“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.”

-Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan

Last year, Volunteers of America served more than 25,000 people in more than 40 programs across four states. We support courageous people who make tough choices about making their lives better. We work, every day, with people in need to find hope and build opportunities.

So we’re proud to have information to share and stories to tell. And we hope it all leads to knowledge — about how to help each other, how to work together and how we can all be part of stronger communities and a more equitable society.

On Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, we share these stories every day. Of moms overcoming addiction, of veterans finding housing, of communities coming together to give young people hope and avoid the criminal justice system.

Be part of our daily discussion @VOAMID. Your voice will make a difference.

During this unprecedented time, VOA is listening, learning, acting and taking care of the people who need us most.

Follow us @voamid
voamid.org

Dear Friend,

At Volunteers of America, we live by core values that guide our mission. In our work every day we think of commitment, diversity and integrity. And in America’s tumultuous and challenging summer, we have been particularly thinking of our other two values: compassion and justice.

We think of compassion as VOA navigates COVID-19. Our front-line workers, in this dangerous and unpredictable time, have continued to serve our clients. VOA provides care to more than 600 people in residential settings. Our team members could have asked to step away, or chosen other options for their employment – something less personal and potentially risky. Instead, they chose compassion. They chose to be there for the clients who count on them every day.

And in these past months, as America and cities from Louisville to Nashville to Lexington have been searching for answers about how we treat all residents of our nation fairly and equitably, we have been thinking about justice. More than half of VOA’s workforce is comprised of people of color. We have opened up forums to give our colleagues an even greater voice as we all search for social and racial justice. And we’ve heard everyone’s voices — all of us must do more. And VOA will do more to listen, take action and make the communities we serve more just for every resident.

Ultimately, we’ve been reminded during this unprecedented time that VOA’s mission is to create positive change. All of the care we give, all of the service we provide is directed toward that ambitious goal: to change people’s lives. We do it when we provide comfort and companionship to an adult with an intellectual disability, we do it when we provide a mom and her children a safe place to live while she works courageously to overcome substance use disorder, we do it when we reach out to veterans who are struggling to find stable housing. It’s our calling and our duty.

It’s also our duty to promote justice and assure that no person feels left behind, marginalized or discriminated against. That no person feels that they are less a part of our community or nation. That’s a noble, and difficult, goal. But no goal that’s worth achieving is easy, and I promise you that VOA is 100 percent committed to being a leading voice for fairness, equality and justice.

Jennifer Hancock   
President and CEO
Last year, Volunteers of America helped more than 150 kids, just like Jasmine’s, have everything they needed to excel in school.

Many of the families we serve are overcoming homelessness and count on VOA and our supporters for the supplies and support they need. Jasmine and her children have been with us in Unity House since February and will soon move into stable and permanent housing together. Jasmine has received comprehensive support from VOA, and is now working in elder care and looking forward to attending nursing school.

During COVID-19, children and families have gone through so much, and are looking forward to a new school year. We are working with our families to build stronger futures, and success and support at school plays a huge part in family stability. Please help VOA support great opportunities for great kids.

SUPPORT VOA’s BACK TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

It’s almost time for kids to get back to school

Contact Gema Moreno at GemaM@voamid.org or (502) 636-4664 to learn more.

Gift cards are perfect for supporting our children.

HOW YOU CAN HELP KIDS

• Donate a gift card that will be used to purchase supplies for specific classroom needs and school clothes
• Direct financial support for Volunteers of America that will be used for families returning to school.
• Volunteer to help families and children.
We use lots of words to describe the COVID-19 crisis. Unprecedented. Challenging. Our new reality. But the truth is simple – it's scary. For months we've all been living with a highly contagious and potentially deadly disease. We work to cope – and stay safe – the best we can. From working at home to limiting trips outside to essential needs, we are trying our best to adjust.

Front-line health care workers and caregivers, simply staying home and isolated is not an option — because the care we provide is not negotiable. It's our mission. Our promise to provide around-the-clock care to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities isn't put on hold because the work is dangerous. Men and women who have made the courageous choice to come to VOA Recovery to beat substance use disorder can't be told to wait and start over because of a pandemic. The families who count on Unity House as a safe and stable place to overcome homelessness usually have nowhere else to go.

Every single day of this crisis, VOA frontline workers have reported to our residential facilities to provide care and service. For our adults with disabilities, that support often includes meeting their most basic and personal needs – care provided one-on-one and up close because that's what they count on. For pregnant and parenting moms overcoming addiction, it means providing hope and comfort during a time made exponentially harder by isolation and loneliness. For families without a home, it means they share our space, every minute of every day, with our staff and 30 other families.

The work is physically hard and emotionally exhausting. The worry for people you care for — people you love — is overwhelming. And even with our diligent safety measures and precautions — the personal risk is very real.

And yet, our front-line workers provide life-changing care for people in need every day.

They are our VOA Heroes.
Virtual Events Help VOA to Continue the Very Best Care and Service

Power of One Breakfast looks to build on the success of our virtual Indiana Luncheon

How do you respond when you have hundreds of people headed to a major fundraising luncheon in the middle of a pandemic? At VOA, we decided that restrictions against large gatherings didn’t mean restrictions against coming together and making a difference for the people we serve – we just had to do it virtually.

As we all are, VOA is learning to adapt and change – like putting together a virtual VOA Indiana Luncheon for 250 people. Safety has been our first concern during COVID-19, so we knew we couldn’t ask our friends and supporters to gather for our annual fundraiser and celebration of our work in Clark and Floyd Counties.

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Being safe and socially distant did not stop us from making history. We are so grateful to our VOA family for coming together to hear stories of amazing change and growth and discuss how we can continue to provide our highest-quality service during this challenging time.

We were joined by leaders like our inspiring Freedom House graduate – and colleague – Amy Kalber and Dr. Eric Yazel. They shared powerful stories of what VOA means to them, and we are so grateful for the amazing generosity of Larry Meyers, Brooke Schafer and First Savings Bank. Thanks to their selfless matching grant, we were able to exceed our fundraising goal – even though we couldn’t be together in person.

On October 20th, we’ll take the lessons we’ve learned and duplicate these efforts for our annual Power of One Fundraiser, which will also be virtual. As we all are, VOA is learning to adapt and change – like putting together a virtual VOA Indiana Luncheon for 250 people. Safety has been our first concern during COVID-19, so we knew we couldn’t ask our friends and supporters to gather for our annual fundraiser and celebration of our work in Clark and Floyd Counties.

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Keeping Adults with Disabilities Connected

Support our 2020 PO1 Virtual Fundraiser in October

Find out more at: https://www.voamid.org/powerof1

Elementary Students Support VOA

Support our 2020 PO1 Virtual Fundraiser in October

Find out more at: https://www.voamid.org/powerof1

Elementary Students Support VOA

Taking on homelessness is ambitious and difficult – but not too much for the 4th and 5th graders of Blake Elementary School. For their Student Leadership Technology Program (SLTP) project, the Blake students decided to try something they knew well – running a lemonade stand. The price for their refreshing cups of lemonade? Water, snacks or personal hygiene products from their classmates. They then assembled “Compassion Care Kits” filled with refreshments and personal care items for recipients in need. The students quickly surpassed their goal of 50 care kits. With 71 kits, they chose to partner with VOA to distribute them to families. The Compassion Care Kits were so well-received that Blake won the SLTP state championship – and had VOA asking for more. We asked Blake Elementary school once again to put their lemonade and entrepreneurial skills to use for our Veterans and their families fighting homelessness. Blake Elementary showed that with a little bit of creativity and a whole lot of compassion, a cup of lemonade can do so much more than quench thirst.

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Volunteers of America knows this is a momentous time for our nation. Across our country and in all of the areas we serve, people are demanding change. We have witnessed protest marches in cities including Louisville, Nashville and Lexington and we have heard from our VOA colleagues about the racial injustice and inequity they have experienced and lived with for far too long.

VOA is an organization committed to social justice. Our mission does not allow us to sit quietly during this time of unrest and change, of anger and hope. We are guided by the words of Martin Luther King, who said that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” That’s why VOA is taking action.

• Creating a new position and program: Director of Racial Justice and Health Equity. This position will oversee a new program specifically committed to aggressively addressing racial health disparities and inequities.
• Building an active and ongoing space for listening and action. We’ve created a place on VOA Today, our internal communications platform, that is set aside for dialogue, information and understanding.
• Joining allies for social justice. We’ve worked with friends and partners including Black Lives Matter in supporting peaceful marches of protest in Louisville and in Nashville.
• Advocating for change with officials and elected leaders. President and CEO Jennifer Hancock is actively working with key elected officials and other leaders on how VOA can be a helpful partner working to heal wounds and build partnerships.
• Weekly meetings. Chaplain Donna Trabue and Marian Vassar, Diversity and Equity Practitioner, share knowledge and answer questions with VOA colleagues.

Find out more about how VOA is demanding change and action at: https://www.voamid.org/fighting-for-justice

Today, as police and criminal justice reform dominates our thoughts about how we build a more equitable society, many of us are asking: what can we do to create effective and meaningful change?

At Volunteers of America, we know a vital part of that answer: Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice is a groundbreaking program that works to keep young people out of the criminal justice system. Restorative Justice is a results-oriented alternative program that brings together the person who has offended, the person victimized and the community to make things right. Through facilitated conferences, parties collectively identify harm and determine a solution-based resolution. Using the restorative justice approach ensures that restitution, collaboration and compassion are integral parts of the judicial process.

Volunteers of America acquired the Restorative Justice program, which has been serving youth in Jefferson County, this year. It has a record of success, affordability and accountability. It builds trust and partnerships while keeping our communities safe.

When a crime is committed, Restorative Justice (RJ) begins a process designed to give young people hope and opportunity while supporting the victims of crimes. Instead of asking “who should be punished,” Restorative Justice ask “how can we make amends.” Through meetings led by trained facilitators, those accused of crimes meet with victims of crimes to find a solution agreeable to everyone. These solutions often include restitution, community service and education. The process is entirely voluntary – and extremely effective.

In fact, compared to those who don’t, young people who participate in RJ are half as likely to commit a crime again. And keeping our young people out of the courts and out of prison means that Restorative Justice costs a fraction of our traditional justice system.

Already, VOA is expanding Restorative Justice to Southeastern Kentucky, as we continue to invest in supporting the health and well-being of this region. We are also expanding in Jefferson County and will soon announce a growing partnership with Jefferson County Public Schools.

We invite you to be part of this innovative and timely program.
Do you want to learn more about Restorative Justice and find out how you can help to keep more young people out of the criminal justice system?

To donate and learn more, visit: https://www.voamid.org/welcome-rj-to-the-voa-family
Compassionate Work

LaTanya Crutcher uses her lifetime of caring to manage a crisis

In her seven years serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities for Volunteers of America, those are three words that have guided LaTanya Crutcher. “That’s what people need to know. You need to learn about the individual and listen to them and it all comes naturally,” LaTanya said.

LaTanya has devoted a lifetime to listening and looking. She started caring for her uncle when she was 13, learning about people with disabilities and their needs. “That was years ago, and back then, people didn’t always accept people with disabilities. But I learned about caring for my Uncle Victor from my grandmother. He needs a little more help and we provide it. I waited for him to get off the bus every day and shared the things he loves with him. He loves gospel music and watching Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy,” LaTanya said.

She has put those skills – and concern for others – to work during one of the most challenging times we have all faced. Like so many caregivers, LaTanya has been working with the individuals she supports, including Angie and Stacy with VOA in Jeffersonville, Indiana while helping them to understand the dangers of Covid-19 and the restrictions that go along with it.

LaTanya talks to the residents about their families. “I talked to your mom tonight and she loves you and misses you,” LaTanya said. LaTanya reminds everyone that the people who love them are thinking of them.

LaTanya and other VOA staff remind everyone about washing their hands and wearing masks, and that it is to protect them and others from germs and the virus. “I say hello beautiful and tell them I love them. You explain that you just want to help keep them safe. You have to treat people with respect,” LaTanya said.

Stacy faces different challenges. She is in VOA’s Supported Employment Program and works for Washington Bank in New Albany. The Supported Employment Program helps place individuals with disabilities in fulfilling and rewarding jobs in the community. When Stacy cannot leave the house to go to her job, solitude is hard. With less interaction outside and more interaction with VOA staff and her housemates, she gets restless. LaTanya has been making sure she has paints for pictures, and encouraging her to use bright colors to help keep her spirits up.

She has been talking to Angie’s mother as well, who usually visits several days a week. Part of LaTanya’s work has been establishing trust with family members so they have confidence in the care their loved ones are receiving. Angie has not been going to her day program and LaTanya is working through her isolation with her.

“I spend a lot of time letting people know that everything is alright, that they are going to get back to normal,” LaTanya said.

Of course, VOA team members are facing heightened dangers as well. LaTanya also works to protect herself as she thinks about the women she’s caring for each day. And she is guided in her difficult and potentially dangerous work by thinking regularly about the difference she is making.

“This work takes compassion. It takes knowledge and it takes caring. I always say to people: How would you feel if it were your family member being cared for? What would you want for them?” LaTanya

Read about the people who are helping our community overcome our biggest challenges in

VOA Voices • Pages 18-19
Brittany wakes up every morning and makes her bed. A simple act that most people do before they start their day, but for her it’s been transformative.

“Who would’ve thought, you get up in the morning and make your bed and it makes you feel like a totally different person,” she said.

Establishing positive routines, building self-confidence, teaching life skills and providing a comprehensive recovery program that gives pregnant and parenting moms hope for the future is what VOAMid’s Freedom House is delivering to the residents of Southeastern Kentucky.

Brittany came to Freedom House in Manchester after battling substance use disorder—a disease she’s been living with for most of her life after experiencing trauma at a very young age. Seeking drugs was her way to battle the depression.

Her struggle with substance use continued through all four of her pregnancies. After years of addiction and finally losing custody of her children, Brittany knew something had to change—so she came to Freedom House.

“I just surrendered everything and the next thing I knew, two months later and I had enrolled in school. I have custody of three of my four kids and everything is just falling into place for me because of being here and going through the program. I owe my life to this place,” Brittany said.

Today, Brittany is Freedom House’s first graduate. She is enrolled in a local community college and has just started a job with the City of Manchester. As she celebrates her graduation with family and loved ones, she finds comfort in the community RCC provides. She takes part in the weekly NA and AA meetings, the group has frequent cookouts and for the first time in her life Sue made Christmas ornaments this past year.

“At any time I can stop by and just hang out with people and talk. They will help me in any way that I need. That’s something that I’ve never had,” Sue said.

For James, RCC has given him an outlet to share his story and show others how his hard work and faith has given him the strength he needed to make it 16 months clean and sober.

James’ father is a local pastor, but he started rebelling at a young age. Through high school, James started experimenting with drugs and alcohol recreationally, but it wasn’t until he turned 18 years old and quit school when his escalation toward substance use disorder began.

“It’s like I was just trying to feel anything—acceptance, drugs—anything that would fill that emptiness that was inside of me,” James said.

He spent years in and out of jail and became an absent father to his three children.

Finally, he was offered an opportunity to leave prison early if he entered recovery. After finding a program that worked for him, he knew his path toward recovery wasn’t finished, so he found RCC.

“I had heard there was a new place in Clay County—that’s where I went when I went to treatment. So, I said I want to be a part of that. I had to stay plugged in. I needed to be around people who were like me,” James said.

James has been part of the RCC family for four months. He received his Peer Support Certification and helps others in Clay County by sharing his story as a Ministry leader at his father’s church where they have started a faith-based recovery program.

“For James, RCC was exactly what he needed. “I’m just so thankful that VOA is here. I watch countless people come in and out of here—they get the help they need. They can get any type of self help every day of the week. It’s such a blessing to this community that’s been ripped apart by the epidemic and addiction.”

Sometimes I’ll stop by after work just to see what everyone is doing and hang out for a minute … it’s like a safe haven for me.

- Sue
Jayne Harbin-Pettit has seen a lot during her 26 years serving Volunteers of America, but as she told the Courier-Journal for a front page story, she has never seen anything quite like the Covid-19 crisis.

Jayne is on the front-line of serving families. She continues to work every day in a residential setting that presents around-the-clock challenges — and dangers — despite VOA’s dedicated work following health and safety guidelines.

Unity House is one of few places in Kentucky where families facing homelessness can stay together while working to find stable housing and change the direction of their lives. Homelessness doesn’t stop and wait out a pandemic. Today, more than 30 families and 60 children are living with VOA at Unity House, leaning on VOA staff and each other to find comfort and hope during these new and often daunting times.

For Jayne Harbin-Pettit, Covid-19 is just one more hurdle to overcome in VOA’s inherent commitment to change the lives of families in need. And nothing keeps Jayne — and so many VOA heroes just like her — from keeping that promise.

Unity House is filled with families who need each other and count on the staff. And, of course, children are still children, even when we are all working to confront a pandemic.

"It’s very, very difficult to get children to understand social distancing," Jayne said.

That’s true, but of course Volunteers of America, and Unity House, have never been about distance, or isolation. VOA is about bringing families together and uniting to overcome challenges. Our goal is harmony and cooperation – the opposite of social distancing. It’s how we achieve results.

But still, leaders like Jayne are adjusting to the new reality, taking every possible step to protect Unity House families and keep them safe while still creating a space that allows them to connect, get help, learn from each other and move forward.

To find out more about VOA Home, our comprehensive programs that serve families facing homelessness, go to: https://www.voamid.org/housing
Who are the voices of VOA? They are veterans and adults with developmental disabilities. They are families facing homelessness, moms and dads struggling with addiction, young people who need alternatives to incarceration and friends who need answers about HIV. They are donors and volunteers who lend a helping hand. They are the voices of our community, coming together.

Frank and Paula Harshaw

“We believe in helping and supporting youth. In the case of Restorative Justice, it’s youth who are making a mistake and it gives them an opportunity to have a reset and second chance,” said Frank Harshaw.

For Frank and Paula Harshaw, generous donors who support a range of worthy causes in Louisville, proven results make the difference and they have been consistent and generous supporters. “We’re very results oriented with non-profits. We’ve always been impressed with Libby’s passion and the results,” Frank said. Now that Restorative Justice is part of VOA, the Harshaws have continued to be invaluable partners to the program. “VOA will help to fill in the support services that are so important,” Frank said. For the Harshaws, VOA’s focus on helping young people and giving hope to families is vital to their support. “We believe in helping and supporting youth. In the case of Restorative Justice, it’s youth who are making a mistake and it gives them an opportunity to have a reset and second chance. As youth, we’ve all probably done some stupid things. It’s nice in this case that they can rectify whatever it is they’ve done,” Frank said.

RJ Case Manager Stanisha Liggons and Volunteer Facilitator Anthony Zipple work to build agreement and cooperation in the Restorative Justice process.

John Jennings

“John asks for nothing in return and gives so much from his heart. He is a true leader in Middle Tennessee and always the first to step up when we have a need. I’m so proud to call him a friend and supporter,” said Randy Brothers, Tennessee External Relations Director for VOA.

John is a key member of the Tennessee Action Council and has regularly overseen the annual “Community Workday” that provides essential services and updates at our homes for adults with disabilities. John's commitment is personal, ongoing and selfless. He has secured construction of a wheelchair ramp at VOA’s Blackfoot home in Madison, Tennessee at no cost to VOA. He is a strong supporter of the annual Dinner of Champions golf event and VOA concert, and even purchased five gallons of hand sanitizer for VOA employees.
POWER OF 1 VIRTUAL BREAKFAST
October 20, 2020
Join us at 8:00 a.m. EST - or - 12:00 noon EST
Follow our event page at: https://www.voamid.org/powerof1

VOA SOCIAL JUSTICE T-SHIRTS FOR SALE
$15.00 each
Contact: Meghan Breen
MeghanB@voamid.org

EMPOWER BOX SUBSCRIPTION GIFT
Pamper yourself with a Back to School treat featuring local products by:
Axis Coffee Shop & Gathering Place
Woodstock Lavender
Blanket Creek Pottery
Beaded Treasures

Mention Inspire & get 20% off using code: Inspire until November 30th
Sign-up for an entire year of boxes and receive a special gift!
Visit beadedtreasures.org to schedule your boxes.

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