

Home provides women with more than somewhere to sleep

Marian House celebrates 25th anniversary

By Meghan Walton

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When Tonya Watts was growing up, her father sold drugs and her home was never a very responsible place to be. She became addicted to drugs, and it wasn't until years later that she realized she needed help to get her life back together.

"I started to feel like I was losing my spirit," said Ms. Watts, 35. "I thought there was something bigger in life for me."

While going through drug treatment at Gaurdenzia, a treatment facility for people affected by chemical dependency, mental illness and other related conditions, Ms. Watts' counselor recommended she seek help from Marian House.

"One of the house managers at Gaurdenzia said, 'If you have an opportunity to go to Marian House it's not luck, it's a blessing,'" Ms. Watts said.

For the last 25 years Marian House has been helping homeless, abused and addicted women get back on their feet. Marian House provides housing assistance, education of every level, scholarships and above all respect. To celebrate its achievements Marian House will be holding a concert to benefit its educational endowment fund, which provides scholarships to former residents who are employed but unable to afford to continue their education.

The concert will take place at Mercy High School's Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Auditorium, Baltimore, on April 28 featuring vocalist Lea Gilmore and the Morgan State University choir.

"Housing, counseling and love first" is Executive Director Sister Augusta Reilly's, R.S.M. motto. "Some of them need to let out their anger and grief. The staff is here to let them vent in a healthy way."

Marian House was started by three women, Sister Margie Beatty, R.S.M.; Jane Harrison, a British-born laywoman; and Sister Josanna Abromaitis, S.S.N.D. These women had a common desire to help inmates being released from Baltimore City's Women's Detention Center. They recruited supporters including Archbishop William Donald Borders and former Mayor William Donald Schaefer, said Sister Augusta.

On April 12, 1982, the first resident moved in to a newly renovated convent building on Gorsuch Avenue and the dream became a reality. Last year the program had 105 women with 35 children, and this year the program has close to 80 women, said Sister Augusta.

Marian House is currently expanding its temporary housing by constructing Serenity Place across the street from its current location.

"It's like the 'Wizard of Oz.' They have given me my courage back. The good thing is it's not a dream, it's reality," said Rochelle Barrett, 42, a house manager at Gaurdenzia where she was once a patient.

"If I didn't have the help from Marian House I wouldn't be able to go back to school," said Ms. Watts. "Most of us come in here not feeling very good about ourselves and they restore some of our self-esteem."



CR Staff/Owen Sweeney III
Marian House, Baltimore, resident Stephanie Addison, straightens up her room.



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Jim Vincent (center right), site manager for Serenity Place, gives Marian House residents Danielle McPhearson (left), Willette Fair and Mia Smith a tour of the construction site. Serenity Place will open in September 2007 in the former Holy Spirit School, Baltimore and will house 15 single and four family apartments.



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Sister Melvina Bennett, S.S.N.D. (left), watches as Victoria Silver works in the computer lab.



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Sister Augusta Reilly, R.S.M., is the executive director of Marian House in Baltimore.