

# REAL LIFE

# 2023

# Annual Report

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# Thank You!

*Dear Friends,*

*It is hard to believe that another year has come and gone. 2023 marked our sixth year that REAL LIFE has been serving individuals in need. This past year we have maintained our 11 houses that offer 121 beds for individuals seeking recovery, hope and reconciliation. Community volunteers helped ensure that our houses felt more like homes by planting gardens, painting walls, and regularly visiting Lifers. Additionally, we continued our regular programming, employment and education services that are designed to give Lifers a new start. We have also finalized our second REAL LIFE curriculum to continue to serve our Lifers as they graduate and move out of our recovery houses. Similarly, we continue to expand our Domestic Violence program that uses a curriculum designed to help change the way they handle their relationships.*

*As the year progressed, we were unable to ignore the news headlines about the gun violence plaguing communities, so we dove into new territory and implemented our Violence Prevention Initiative. Project SAF (Safe, Alive and Free) and the Community Resilience Program were launched in Hopewell in the Summer of 2023. These programs take a holistic approach to combating community violence, including assisting communities as they build resilience. The Initiative has seen great success in Hopewell, and we have plans to launch it in other localities in 2024.*

*We take immense pride in the extraordinary growth and success we've attained, touching the lives of thousands and preserving many more in the process. As we eagerly anticipate the prospects that 2024 holds, we remain steadfast in our commitment to further expansion and continued positive transformation for those who we are privileged to serve.*

*To our supporters over the past year - you made a difference in the lives of so many Lifers! Whether you made a gift, painted inside one of our houses, participated in a Peace Walk, planted a garden, donated an item to our Portraits of Hope auction, tutored a Lifer, led Bible study, provided meals for our houses, or assembled welcome home kits - thank you! Our success would not have been possible without you!*

*Gratefully yours,*



**Elaine Minor**  
**Chair, Board of Directors**



**Dr. Sarah Scarbrough**  
**Founder and Director**



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# Our Mission

**REAL LIFE** creates pathways to attain and sustain a thriving life for those who desire change.

# Guiding Principles

At **REAL LIFE**, we believe:

- Consistency, encouraging relationships and accountability are essential
- In empowering and walking alongside those desiring a life of meaning and purpose
- Everyone should have the opportunity to thrive
- In the redemptive power of grace
- That utilizing a holistic approach to healing – within an inclusive community – fosters transformation.



# Housing

Starting with just one house in 2017 and establishing our REAL LIFE Community Center six months later, our journey has been nothing short of remarkable. Through unwavering community support and careful planning, we've maintained 11 recovery houses, providing a total of 121 beds.

Before the inception of REAL LIFE's housing program within the community, we operated within the confines of the Richmond City Jail. While we saw significant success, we observed firsthand the struggles individuals faced upon release. This realization encouraged our transition to providing safe housing and wrap-around services for individuals who are seeking the skills to live a thriving life outside of incarceration.



Maurice, a program graduate now employed full-time with our Violence Prevention Initiative, recalls his introduction to the program within the Richmond City Jail. Reflecting on his experience, he said, “all the classes we had to complete, coupled with the curriculum, were very informative and transformational. It made me study, learn more about myself, taught me new ways to think, and gave me tools that I could use in life.” Maurice emphasized the crucial role of safe housing. Following his release, he initially stayed with a friend, only to find himself slipping back into old habits due to the

environment. Later, moving into a REAL House provided him with the atmosphere needed for personal growth, while most importantly providing him a structured environment free from easy access to substances.

Ervin Hart, one of our esteemed recovery coaches, emphasized the importance of housing in combating a person's return to substance use and recidivism. He stated, "the main thing for recidivism is lack of housing. You get somebody who's done any amount of time and has a drug problem and housing makes it a bigger problem. Even though the drug problem is the main thing, they tend to get back into the mainstream of crime just because they don't have anywhere to live and no income so the first thing they turn to is criminal activity."

By prioritizing housing for those most in need of support and guidance, we've significantly enhanced the prospects of success for each member of our community.



## By the Numbers: Housing Facts and Figures



**11 houses  
121 beds**

**80% average  
occupancy in  
houses**

**\$20 average  
cost per bed  
per night.**

**7.2 month average for  
someone to graduate  
and move out**

**21 new residents  
each month (on  
average)**

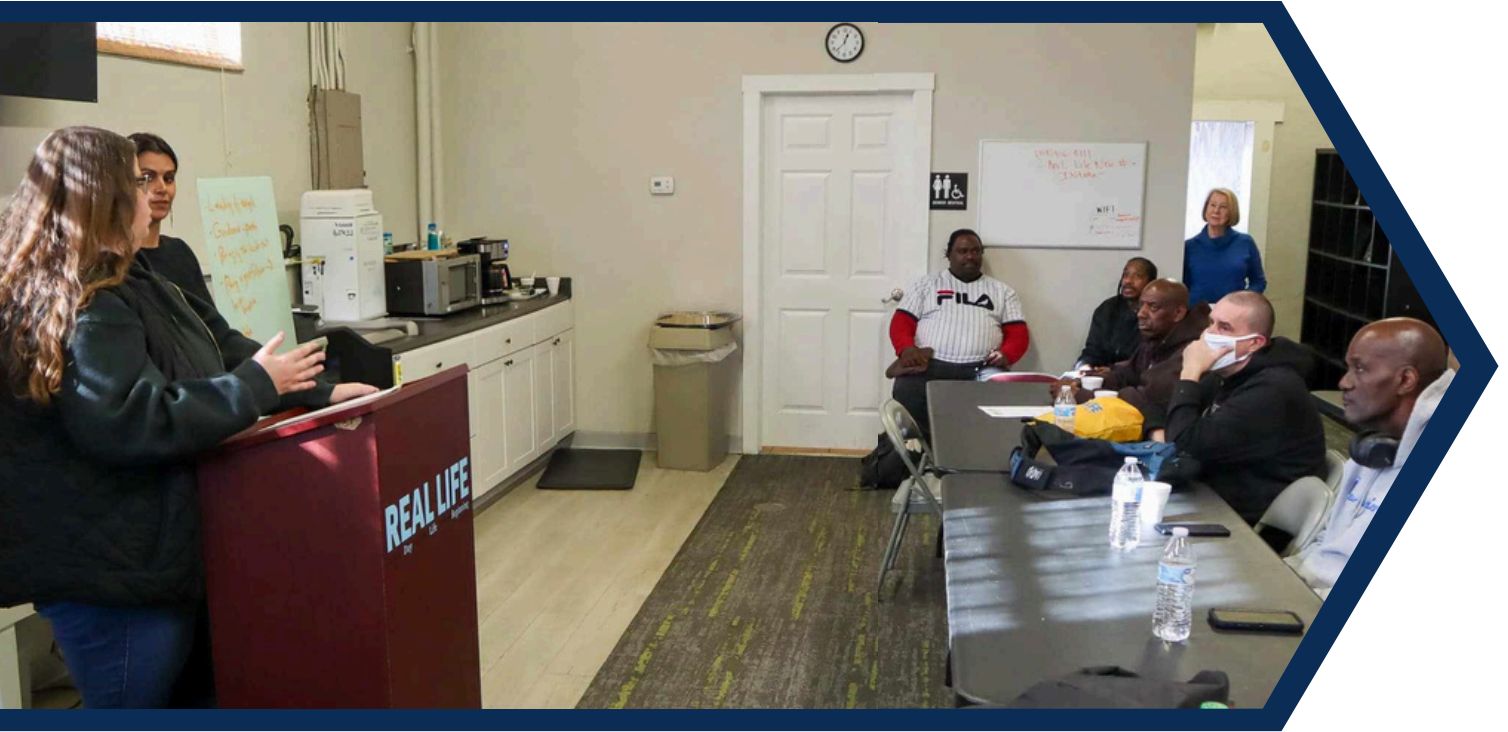
**247 new  
male  
residents**

**66 new  
female  
residents**

**48% of people are not  
paying for beds at a  
given time**

**\$3000 cost to subsidize each  
house each month, enabling all  
residents to move in free of charge**

# REAL LIFE East Center



At REAL LIFE East, as we call it, Lifers engage daily in groups, classes, community service, and meetings. Groups and classes are led by staff, volunteers, and peers. Each class and group is aimed at assisting in the “Recovery from Everyday Addictive Lifestyles” (what REAL stands for). This includes many different topics, as we strive to ensure they not only stay clean, but learn how to live clean and remain clean, while establishing a thriving life.

As our “main hub,” we also hold community events, such as clothing and coat drives and hygiene pack giveaways. We use our location to stage community walks and neighborhood clean-ups.

## By the Numbers: Programming Facts and Figures

- 55 total classes are taught during a full week. Men attend 28 classes per week; Women attend 27 per week
- 36.5 hours of class instruction during a full week.
- 1,950 total classes were taught by staff and volunteers in 2023
- 2,064 peer hours provided

# Fatherhood

The REAL LIFE Fatherhood program, developed during the pandemic and led by Senior Pathway Navigator Young, aims to address the informational gaps faced by many fathers who are in our program. Young emphasizes, "I found that a lot of fathers were uninformed about a lot of things that they simply did not know or were never taught when it comes to dealing with children." The class remains attuned to the specific situations of the participants to determine relevant topics. The weekly sessions cover topics, including navigating the legal system, understanding child support, addressing trauma, and building connections with children after periods of absence.



Two topics that tend to be recurrently discussed and taught include child support and reconnecting with their children. He explains, "I teach them about the child support guidelines and how to work with child support agents." Regarding reconnecting with their children, Young notes that many struggle with this aspect, especially after

returning to society. Young underscores, "This is our core objective: to enhance family relationships and to do so with love and patience."

The block "Dealing with Co-Parenting Issues" is likely his most popular class. Young holds this class about once a month. Young says, "we talk about all the issues and the problems they have dealing with the mothers of their children. This block generates high emotion, and they all want to share experiences. The Lifers and I have learned A LOT from these blocks."

Young's motivation stems from a lifelong curiosity and passion for understanding what drives people and the reasoning behind their actions, with a particular emphasis on their thought processes. He notes, "many men have had success reconnecting with their kids and have strengthened this relationship. This is the number one goal." The positive outcomes and the transformation of relationships with their children inspire and fuel Young's dedication to the work he does.



# Domestic Violence Support Group

In December, we led our first domestic violence support group for women in the program, most of whom had been in abusive and unhealthy relationships in the past.

A common sentiment echoed was the difficulty of leaving abusive situations, with one woman sharing, "I didn't feel like I had an option. I was mentally, physically, and emotionally abused." Through the group's facilitators, we emphasized the need to address these issues to prevent them from affecting future relationships.

An important revelation from one woman underscored the ongoing nature of the healing process. Despite escaping a bad relationship, she acknowledged that she has more work to do on herself in terms of healing. The support group serves as a beacon of hope, guiding these women toward a future where their painful experiences lead to empowerment and healing. We plan to take this forward in 2024 and fully develop it into a structured program and part of REAL LIFE for our ladies.

# Motherhood Program

Tauchanna, leader of the Motherhood program, reflects on the life-changing journey it has offered to REAL LIFE women. "The Motherhood Program provides the opportunity for women to heal, grow, and flourish," she says. This program serves as a nurturing space where women access resources to address past trauma, foster self-efficacy, and develop avenues to gain independence.

As the women navigate through the program, Tauchanna says "they have been able to learn the tools to restore broken relationships, reconnect with their children, and regain the trust of their families." A pivotal aspect of the program lies in the mutual support these women extend to each other.



The Motherhood program not only guides the women through personal growth but also creates a community where they uplift each other on their journey towards brighter and more fulfilling futures. Tauchanna notes, "there is nothing like the beauty of seeing these women flourish and live a life that one time, they could only dream of."

# Flora's Story

Before coming to REAL LIFE, Flora lost her mother and baby boy. These losses were devastating to her and plunged her deeper into active addiction. "I thought I had hit rock bottom, but then the ground would give and I would drop again. I knew this last time that if the ground gave again, there was only one more place for me to go." This desperation to change drew her to REAL LIFE.

Flora's relationship with her children has always been strong, but the Motherhood program has helped her to see that she had some difficult conversations that she needed to have with her children. She admits that she did not provide a lot of mothering and care while she was in active addiction and she regrets that she wasn't able to do that for them. After entering REAL LIFE, she talked with Tauchanna about these situations and said "I really respect and look up to Ms. Tauchanna. She gave me the confidence to have some really tough conversations with my kids."

Flora and Tauchanna would meet and try to brainstorm ideas on how to bring up difficult topics with her children about past events. Since her mother is gone, having Tauchanna for support and advice fills an important void for Flora.

Flora also finds that the Motherhood group is a safe place to talk about the successes and challenges of motherhood. "Having these classes is important because it reminds you that everyone makes mistakes. It doesn't mean that we don't love our children or love our families because we did stupid stuff."



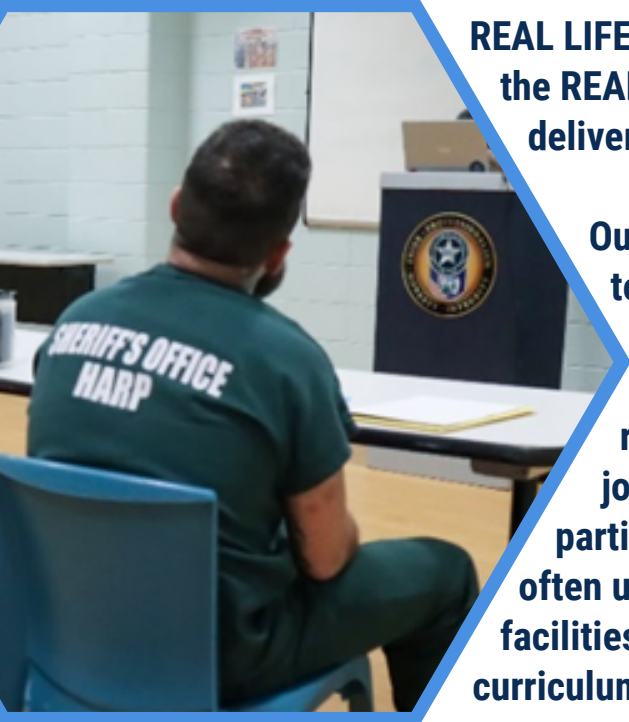
Flora has also begun helping facilitate the Motherhood class. She says that she always begins the group with a reminder of the definition of motherhood – the act of mothering and nurturing, which she reminds the women, they all do. "You might not have given birth to a child yourself, but you might have a niece, a nephew, a dog, a best friend, that you love, cherish and nurture."

With reunification at the forefront of our Motherhood program, we strive to provide a safe place for all mothers to pursue sobriety and create a new life for themselves and their children.



# Jail Programming

REAL LIFE originated as a program within the Richmond City Justice Center, initially focused on supporting individuals during their incarceration. Recognizing the importance of a community-based approach, our program evolved, but REAL LIFE still extends its services to local jails through two primary channels.



REAL LIFE offers programming services to contracted jails, utilizing the REAL LIFE model. This programming encompasses curriculum delivery, recovery support services, and direct re-entry preparation.

Our jail program focuses on 22 discussion and engagement topics, which each is also outlined in our curriculum.

Participants engage with modules in our curriculum that address critical subjects like trauma, healthy parenting, and relationships. Completing our curriculum and associated journaling activities provides a therapeutic avenue for participants to confront unaddressed traumatic experiences, often underlying addiction, and criminal behavior. There are other facilities that opt to purchase the curriculum, implementing the curriculum independently through their program department.

During her time at the Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail (VPRJ) in Williamsburg, one of the jails we provide programming, Rachel discovered the WAITT Program, an acronym for "We Are In This Together." It was a turning point for her – the moment she decided to wholeheartedly commit to her recovery journey. Surrendering to the process, Rachel embraced the valuable advice provided by the program. The WAITT Program, a weekly program at VPRJ led by REAL LIFE, instilled in her a sense of accountability for her actions. She noted that Tauchanna, who also co-leads classes at VPRJ, stated, "You made an impression on those girls; they really look up to you."

In the past, she states that she felt like "just an addict who let everyone down and couldn't be trusted." However, this program marked the beginning of a transformative journey. "That was the beginning of me becoming a person who did positive things," she said. The WAITT Program became the catalyst for a positive self-image and a renewed sense of well-being. When being released from VPRJ, Rachel joined REAL LIFE in one of our recovery houses to continue her recovery journey. 15 women graduated from the WAITT program at VPRJ in 2023.



# Education Pathways

The Education Pathways Program works with each Lifer to understand their educational goals and create a plan to navigate this path, should they desire. This initiative aids participants in creating and executing a realistic plan to achieve their educational objectives.

Kristina, REAL LIFE's Education Navigator, begins by identifying the career and life goals of each participant and building from there. "I have the privilege of supporting them during the early stages of brainstorming possibilities," says Kristina. These goals encompass a range of educational pursuits, from digital literacy and basic literacy to short-term skill training, certificate programs, and college degrees. "Thankfully the great staff and employment and education program worked diligently to build my resume, set me up with certifications and career courses, and an endless network of caring individuals to help me succeed," says Tommy, a REAL LIFE graduate and current Peer House Leader.

Educational goals are often directly linked to employment goals, requiring participants to obtain specialized training or certificates for certain jobs. Popular training and certificate programs include HVAC technician, electrical assistant, plumber, welder, and other electrical trades. The program facilitates interested participants in pursuing these paths.

Getting started is often challenging. Kristina acknowledges that "the financial and time commitment can be daunting." However, recovery allows them to envision and plan for the future in ways that they may not have before. Even after program graduation, participants have ongoing access to resources through the Education Pathways Program. They continue to receive support and mentorship, including assistance with financial aid applications and grants to continue to encourage them forward into their new future. Tommy adds, "I have been able to build a

foundation by continuing to meet my goals while making new ones and I remain hopeful to see what the new year brings!"

Strong partnerships allow opportunities critical for Lifer's educational attainment. The READ Center serves Lifers that struggle with Adult Literacy. This provides a wonderful opportunity to offer those who struggle with reading comprehension or those who speak English as a second language but struggle to read the language.

Today, digital literacy is a critical skill that many of those



in our program lack. As such, we offer a comprehensive digital literacy program for all participants. Upon entrance, we assess everyone's digital skills to identify specific needs. For those who require additional support or wish to enhance their knowledge, we provide tailored options: they join our weekly small group digital literacy classes or receive personalized instruction from a one-on-one tutor. This program ensures that everyone can develop crucial digital skills that are essential for successful integration into modern society.

## By the Numbers: Education Pathways Facts and Figures

- **146 male and 39 female Lifers submitted Education Interest Forms to our Education Navigator, beginning their education journey.**
- **109 Lifers worked with our Education Navigator to develop a personalized education plan, based on their interests and goals.**
- **Four female Lifers enrolled and began attending college while engaged in REAL LIFE programming.**
- **Ten Lifers successfully completed their Forklift Certification, earning an in-demand workforce credential.**

## Curriculum Development

They say that necessity is the mother of invention, and in the case of the REAL LIFE curriculum, they were right. When Sarah Scarbrough led programming in The Richmond City Jail, she noticed a big problem. While the curriculum they used contained some of the right information, including behavior modification techniques, it was written at too high of an education level for the average incarcerated person to understand (in jails, that is 6th grade for men and 9th for women). That was coupled with the need to have one curriculum comprehensive with all that is needed, instead of having a different curriculum for many different topics, which is not practical for one person to complete, nor for staff to deliver.

“So,” she states, “I decided to write my own curriculum.” She didn’t know this at the time, but this was the grassroots beginning of REAL which eventually expanded into what we now know as REAL LIFE.

“The first curriculum, completed in 2019, is a great start,” Sarah stated. The 237-page book

includes the basics of what is needed for someone to begin their recovery journey and recovery from everyday addictive lifestyles.” The first curriculum addresses many issues including communication, parenting, anger management, and changing thoughts and behaviors.

With behavioral modification at the forefront, the curriculum educates participants and provides the additional support needed to change negative thinking patterns and behavior. Once thinking is changed, a change in behavior follows suit. All of this prepares the individual with the skills needed on the path of recovery.



The second curriculum, recently released, evolved organically. Sarah saw an issue arise through REAL LIFE’s program at the Virginia Peninsula Regional Jail. Once the women finished the first curriculum, there was nowhere for them to go and continue their pursuit. They just did the same curriculum over and over again. While this might be helpful for reinforcement, it made Sarah think about next steps. “If this first curriculum is the baseline, what’s the next step for them? We wanted them to continue to grow and build upon their foundation.”

The second curriculum was also written for our REAL LIFE Housing graduates. “We needed a way to continue to hold them accountable as they continued to live in our recovery house.” REAL LIFE will also be providing this curriculum to future graduates that move out to support them as they navigate their recovery. Many of the chapters in the second curriculum build on the first curriculum, “while incorporating more complex topics, that they should begin to address” Sarah notes. For example, in the first curriculum, they are encouraged to set goals for themselves and in the second curriculum they revisit and revise their original goals. We then go into topics such as being resilient and intimate partner violence.

The impact of the REAL LIFE curriculum hasn’t gone unnoticed. Through an anonymous grant, Christopher Newport University is in the midst of an in-depth study of the curriculum. The interim study results highlight the amazing impact that REAL LIFE curriculum has had on participants. The report notes that REAL LIFE graduates “consistently stated that REAL LIFE helped change their thought process and they know how to better identify triggers in their life and respond to them correctly.” Considering the drive behind REAL LIFE’s curriculums is to modify thinking and behavior, these qualitative results are affirming of the program's efficacy. We are looking forward to the results of the CNU study in 2024 and continuing to grow and develop our curriculums to meet the needs of our Lifers.



# Graduation

With 63 graduates in 2023, and 3 graduation ceremonies, we had a lot to celebrate. However, a REAL LIFE graduation is much more than just a celebration of academic achievement. These Lifers have disciplined themselves to beat the odds and maintain their recovery. For about 7 months they completed 237 pages of the REAL LIFE curriculum, attended approximately 25 hours of instruction a week, executed household duties and chores, attained and then maintained full-time employment, opened a bank account, obtained a sponsor for their recovery and much more. Our “Pathway to Thriving” illustrates what a Lifer must do to complete the program and graduate.

Our winter graduation included keynote speaker Chesterfield Sheriff Karl Leonard. He is a staunch supporter of our program and recovery programming for those desiring change. During this graduation, Lydell, a graduate, also shared. When he arrived in front of the podium, he could hardly speak through his emotion. “Seven months ago, I was unemployed. I was broke, I was hopeless, I was homeless and I was helpless.” Lydell confessed to the packed room, “I wanted to go somewhere else because it was six weeks instead of six months.” His father researched the REAL LIFE Program and convinced Lydell to choose this program instead. “I’ve been using for 31 years. I’ve been to 8 programs. And 8 is enough,” Lydell said. He thanked his supporters in the program, and most compellingly he said, “Sarah,” referring to Dr. Sarah Scarbrough “you say we are in the business of saving lives, and you have saved mine. And I will be forever in your debt.”



One of the amazing aspects of our program is that the graduates are able to stay in the REAL

House until they (and their Pathway Navigator) feel they are ready to move out. Some of these

graduates even

become Peer House Leaders in one of the REAL Houses.

Michael, a recent graduate and Peer House Leader, says, “holding other people accountable helps me hold myself



accountable.” He says he tries to lead by example; he goes to work, does his chores, works the program and expects the other guys to do the same.

REAL LIFE graduation is just the beginning of a new life. Robert, another graduate and Peer House Leader, said, “I’m enjoying life. This is the first time in a long time that I’m actually happy with myself. I’m happy with the situation I’m in, the place I’m at, the job I’m doing, I’m not on drugs, I’m not drinking and I feel good!”

We began to develop our Alumni program this year and will continue to do so in 2024. This will help us keep in closer contact with our graduates and continue to provide services as needed, as research shows continuation of services is important for 5 years. We are working to ensure that each Lifer knows that we support them in their recovery journey whether they are living under our roof or not.

## Employment Pathways

The REAL LIFE Employment Pathways Program offers Lifers a tailored, one-on-one approach to discover fulfilling employment opportunities. We believe that everyone deserves meaningful work, recognizing the valuable experience and potential Lifers bring. Known for their diligence and gratitude, our Lifers deeply appreciate the second chances afforded by our over 100 employment partners.

Our program defies the one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, our Employment Navigator, Sydney, collaborates closely with each Lifer to discover their interests, address barriers to employment, assess their work history, and create strategies for success. Sydney emphasizes the importance of understanding Lifers' aspirations and creating multi-step plans to achieve them. “Most of the time our clients have never been asked what they want to do and most notably what they don't want to do,” Sydney states. “Additionally they don't realize that they have so many acquired skills already that they can offer. So I try to encourage them to focus on honing in on the skills they might already have to find employment in the field they desire.”



Central to the Pathways Program is not just securing employment, but ensuring Lifers sustain meaningful jobs. “So often, Lifers don't understand their self-worth and don't believe that there is a possibility of finding THE job,” Sydney says. “They are so used to going from job to job and not really caring about what they do. I try to change their perspective and find them a position in a

company where I know their skills and personality will fit just right. I essentially act as a filter looking at multiple components like background, skills, and career goals, to find the perfect placement.”

Through partnerships with over 100 local employers, Lifers acquire essential skills for workplace success and forge enduring connections within their companies. Jae, the Chief Operations Officer of the Market @ 25th, says “our Lifer Team Members are some of the most valuable shining stars on our staff, with a dedication stronger than the average new hire. Like Patricia, who shows the type of work ethic that has made her contributions to our staff irreplaceable, or Flora, who propelled herself to Assistant Customer Service Manager.”

A key factor in our Lifers' success is our comprehensive support system. “I firmly believe that our employment numbers continue to be exceptional because of the wraparound services our Lifers receive,” Sydney states. “I can help them obtain employment all day long, but if they can’t rest their head in a safe place at night or communicate with trained case managers on their needs outside of employment, how successful can they really be in the long run?”

Through REAL LIFE's Employment Pathways Program, Lifers not only secure jobs, but also cultivate newfound confidence, resilience, and belonging as they rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to the world around them.

# By the Numbers: Employment Pathways Facts and Figures



# Empowering Pro-Social Growth



Participation in prosocial activities is integral to the recovery process, as well as the REAL LIFE program. These intentional actions, directed towards assisting others or a group, involve cooperative and positive interactions. During active addiction, individuals likely have experienced less-than-ideal interactions with others, as well as isolative behaviors, and perhaps developed issues that may require the help of a mental health professional. Therefore, creating positive interpersonal skills through engaging in prosocial activities becomes an important aspect of their recovery, fostering continued growth on their journey toward sobriety.

As a part of the program, we plan several prosocial activities throughout the year for our Lifers. REAL LIFE intentionally creates opportunities for positive social interaction, aiming to provide Lifers with moments of enjoyment, team building, and the fostering of camaraderie among both residents and staff. According to Jessica, REAL LIFE Deputy Director, these activities play a crucial role in "further building rapport with other Lifers and staff." In 2023, some of our favorite pro-social activities included:

## Field Day

REAL LIFE staff and residents came together to enjoy the amazing weather and each other's company during a field day event at a Richmond park over the summer. The festivities included a variety of games such as kickball, basketball, cornhole, and giant Jenga!



The highlight of the event was the kickball game, fostering teamwork and team spirit that encourage positive interactions among all participants. While the competitive spirit made an appearance, to Dr. Scarbrough, everyone had a wonderful time.

Josh, REAL LIFE's Community Resilience Project Coordinator, expressed, "I enjoyed the fellowship of being able to connect with my coworkers outside of a work setting. It's also an opportunity to get to know Lifers."

With approximately 90 people in attendance, Michael, a graduate, observed, "It was nice to see the interactions between the various houses. It's so easy to forget that the program is bigger than just the house you live in. It's a nice reminder to be able to participate in a community event like this because it shows you that you aren't walking the recovery road by yourself."

The event not only provided an enjoyable experience but also reinforced the sense of community within the REAL LIFE program.

## Christmas Party

The 2023 REAL LIFE Christmas party for staff and Lifers marked the 5th celebration of its kind. This festive occasion coincided with REAL LIFE's 6th anniversary, commemorating the journey from a humble beginning to having 11 houses, 18 employees, 1 AmeriCorps member and 5 Recovery Corps members. The evening kicked off with a taco and burrito bar, accompanied by a DJ, Karaoke, and a photo booth! Lifer Mackenzie said, "It was nice to get out of the house and be a part of REAL LIFE as a whole. The REAL LIFE staff was so much fun. I never thought I would Cha Cha Slide with the program director." For many, the highlight of the night was the karaoke portion, adding a lively and entertaining element to the celebration.



## Book Club

Led by Karen Grant, one of REAL LIFE's Recovery Corps members, the REAL LIFE ladies had a fall book club on the book, "Slay like a Mother" by Kathrine Wintsch. Kathrine provided books to all ladies in the program. The book club delved into the metaphorical dragons discussed in the book. Karen noted that "a lot of the women discovered that their dragons really started in childhood and adolescence." These self-doubts and comparisons tend to intensify and multiply during motherhood. During the book club sessions, participants took the opportunity to write letters to their dragons. A common thread emerged as many expressed how these dragons had profoundly impacted their thoughts, acknowledging the detrimental influence on their thought patterns and lives. It became a collective expression of gratitude and farewell to their metaphorical dragons.



Following the conclusion of the book club, author Katherine Wintsch dedicated an evening to spend time with the ladies, digging deep into the themes of her book. The discussion allowed for a more extensive exploration of the book's concepts and provided an opportunity for an enriching and meaningful conversation with the participants.

# Violence Prevention Initiative

After spending 2022 researching best practices and initiatives to deal with violence, in 2023, REAL LIFE introduced the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), a multifaceted approach aimed at tackling violence through various programs and partnerships. REAL LIFE's VPI directs the program toward three main groups: individuals involved or at risk of involvement in violence, communities affected by violence, and law enforcement along with community stakeholders committed to addressing violence.

REAL LIFE was uniquely positioned to make VPI a success, due to our ongoing work in this field and related fields, as well as currently working with and housing individuals with previous violent convictions. We are also able to use many of the services we currently provide, including intensive case management, our behavior modification curriculum, and employment and education support. The core of VPI comprises three distinct programs: Project SAF, Community Resilience Programming, and Domestic Violence Prevention.

## Project SAF

Violence reduction is addressed by our Project Safe, Alive, and Free (SAF) program launched in Hopewell. This initiative targets small but highly influential groups associated with the majority of violence in communities. Individuals within these groups receive a personalized intervention, offering both a message of hope and the stark consequences of continued violent behavior. This is then met with relentless engagement by one of REAL LIFE's life coaches, who has some sort of violence in their past and is an example that change is possible.

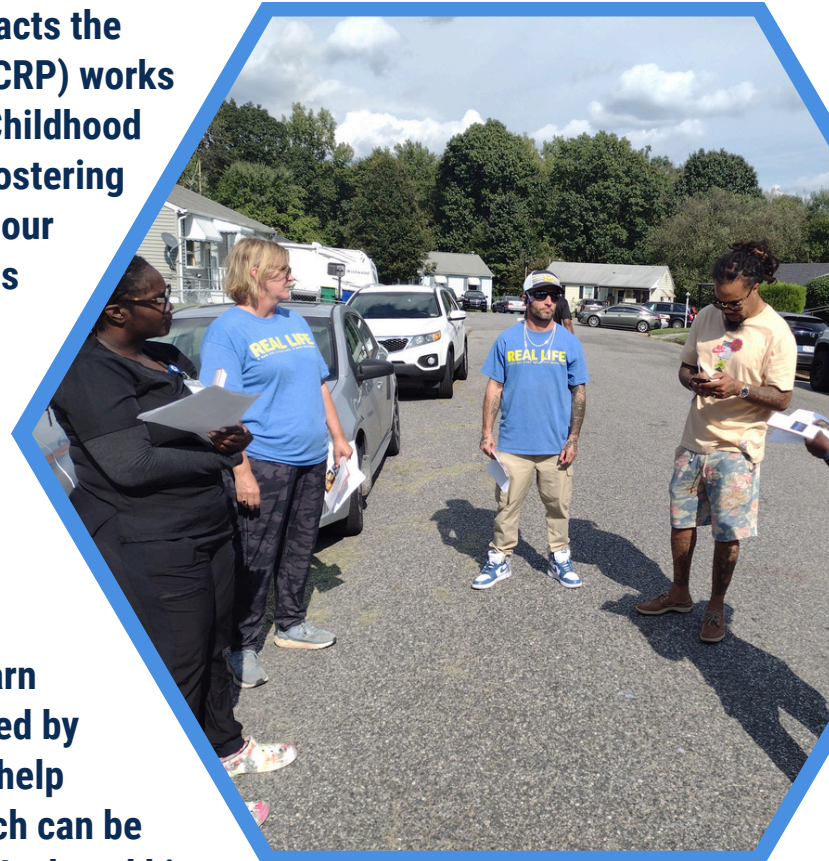


The holistic approach of VPI is pivotal to its success. REAL LIFE's strategy confronts violence through a comprehensive lens, drawing upon research-backed methodologies and practical experience. Maurice, VPI Coordinator and Life Coach, expresses excitement about the initiative, highlighting the transformative potential of this approach in addressing gun violence. "What excites me is that it's not just a program, but a new way of doing things in the city to address gun violence," says Maurice. "Just seeing the Hope in the eyes of those participating so far has given me more confidence that this will continue to be successful."

# Community Resilience Project

Recognizing that every instance of violence impacts the community, our Community Resilience Project (CRP) works to mobilize communities around ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) prevention and intervention, while fostering resilience among those affected by ACEs. Josh, our Community Resilience Project Coordinator, trains volunteers from the community to become Resilience Ambassadors, and they then join peace walks and provide wellness workshops within communities. Peace walks are conducted in neighborhoods after incidents of gun violence.

They are trained in a “set of six basic easy to learn and easy to teach wellness skills that is supported by data and science,” Josh says. “These skills can help them better regulate their nervous system,” which can be especially helpful after a local traumatic event. Josh and his team also offer workshops teaching these skills to people in the Hopewell community, where VPI is focused. Additionally, they work to connect folks in the community with services to meet needs.



## By the Numbers: Community Resilience Project Facts and Figures

- **14 Community Peace Walks** conducted, visiting a total of **915 individual homes** during the walks.
- **5 Resilience Ambassador classes** held, with a total of **94 hours** of cumulative Resilience Ambassador training hours.
- **Nearly 40 hours** of volunteer service hours by Resilience Ambassadors and partnership Resilience Ambassadors during Peace Walks and other events.

# Domestic Violence Prevention

**REAL LIFE's Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Program targets the behavior of perpetrators, a highly underserved population. Unlike existing programs that lack trauma-informed approaches and effectiveness, REAL LIFE's curriculum specifically addresses underlying issues contributing to domestic and intimate partner violence, offering preventive strategies for the future.**

**Through funding and partnership from the Virginia Department of Health, a tailored curriculum for the Domestic Violence program was developed, aiming to confront root causes of violence and prevent recurrences. REAL LIFE recognizes that addressing domestic violence demands more than standard relationship or anger management courses, aiming instead to disrupt the cycle of violence in families, thereby fostering a more promising future.**

**The curriculum is currently taught in Chesterfield and Henrico jails. According to TJ, the class instructor, "The class fills a much-needed gap in domestic violence prevention, because it focuses on the abuser, and how to help them as opposed to most other programming being for domestic violence victims."**

**The Domestic Violence course comprises ten sessions, each focusing on a distinct subject. Topics addressed in the course include regulating emotions, addressing trauma, cultivating healthy relationships, building relationship skills, taking responsibility, developing resilience, and creating prevention plans. "The class is unique in its approach to domestic violence because it pays special attention to the underlying reasons and causes of anger and angry outbursts," says TJ.**

**When asked how this curriculum was developed, REAL LIFE founder and director Sarah Scarbrough commented, "the curriculum's development was entirely organic and not initially part of the original REAL LIFE Plan,**



which contributes to the program's beauty. This evolution was evident as we realized the number of those who had been perpetrators had nothing specifically geared toward that aspect of their life. Recognizing a significant need for specific intervention, discussions with the police department and the Virginia Department of Health revealed a lack of resources for this population." In partnership with the Virginia Department of Health, REAL LIFE was able to create a curriculum specifically for perpetrators of violence.

Terry, a recent graduate of the program, discovered its benefits in multiple ways. He emphasized the crucial role of communication, stating, "Without communication, it will be a rough journey. Communication is the key. Speak instead of blowing off and going off." Terry expressed his commitment to being more honest, open-minded, and grateful in future relationships. Reflecting on the impact of the class, he mentioned, "Understanding myself and my circumstances. The best thing that I learned about myself was how to become a better person."

## REAL LIFE's Strategic Planning

In 2023, led by the Board of Directors and with the support of staff, REAL LIFE began a strategic planning journey. After developing five areas of strategic focus and related goals, the Board adopted the strategic plan framework. Those five areas of focus are as follows:

**Financial Health**

**Community Relationships & Partnerships**

**Organizational Development**

**Core Services Programming**

**Messaging & Marketing**

# Board of Directors

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## Stay in Touch and Get Involved!

**REAL LIFE has achieved so much because of our incredible supporters and volunteers! We are so grateful for each and every one of you - and all you have done over the years.**



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**Interested in learning more about REAL LIFE or want to learn how to get involved? Visit our website at [reallifeprogram.org](http://reallifeprogram.org) or email [info@reallifeprogram.org](mailto:info@reallifeprogram.org). We'd love to hear from you!**



**REAL LIFE**  
Navigating a New Tomorrow