



ST. MARY'S CENTER

Everybody needs a place

Summer 2018 Newsletter



Marian White: Homeless to Hope and Resiliency

Marian has worked hard with St. Mary's Center staff to change her life. Here is her story, in her own words:

"I had a rough marriage due in large part to my abusive, drug addicted husband of 40 years. Living in Oakland, my husband did not work, and with three children, I had to be the bread winner of the family. After my children were grown, I suffered three strokes in 2000, and in 2006 I applied for disability insurance as I could no longer work. In 2015, broken, depressed, and with no hope, I could no longer continue in this abusive marriage, and decided it was time to leave. Otherwise, I would die. With this decision came loss. The loss of my home. the loss of family relationships. The loss of independence. The loss of community. And most importantly, the loss of myself. Who am I?"

I contacted several churches who placed me in family homes on a weekly basis in which I was sleeping on the floor or churches. I had heard of St. Mary's Center and decided to take a visit and in 2015, I met my social worker. We seemed to hit it off at the start. One evening, I became very sick. I was sleeping on the floor of a family home. I was cold, shivering, and had difficulty breathing. The next day, I called my social worker to see if she could land me some housing. Within the month, she helped me move into Friendly Place- transitional housing for women. I was also provided with counseling services for my PTSD, depression, and life situation. I would see my counselor every week and we would process a lot of my dark experiences. It was the first time I had a voice and there was somebody who listened and understood.

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One day I came to my appointment very sad and depressed. We were both quiet for about a minute and then I said to her, "I want to know who Marian is. I've lost myself. I don't know who I am please help me ."

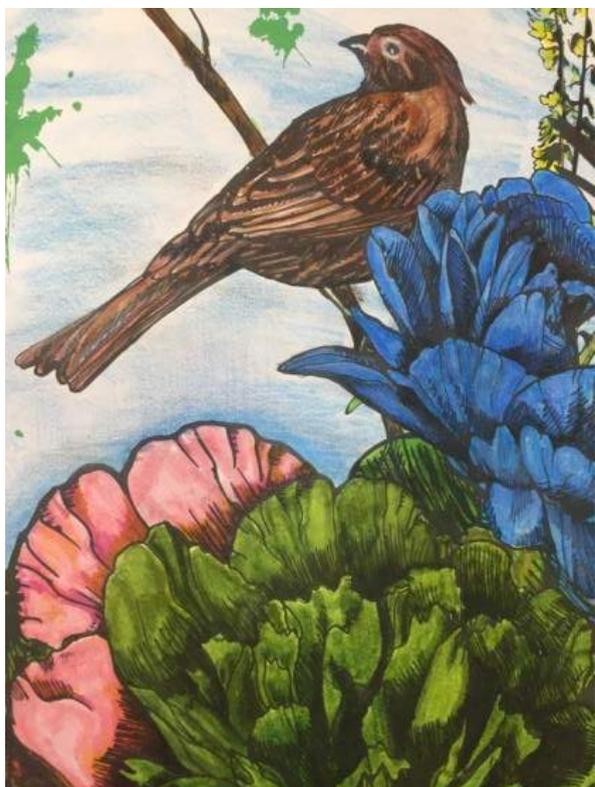
We continued counseling while exploring my personal attributes, and one day she asked me to voice my strengths. With conviction, I answered: love, creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, perspective, braver, persistence, integrity, and love of learning. Over time, I began self-discovery and I felt excited and hopeful.

Fast forward to today, I am living my dream. I am an independent woman with permanent housing. I have re-kindled lost family relationships. I have made new friends. And, I finally returned to college where I will be majoring in social work. I am currently enrolled in Laney College and will be transferring to Cal State East Bay in 2020. Hope is a good thing and life is wonderful. "

Color Our World

Ten St. Mary's Center seniors, including shelter residents and community members, participated in a weekly, hour-long class Color Our World from February - April. During these meetings, Rodney Bell, artist and senior at St. Mary's Center, introduced the art of coloring designs in books and introduced techniques for creating multi-dimensional images with vibrant colors. Rodney provided inspiration for participants to explore their creativity and ultimately self-empowerment.

Seniors boldly began to color in selected designs and took off in exploring their connections to color, meaning, and story. Many struggled with multiple stressors: being homeless, finding housing, adjusting to living in a shelter.



They found though, that the class offered a quiet and focused environment where they could relax and connect to themselves. They reported that concentrating on creating art supported them to quiet their minds and worries and to relax and feel capable. The class supported them in channeling their anxiety and despair in healthy and inspiring ways.

In each class, seniors shared their art and reflected on what they did, learned, and appreciated. They lovingly encouraged and acknowledged each other. The exchange boosted senior's self-esteem and the sense of value of all involved; some seniors became friends through meeting in the class.

One senior drew images to send to family members with whom she cared to connect. Another senior reawakened her love of writing and planned to share the story with her grandchildren to nurture their self-worth and creativity. And another senior created a scrapbook about her love of colors.

Participants often expressed being amazed with themselves and their creative abilities. Seniors were able to counteract the powerlessness they faced in their life with a sense of agency and authority through art-making. At the close of class, seniors wanted to share their joy of creating and create the opportunity for coloring and self-empowerment for the broader St. Mary's Center community. Senior artists are planning to lead a class in Coloring and Story Telling this summer.

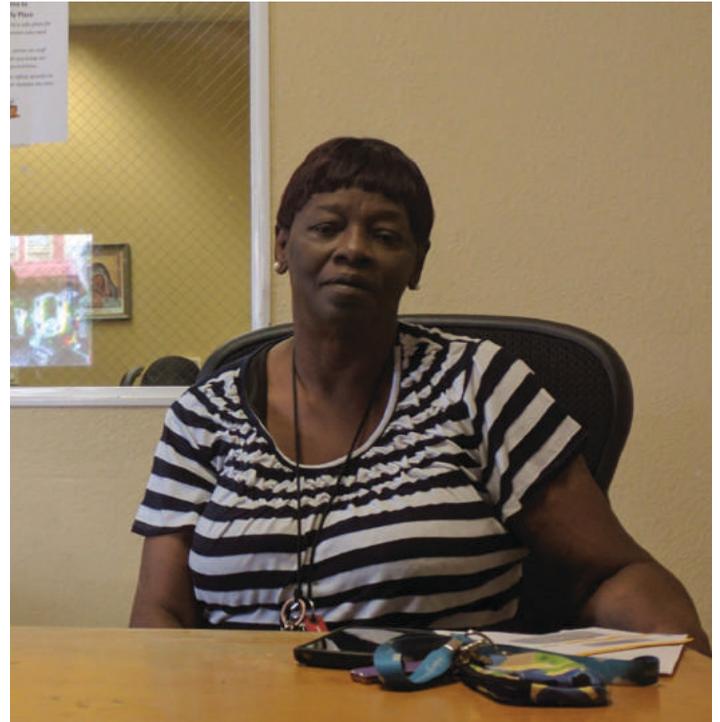
Leading By Example

Walking into Friendly Manor, one of the first faces you're likely to see is Myra's. She has been a staple since its old days back on Grand Avenue before the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet were able to purchase the current site at 2298 San Pablo Ave and the accompanying upstairs transitional units.

Slowly, she has worked her way through Friendly Manor, first by regularly coming into the Drop-In Center. Then, Sister Maureen encouraged her to attend a recovery program. Eventually, Myra was offered a room in the transitional housing upstairs.

As Myra recalls, one day, Sister Maureen asked to speak with her, asking if she would be interested in helping to manage the Drop-In Center. Myra, eager to help the women sitting where she once did, eagerly accepted. **"These ladies live for this place, they're lost and they don't even know themselves now."**

Since St. Mary's Center took over management--and eventually the program of Friendly Manor in 2016--Myra has enjoyed the expansion of programming and the support women now receive in Case Management.



If You Like It, Go; If They Like You, Stay



Judy has quickly become a staple in the St. Mary's Center community. She first learned about St. Mary's Center through a Fall Prevention Class our senior advocates teach throughout the community. She enjoyed how teachers offered modifications for seniors who had difficulty with certain exercise, and paid special attention to seniors who needed support.

After working on her strength and balance at one of these classes, she was interested in coming to see the rest of what St. Mary's Center had to offer.

Now, despite being a primarily monolingual Spanish speaker, she has made friends and grown to be a part of the St. Mary's Center community. She regularly helps out by serving lunch during the week to other seniors, she regularly advocates for seniors in need in the community, and she of course, has continued to attend Fall Prevention Classes.

Judy knows that she "needs" the classes to help her stay physically strong and maintain her health, but she stays because she feels respected and has befriended many people in the class. As she explained, there's a Latino proverb "If you like it, go; if they like you, stay." Not only does Judy get a good workout, she has found a community.



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For more information about St. Mary's Center visit www.stmaryscenter.org or contact Regan Murphy at 510-923-9600 x236 or rmurphy@stmaryscenter.org



St. Mary's Center has received Charity Navigator's highest recognition. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator and assesses the Financial Health and Accountability and Transparency of nonprofit organizations.

Beautifying the San Pablo Corridor

For four years, St. Mary's Center has worked with our partners at EBALDC on the San Pablo Area Revitalization Collaborative (SPARC). This group is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of the residents of our stretch of the San Pablo Corridor.

One of the four goals for the collaborative is to improve safety by reducing blight and improving streets, parks, and abandoned land to create more friendly community spaces.

After months of work and outreach to our community, we are unveiling some beautiful new panels on our front gate. These panels highlight the St. Mary's Center community while bringing some beautiful art to an area that needs it.

The next time you're in the area, be sure to check them out!

