Dear Friend:

“Our prime purpose in life is to help others.” Those simple words of the Dalai Lama guide our mission at Volunteers of America.

Today, the communities we serve need us more than ever. With your help, VOA is there for families who count on us, serving in more ways than you can imagine. We reach out to veterans in desperate need of affordable housing. We connect low-income families to high-quality health care. We provide HIV testing and education. We welcome adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities into loving and safe homes. We help young people find productive alternatives to the criminal justice system.

With more than 40 programs across Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia and Clark and Floyd Counties in Indiana, Volunteers of America provides proven and results-oriented professional service and care to thousands of individuals every year. We are there to do the hard work for people who call on us during their most difficult times.

In this issue of Inspire, you’ll read about seniors living in award-winning housing in Tennessee. You’ll read about a family that escaped domestic abuse and started a new life at Unity House. You’ll learn more about how our rapid rehousing team helps families avoid homelessness. We’ll show you how we are expanding to confront the opioid and addiction crisis. And we’re honored to tell the stories of VOA team members, supporters and community partners who change lives every day.

So much more must be done. But that’s why VOAs prime purpose is to help others, and with your support, we’re honored to do it.

Jennifer Hancock
President and CEO
“Miss Martha stood by me and told me she was proud of me. I’ve never had anybody do that for me before. I wouldn’t be standing here today if it weren’t for Freedom House. They believed in me,” Holly said.

After graduating from Freedom House, Holly, James and Rita moved into transitional housing at VOA’s Unity House, one of very few programs in Kentucky that provides housing for entire families in recovery. The seamless continuity of care is key to VOA’s commitment to meeting families’ housing needs while they stay focused on long-term recovery.

At Unity House, James and Rita have made friends with other children and James says his best friend is one of his new Unity House playmates. Both children are looking forward to a new school year. The Unity House staff has located long-term housing for Holly, and helped her with her job search.

Holly’s long-term goals represent huge growth from just a few months ago – she’s ready for a permanent home and a good job, and is feeling more hopeful than she has in a very long time.

“I’ve realized how strong I am. I moved hours away with my children to a place I had never been before and we’re doing better. I’m not afraid for my future now,” Holly said.

Volunteers of America’s Back to School program is designed for families just like Holly, Rita and James. VOA supports families with school supplies and clothes tailored to their specific needs. VOA also provides the financial support to cover costs as they prepare for the classroom. From backpacks to coats to notebooks, the VOA community gives families everything they need for a great school year.

When you support our Back to School campaign, you are changing lives, just like Holly, James and Rita’s.

“A New Home, and New Hope, with VOA

Holly lived most of her life in Southeastern Kentucky and had never made the nearly four-hour trip to Louisville – until she came to VOA for life-changing care.

“I couldn’t believe how big everything was. And how beautiful – especially the churches,” Holly said.

Holly was escaping from desperate living conditions. After the death of her father and sister, Holly struggled with substance use disorder. She was facing constant violence from an abusive husband that left her afraid for her life.

She made the difficult decision to start a new life at VOA’s Freedom House. Relocating to Louisville was a big change from a home where she sometimes had to drive miles to get cell phone service, but she was ready to travel any distance for the chance for a stable, sober future. She only had one condition – she needed a recovery program where she could take her children, seven-year-old Rita and six-year-old James.

“I knew I needed to go into rehab. But I needed someplace where I could bring my kids. Recovery had to be for all of us,” Holly said.

She found that opportunity at Freedom House, VOA’s recovery program that is a national model for care for pregnant and parenting women. Freedom House provides comprehensive, trauma-informed services that focus on housing, employment and education. The Freedom House program has a rigorous schedule with group and individual therapy and classes including parenting, life skills, conflict resolution and much more.

VOA’s program requires vulnerability and determination, and Holly struggled at first.

“After three days I was ready to go home. I was about to call my abusive husband and tell him to pick me up. But they stood by me with personal support and commitment,” Holly said, singling out Freedom House Supervisor and Peer Support Specialist Martha for particular gratitude.

“Now my kids aren’t at home with yelling and screaming all of the time. They’re not scared – they are more like themselves. They needed something new, and we have it here,” Holly said.
161 CHILDREN ARE COUNTING ON US

SUPPORT VOA’S BACK TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

• Make a tax-deductible contribution
• Donate gift cards for Back to School clothes and school supplies
• Organize a collection drive at your place of employment, civic group or place of worship
• Shop our Amazon Wish List
• Register to volunteer to provide tutoring and other support services at voamid.org/volunteer

Contact Laura Ryan at LauraR@voamid.org or (502) 636-4660 to help or learn more.

Click here to view our Amazon Wish List
BUILDING STABLE HOMES AND STABLE FUTURES

"Before I found Volunteers of America I was homeless and in and out of hotels. If it weren’t for the Rapid Rehousing program, I would honestly still be in a terrible situation with my son’s dad,” said Chelsy Smith, VOA Rapid-Rehousing client.

For 38 years VOA Home has been providing emergency housing for families in Louisville and helping them locate stable and affordable long-term homes. While VOA’s team provided support for unhoused individuals in Louisville, VOA knew families like Chelsy’s in the surrounding counties faced barriers that prevented them from receiving the support they needed – and their challenges only grew during the Covid pandemic.

To help Chelsy and so many others, in November of 2020 VOA expanded services and brought the Rapid Rehousing Program to 13 counties surrounding Louisville. VOA’s Rapid Rehousing program has been active in Louisville since 2017 and empowers families to work toward long-term housing stability – providing case management and budgeting to ensure that they will be successful.

Associate Program Manager Danielle Cavanaugh and Outreach Case Managers Andrea House and Amber Jones oversee work in the 13 counties and locate individuals in need of support.

“We went to low-income apartments and the housing authorities. When they had to turn someone down because they didn’t have available units, we locate individuals in need of support. Associate Program Manager Danielle Cavanaugh and Outreach Case Managers Andrea House and Amber Jones oversee work in the 13 counties and locate individuals in need of support.”

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Chelsy found VOA February of 2021. After escaping an abusive relationship, she and her son, three-year-old Laithyn, were looking for support to get back on their feet. Chelsy had a job, but lacked the savings for a deposit on an apartment. The Rapid Rehousing program supports clients while helping them build habits that maintain financial stability. VOA paid for a security deposit and the first three months of Chelsy’s rent. The financial support allowed her to find a home that was close to her son’s school and start a savings account to build a financially stable future for her family.

“The biggest barrier for our clients is that they don’t have good family support. I think that’s why it’s great for us to be there for them,” Amber said.

Chelsy is now working and saving for Cosmetology School to be an Esthetician. “I’m very grateful for this program, it’s been so helpful and Amber is very sweet,” Chelsy said.

Imagine being 28 years old and having everything you could want: A family with a home, and a career with a bright future. That was Jason Browning’s story before substance use disorder took over his life.

“I actually had things going on in my life,” said Jason. “I kept setting goals, I had these great morals, my family was religious, my dad was a preacher. I knew the things I should be doing, and I did them.”

He was a computer programmer by trade and eventually landed a director position at a large insurance company. While moving his family into a new house, he suffered a foot and ankle injury. The injury was significant and Jason was prescribed opiates for the pain.

“I hated them at first,” said Jason. “They would make me sick and I would throw up. But after I threw up I thought, ‘ah-oh, I kind of like this.’”

Soon, like many who struggle with substance use disorder, he found that the opioids were helping him cope with repressed childhood trauma. “I never really dealt with it, but when I took that pill, it all went away,” said Jason.

He continued to exploit his injury to feed his growing opiate tolerance. Eventually, the prescription ran out. He became desperate and his struggles escalated.

“Relapse doesn’t have to be everybody’s story, it wasn’t mine for most of the time, but this past time it was.”

At Liberty Place, Jason has found the hope and confidence he has been seeking for so long. Working closely with the staff at Liberty Place, he’s found a sense of connection and understanding that was lacking in other treatment and recovery attempts he made for years. His main motivation is his children and a strong desire to be a positive example for his second child.

Jason is working hard to turn his life around. “This is life or death,” said Jason. “Relapse doesn’t have to be everybody’s story...”

His role at the insurance company gave him access to a list of clients who had let their opiate prescriptions expire. He used those prescriptions and eventually was caught and arrested. His wife was pregnant with their second child.

Jason knew things had to change. He secured a plea deal for taking responsibility for his actions. After nine months in prison, he was released to a halfway house. He began a period of recovery, but his path was difficult.

After more than a decade, Jason relapsed. In June of 2021, he overdosed and had to be revived by paramedics. Fortunately, he found Volunteers of America. His near-death experience changed the way he views his recovery at Liberty Place.

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“I’m really proud of my kids,” Jason said. “I want to show them you don’t have to do what I did, because it definitely changes your life.”
BUILDING HOPE

Volunteers of America is one of the region’s largest providers of services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, serving more than 170 individuals in Tennessee, Northern Kentucky and Clark and Floyd Counties in Indiana. VOA operates welcoming, comfortable and safe homes and provides around-the-clock care to individuals and families who count on our expertise and compassion.

Of course, we prioritize the health and safety of the adults we serve. But our work is about much more than providing for day-to-day needs. The most important need of many adults with disabilities is not simply for care – but for connection. Our team of committed professionals make sure VOA clients don’t feel lonely or isolated and consider building engagement with the community a vital goal. We do this important work in so many ways – from regular shopping outings to social activities in homes to trips to fun events that clients choose.

This commitment to ending isolation for the people we serve led VOA to change how we refer to our professional services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. “VOA Community” captures our work and commitment, and is the new name for our program. It honors the dedication of our amazing team and it captures the core values that drive our mission.

HEALTHY MOUTH, HEALTHY YOU CAMPAIGN LaunchES

Volunteers of America knows that taking care of your oral health is a vital part of overall health and wellness. That is why VOA is working with Southeastern Kentucky community partners on a campaign to build awareness and improve oral health for Kentuckians.

VOA’s Healthy Mouth, Healthy You campaign is highlighting the importance of oral health and connects families with dental care providers in their local communities. They have joined with the Kentucky Beverage Association, Avēsis and community partners across Kentucky, including the Kentucky Dental Association, on the campaign. Healthy Mouth, Healthy You kicked off with a press conference in Frankfort on February 8th, where the Kentucky legislature proclaimed Children’s Oral Health Awareness Day to celebrate the campaign.

The effort is focused on outreach and education to teach children about proper dental care, including brushing, flossing and regular dental check-ups. Healthy Mouth, Healthy You is also connecting families to providers and encouraging young people to establish good oral health habits at an early age.

More information and great resources can be found at the campaign’s website, www.healthymouthHealthyYouKY.org or on Facebook at facebook.com/HealthyMouthKY.

KENTUCKY LEADERS TOUR FREEDOM HOUSE

As Volunteers of America’s Freedom House for pregnant and parenting women continues to expand in Kentucky and attract national attention, VOA was honored to host a range of key leaders to tour the program and discuss how VOA is working to combat substance use disorder.

VOA hosted Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Dr. Rahul Gupta, at our Freedom House facilities in Louisville. At our Shelby Street Campus, Dr. Gupta was joined by Senator Republican Leader Mitch McConnell to discuss national strategies on prevention and treatment. At our 2nd Street Freedom House, Gupta was joined by House of Representatives Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth.

VOA President and CEO welcomed Director Gupta, whose agency is tasked with overseeing and coordinating our nation’s drug policy. Director Gupta, Senator McConnell and Congressman Yarmuth were joined by a range of community leaders and advocates to discuss VOA’s role in building effective recovery strategies for women and families and ways to expand the Freedom House family-focused recovery model.
**VOA LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH JCPS**

Program will protect students and keep young kids out of trouble

Volunteers of America continues to expand the Restorative Justice program to reach more at-risk youth. Restorative Justice is a groundbreaking model that works to keep young people out of the criminal justice system and bring together stakeholders to support victims and identify community-based solutions to non-violent crimes.

Late last year, VOA announced an innovative partnership with Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) that provides early intervention for young students with behavior issues in school. The goal of the partnership is to provide a structured, evidence-based intervention to avoid school disciplinary issues or possible legal trouble. The JCPS-VOA pilot is designed to identify and intervene with at-risk children.

The new program is already showing results. RJ has served 20 families across five elementary schools, providing services for youth between the ages of four and eleven years old. VOA is working closely with JCPS to diminish or eliminate suspensions related to disruptive behaviors and assist in rebuilding and enhancing relationships between the school staff, youth and family. Students who have received disciplinary referrals or are displaying continued behavior issues are assigned case managers who implement restorative practices with the student, their family and school staff. They work together to build or rebuild relationships, redirect the student and reduce further behavioral issues.

“This initiative is different than anything we’ve ever done before, and will be a game changer for some of our most at-risk students,” said Dr. Katy DeFerrari, JCPS assistant superintendent of Climate and Culture. “Early intervention is something that we’ve always focused on. What is different about this pilot is the addition of wrap-around support and case management from a community partner that has access to a broader scope of resources, including those that support non-school age caregivers and family members.”

DeFerrari added that students struggling with disruptive behavior and poor decision-making at a young age often face barriers to successful transitions and academic achievement. The lost instructional time or disengagement from school that could result from repeated behavior consequences can be detrimental to a student’s success, she said.

This partnership is just one element of VOA’s expansion of the Restorative Justice program. VOA has now expanded Restorative Justice to Southeastern Kentucky and is working with the KY Department of Juvenile Justices (DJJ) to expand our work to include probated and committed youth who are involved with DJJ.

“We know RJ works by offering comprehensive services and expertise – but what really drives success is a focus on accountability instead of just punishment. We’re thrilled to partner with JCPS and will continue to expand this important program,” said Jennifer Hancock.
Finding Home During a Pandemic

On Mother’s Day in 2020, Wanda “Jodye” Rakis was in a new home in a new city and surrounded by boxes. She had just moved into Candleridge Plaza, Volunteers of America’s senior living facility in Powell, Tennessee. While moving to a new home is always a challenge, at age 81 Jodye was faced with a seemingly impossible task of getting unpacked, settled and acclimated in a new town – all during a pandemic.

VOA operates five senior living facilities in Tennessee and Kentucky, providing 279 units of housing for lower-income seniors. Recent recipient of our national VOA Property of the Year Award, VOA’s Candleridge Plaza houses up to 100 individuals and helps residents maintain their independence while receiving on-site support and services. Activities like bingo, potlucks and trips out instill a sense of community and self-sufficiency. But when Jodye moved in, the Candleridge team was forced to pause community activities for the health and safety of the residents.

“It was hard to meet people during Covid-19 because everyone stayed in their apartments,” Jodye said. “I kept busy unpacking and finding things to do,” she said. But even during a world changed by Covid, it didn’t take long for the Candleridge community to welcome Jodye.

Judith Lewis has lived at Candleridge for nine years and values the family-like atmosphere. She didn’t let the pandemic prevent her from socializing and welcoming new residents like Jodye – she just had to get creative. Judith started a small coloring-book group with three of her neighbors and invited Jodye to join.

“I’m not a colorer, but it was a good way to meet people,” Jodye said. From coloring groups to Tuesday movie nights – Judith and Jodye found safe, socially-distanced ways to have fun and maintain their independence. Jodye used her baking expertise to deliver fresh-baked goods and introduce herself to neighbors.

“They call me meals on wheels!” Jodye said. Judith was busy giving residents in need rides to doctor’s appointments. “We have a community that’s more like a family,” Judith said.

“We just feel so fortunate to have these people who care and are willing to help.” - Jodye

It’s just a lot of nice people helping each other out,” said Jodye. And with Covid rates declining, some Candleridge community activities have come back.

Amber Morton, Candleridge Plaza Community Administrator, and Lisa Neal, Service Coordinator, have been working with community partners to organize fun, safe activities and ensure the residents have high-quality health care services.

“I am involved in planning activities for outreach, social isolation intervention, health and wellness programs and educational events to provide our residents with resources to help meet needs and to create a sense of community within the property, as well as in the larger community,” Lisa said. From COVID-19 vaccinations to fresh produce from Second Harvest Food Bank, Lisa and Amber help the Candleridge residents receive safe, healthy and entertaining services and experiences without leaving the building.

For Judith, Candleridge is a place to be safe and comfortable and build friendships.

“I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else,” Judith said. And for Jodye, who felt uncertain and alone at the beginning of the pandemic, Candleridge has become home.

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After a stroke paralyzed the left-side of her body, Irene Benford spent most of her days watching TV and playing her favorite “Word Find” books. “I was just sitting at home, all day every day, and I didn’t have anything to do,” Irene said. “I love my Word Find books, but I just wasn’t getting out or getting any exercise.”

She also didn’t have reliable transportation, which limited where she could go – and how often she could see her doctor.

Then she was contacted by Brianna Lazier, a VOA Community Health Worker. Brianna is part of VOA’s Determined Health program, an innovative, grassroots program working to connect residents living in West Louisville with affordable, high-quality health care. In partnership with Humana, Community Health Workers like Brianna are in West Louisville neighborhoods every day, talking with area residents, learning more about their health care needs and finding providers to serve and support them.

“I asked her, ‘There’s still real people in the world, right?’” Irene said. “Then she got busy and found me a church group where I could do chair exercises with other people.”

Irene said she became fast friends with two women in the class, and fell in love with the program. When the teacher of the church group became ill and the classes were canceled, Brianna stepped in again and quickly signed up Irene at the YMCA so that she could continue making progress and improving her quality of life. “I’ve been doing exercises every week at the Y, and I’m just really happy,” Irene said. “And my two little ladies, they said they’re going to start coming to the Y with me. So everything turned out just wonderful, I’m getting exercise and seeing people again.”

Irene said having Brianna in her life has been a godsend, and that she has helped her many times with everything from getting new glasses to finding her a motorized wheelchair.

Since January, Determined Health has already contacted 430 Humana members and linked 60 of them to health care providers. The program continues to grow, and will soon provide a community resource center where residents can use computers and printers as VOA continues to identify new and effective ways to reach more individuals and families in need. Find out how our Determined Health program is partnering to improve health outcomes at voamid.org/determined.

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DERRICK DENNIS

“Volunteers of America doesn’t just treat the particular circumstance, they treat the whole person,” said Derrick Dennis, former VOA Unity House resident. Derrick came to Unity House in 2013 in need of temporary housing while he searched for a stable, long-term home for him and his son, Derrick Jr. Families can stay together at Unity House while our staff provides comprehensive services – including finding an affordable home and helping clients like Derrick build a financial foundation for a stable and hopeful future. Today, Derrick is happily married and attending the University of Louisville, working toward his Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

RANDY CRAFT

Randy Craft has put a lifetime of community leadership and activism to work for the people of Southeastern Kentucky. In a new shared position between AdventHealth Manchester and VOA as the Community Development Coordinator, Randy leads a range of working groups focused on economic development, health, revitalizing downtown Manchester and bringing more broadband coverage to the region. As a Manchester native and natural bridge builder and organizer, Randy has led real progress on issues that are vital to residents of the region. He leads efforts on issues including Transformational Employment, Tourism and Oral Health. “What we do is life-changing – we give moms and kids a chance to get their lives back and I just feel blessed to be a part of VOA,” Randy said.

JUDIE PARKS

Judie Parks is Chair of the Board of Directors of Volunteers of America Mid-States and works tirelessly to move forward VOA’s mission of changing lives. Judie is co-owner of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Parks & Weisberg Realtors and a dedicated leader of the Louisville business and real estate community. Her business leadership and focus on integrity and results translates every day to her commitment to VOA.

“VOA is about proven outcomes and delivering on the expectations of the clients and families who come to us. It’s not just about keeping them off the streets; it’s about changing their lives,” Judie said.

ROSEMARY CONDER

When it comes to building bridges and bringing people together in Daviess County and the Owensboro area, it’s hard to find a more committed and effective leader than Rosemary Condor. As retired Director of CASA of the Ohio Valley and a Board of Directors member of the Hager Educational Foundation and Kentucky Youth Advocates, Rosemary is dedicated to helping her community collaborate to find solutions. That’s why VOA is thrilled to count Rosemary as a key ally in bringing Freedom House to Owensboro.

“This is a can-do community and when we see a need we meet the need. VOA’s mission aligns with what we genuinely need. We know there is going to be a great collaboration and Freedom House will be a really welcome part of the community,” Condor said.

JENNY HARRIS

Jenny Harris was working as a commercial lender in Nashville when she met a member of the Volunteers of America team. As she learned more, Jenny became eager to get more involved. Soon, Jenny joined the Middle Tennessee Action Council and serves as chairperson today. From volunteering her time along with her family to being a member of VOA’s Positive Change Society, Jenny has been an invaluable leader in Tennessee and an essential part of a community that makes VOA’s work possible. “I know from the experience of taking care of parents and relatives that caring for someone is the hardest job there is. The beautiful and talented staff at VOA are some of the most amazing people I have ever met,” Jenny said.
AN OLD VEHICLE CAN OPEN UP A WHOLE NEW WORLD FOR SOMEONE IN NEED.

DONATING WITH VOA IS:
- Tax-deductible
- Fast, easy and convenient
- Free – we’ll tow the vehicle at no charge

Call 833.300.5737 or visit voamid.org

TOMORROW STARTS TODAY

Please join us at this free fundraising event and learn how you can make a difference for people who need us most.

Please visit voamid.org/po1breakfast for details.

TAKE A JOURNEY WITH US

A Journey is a 45-minute, engaging tour that highlights the services VOA provides to families.

See how we reach people through more than 40 programs across four states - and why we cannot do our work without you.

To learn more, contact Enidza Torres at EnidzaT@voamid.org

What | 14th Annual Power of 1 Breakfast

When | October 18th, 2022
        Networking at 7:30 a.m.
        Breakfast at 8:00 a.m.

Where | Kentucky International Convention Center
       221 S. 4th Street
       Louisville, KY 40202

RSVP | Enidza Torres
     EnidzaT@voamid.org
     (502) 815-2939