The Women’s Initiative holds a writing contest that honors women who transform challenge into change. If you are interested in learning about our writing workshops, or the contest, please call our office or email us at:

change@thewomensinitiative.org

434.872.0047
www.thewomensinitiative.org

The Women’s Initiative provides vital mental health services for women regardless of ability to pay.

TWI Welcomes New Board Members

Jim Haden was president and chief executive officer of Martha Jefferson Health Services from 1993-2015. Among his many distinguished appointments, Mr. Haden served as a board member on the Federal Reserve Board of Richmond from (1998-2003). He is a former board member of the Charlottesville Chamber of Commerce.

Bruce Murray has served as Chairman of both the Boards of St. Anne’s Belfield School and the Charlottesville Free Clinic. She has also served on Boards of Martha Jefferson Hospital, where she co-chaired the most recent Capital Campaign, and is on the Blue Ridge PACE Board.

“If it wasn’t for TWI, I wouldn’t be on this road towards recovery and healing, but most of all, change.” - TWI Client