

Volume 48, Issue 2, Fall 2025

GRADUATE HUMANITIES

A multidisciplinary program bringing together students and faculty from a variety of backgrounds to collaboratively explore the interdisciplinary intersections of the arts, historical, cultural, and literary studies within an open, exploratory, and experimental graduate-level educational environment.

Everyone has a story

Little known fact: our Graduate Humanities newsletters celebrate "a private class of entities dedicated to mobilizing for the common good." Who are these entities?

Most of us contribute, benefit, maybe even work for them because, according to PROPUBLICA (accessed 7/2/25) there are over 11,903 in West Virginia.

This definition may blow their cover: "They are driven by their values that embrace social, environmental, and cultural issues." I have a friend that argues businesses can claim the same. I'll give him that, however, these folks are required to plow their profits back into their services.

They survive using grants, fundraisers, and partner with other similar entities, and many of them couldn't do the things they do without a throng of volunteers.

Functionally, they are non-governmental organizations, although they often work alongside local, state, and federal governments.

You guessed it: we're talkin' nonprofits.

Stories about nonprofits in the following pages were culled from two recent community-university partnered projects.

Another factoid: these stories reveal engaging and professional pathways to a life dedicated to public service and positive change.

~ Trish Hatfield, Editor

Celebrate with us!

New Generation Change Agents in Appalachia

Marshall University Graduate Humanities Program
Drinko Project Team

LOOK inside



Marshall University
Graduate Humanities Program
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Let's Begin with a Time Line

Documentation of Nonprofits in West Virginia

2016: "West Virginia Activist Archive" Seminar



Beginning with the 2016 "West Virginia Activist Archive" seminar, the Graduate Humanities Program (GHP) partnered with Step By Step, Inc. (SBS)—a nonprofit that benefits West Virginians striving to "dream, work, and grow"—to host panels of "long-haul" activists and groups. These panels were digitally

recorded and archived in collaboration with their storytellers. SBS's Director, Michael Tierney, and GHP's Director, Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter, then engaged students and activists to produce posters and other media for a public exhibit. These posters traveled throughout West Virginia until 2020.

2018: "Work in Nonprofits" Seminar & Book



Next came a seminar titled "Work in Nonprofits: Appreciating the Charitable Sector." This enabled students and their instructor to interview staff and board members of Step By Step, Inc. The interviews were published by GHP in the book Octopus, Elephant, Beehive: An Appreciative Inquiry into a Thriving Step By Step, Inc. This research used the Humanities lens and the interactive methodologies of Appreciative Inquiry and Collaborative Ethnography. The interviews were explicitly designed to be used in Step By Step's strategic planning.

OCTOPUS
Elephant
Beehive

An Appreciative Inquiry into
a Thriving Step By Step, Inc.

Marshall University
Graduate Humanities Program
2018 Seminar on Nonprofits
Public Humanities Project

**In-house
Metaphors
for a thriving
Step By Step, Inc.**

OCTOPUS for its
diverse activities and
systems-wide capacity
to adapt through
constant learning

ELEPHANT for its
breadth of grassroots
collaboration with over
seventy-five partners.

BEEHIVE because
everyone has a role
and everyone's working
within their role to see
the organization grow.

2023 - 2025: "Drinko Project" & Manuscript

Then, a Drinko Fellowship was awarded to Dr. Lassiter when he was named the 28th Distinguished John Deaver Drinko Academy Fellow. During his 2-year Fellowship, Dr. Lassiter assembled a group of faculty, graduate students, and a community member who launched a larger effort to engage and learn from a newer generation of Appalachian "change agents." The

student-interviews were featured in a manuscript published in book form, *New Generation Change Agents in Appalachia* (pictured on the front page of this newsletter). Additional plans include gathering all the participants to co-interpret the interview findings and collaboratively write and produce further outputs.



The "Drinko Project Team" answering questions at the 2024 Appalachian Studies Conference.

Brief Background to this Collaborative Ethnography

These excerpts, used with permission, are from the Preface by Dr. Luke Eric Lassiter in *New Generation Change Agents in Appalachia*.

< The Drinko Project Team narrowed in on a persistent theme in those projects: namely, that older activists, community organizers, nonprofit leaders, and others—mostly in their sixties and seventies—regularly mentioned how encouraged they were by a new and upcoming generation of leadership. . . . These newer change agents were also different: they offered new takes and fresh ideas and, more often than not, generated novel and innovative methods that created concerted positive change in a host of different organizations. . . .

With this previous work as our backdrop, the Drinko Project Team set out to consider the background and evolving experience of these younger, beginning to midlevel career change agents. We wanted to know what motivates them. What visions for service and change do they prioritize? What and who

inspires them? What makes their organizational efforts "new" or "innovative"? How are they reshaping public service and change?

As this was only a start to a much longer and larger project, we decided to focus only on West Virginia, and to engage in an involved conversation with a small number of these newer change agents, all of whom, it turned out, worked for nonprofit and other organizations that had experienced (or were experiencing) these changes in leadership to varying degree.

The quotes on the next page are from initial interviews conducted by Anna Osborne and Justin Whittington who, working with Cat Pleska and Trish Hatfield, respectively, also wrote narrative first drafts of each interview. The larger Drinko project group then engaged in conversations around these

drafts, elaborating content and identifying developing themes which, in turn, served as the base for developing the essay drafts further.

Beth Campbell then edited the manuscripts in line with an overall vision for the developing manuscript. I took these drafts into another round of editing, preparing their final production in collaboration with the nonprofit leaders who are featured herein.

Importantly, these nonprofit leaders read and commented on the developing drafts at various points

in the process, which introduced further layers of conversation, with new ideas and interpretations about the themes and issues that surface in each essay. . . . The final form of this manuscript took shape via Marshall's partnership with Mountain State Press and Editor-in-Chief Cat Pleska, who worked closely with our team as we moved this work into production. >

New Generation of Change Agents in Appalachia

“Afterword: Cloud of Witnesses”

by Michael Tierney

These excerpts, used with permission,
are from the “Afterword: Cloud of Witnesses,”
New Generation Change Agents in Appalachia.

< When I am asked how I maintain hope in this time of desperation—or often more specifically and bluntly, while living in West Virginia—I reply without hesitation that I look to the work of young(er) activists.

This practice is part of a very old tradition. In the aftermath of 9/11, Mr. Rogers noted the people who ran into the fires and remembered what his mother said to him: “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

Finding the strength to work for change is often a matter of taking responsibility for where we focus our attention. . . . Part of that self-discipline is noticing the people whose stories and lives can inspire us. This collection is filled with such stories.

If I were to describe these richly varied lives in a single phrase, I would note that they are prophetic pragmatists. Truly they are visionaries, challenging complacency, taking on the Goliaths, the seemingly intractable problems of our times—community disintegration, environmental destruction, the tragedies of the opioid epidemic and mass incarceration, and all the many ways our fellow humans are left behind.

While they speak truth to power, they are willing to work with anyone and everyone. . . . In a world increasingly dedicated to othering, elementary kindness and respect can itself be revolutionary. >



1 Alex Weld: Executive Director of Generation West Virginia. "What I never want is for someone who really wants to stay in West Virginia to not know what to do. To say, 'Well, if I have to leave, I guess I will.' People love their communities and if they want to stay, I want to do everything we can to help make that happen."

2 Erica Marks: Director of the Yew Mountain Center. "You have to hold all these things all together all at once and I know that we're all just sharing this place."

3 Lori McKinney: Cofounder and Executive Director of the RiffRaff Arts Collective. "It's been a lot of private investment and a lot of citizen blood, sweat and tears. But here we are twenty years later, and it's a pretty happening district now. And a lot of great, creative people have moved here to be a part of it."

4 Michael Farmer: Co-Director of Step By Step and Pastor of Risen City Church. "Ultimately, at least from a perspective in West Virginia where we're having so much population loss, I think it's important for us now to show young people people that they are valued at their work, . . . It's not always about the money. It's also about self-worth. We've got to be able to invest in what they need."

5 Jacob Hannah: Chief Executive Officer, Coalfield Development. "We're rebuilding our Appalachian economy from the ground up, with the people who have been left behind, in the places that have been left behind. We're creating new businesses . . . that policies and funding and grants can then plug into and say, 'Yeah, Appalachia deserves a second change, Appalachia deserves this investment.'"

6 Stephanie Tyree: West Virginia Community Development Hub. "I think that's one of The Hub's strengths. That we are so deeply rooted in West Virginia, and we have a

deep, deep understanding of the culture and the history of the place, and we also have a respectful humility that we don't know everything about every place."

7 Joe Solomon, Co-Director, Solutions Oriented Addiction Response West Virginia (SOAR WV). "Some people have destinies. I thought my destiny was to become a therapist. But I think some places have destinies too, and I just don't think that if you're living in the overdose capital of America, it's a time and a place to put your story first. It's not our city's destiny to stay this way. We need everybody working on helping us shake and shuck that mantle."

8 Kandi Workman: Tamarack Foundation for the Arts. "I've been really fortunate to be in community with other people who have been talking for years about narrative change. And it's like, 'Where does that start?' And 'Where does it stop?' And 'What is the part that I can do?' Being a culture worker and an organizer has got to be done with people. It can't be somebody who comes in thinking that they're the leader and then they make all the plans."

9 Kathleen and Brian DeRouen: Co-Directors of the Alderson Hospitality House. "Having people feel loved, accepted, listened to, fed: those are the core things that I think are important for any human being. And being in community. The Hospitality House is an incredible community."

10 Autumn Crowe: Deputy Director of WV Rivers Coalition. "This organization is built on relationships. Nonprofit partners, businesses, as well as state and federal agencies. They must be manufactured to do this work. It's the most important piece—we can't do any of it alone."

2025: "Nonprofits in Appalachia" Seminar

Contiguous with the Drinko Project's trajectory of interviewing "change agents," the third seminar, "Nonprofits in Appalachia," involved a new cohort of students in a new round of conversations with student-

selected young nonprofit professionals. Students participated in weekly seminars, completed weekly journals, interviewed and collaboratively wrote-up the interview with a "change agent" of their choosing.

Weekly Journals, by Ben Campbell



The following excerpts (shared with permission) are from the "Weekly Journal" of graduate student, Ben Campbell. Ben's journal was chosen for this newsletter because of his experiences within several nonprofits.

< Week Seven (2/21/25)

I couldn't help but see myself in some of this week's writings from Margaret Wheatley's *Turning to One Another*. I was at a crossroads this time last year that required me to ask some of the same questions posed in her excerpts and to brainstorm possible courses of action for creating a more purpose-driven life.

It would be easy to claim I "went through a lot" for an extended period, though what I did endure is really nothing more than living life. I contracted Lyme Disease during the first year of the pandemic and went through a bout of hell with that. Like so many other American households, we decided we needed a better version of home after having spent an unfathomable amount of time in the same house for well over a year.

Within four months of moving both of my grandmothers died, two weeks apart. It was an extreme amount of loss to process at once. I loved them both dearly.

Then came inflation and the sudden realization that we would not be living as comfortably as we had grown accustomed to unless I actively sought a new revenue

stream, which meant I needed to find another job.

One of the best experiences of my life was my first "official" job at the age of sixteen, when I worked the maintenance crew at Babcock State park between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Having spent my time outdoors all day every day, experiencing camaraderie with members of the crew, and taking pride in making a naturally beautiful place even more pristine and presentable added up to a truly special notch in my personal timeline.

In an almost mid-life-crisis kind of way, I decided I wanted to recapture that experience, only this time I would work for the United States Forest Service. Yes, there would be money earned, but I would also be providing a service to my nation through the beautification of the Lake Sherwood and Blue Bend Recreation areas. Here is where I believed I could find a purpose worth working toward, a new life-defining path. Only I was guilty of those *imagined realities* that Dr. Lassiter speaks of in relation to ethnographic research when I envisioned the outcomes. In my mind, I was going to make a real difference in the same way I did all those years ago at Babcock State park.

What I got instead was an additional layer of disappointment. The maintenance crew spent more

time working to keep me from working than they did performing the duties of the job! Four and a half months later, I couldn't take it anymore. I was mentally exhausted from trying to divert their diversion tactics.

All that next winter I lived in a state of depression. Thankfully, I took the kind of action that Margaret Wheatley advocates in *Turning to One Another* to make my emerging purpose happen. I gave of my heart once again, as she suggests, by working with low-income children through the Energy Express program via AmeriCorps. I was able to make the kind of difference I could hang my hat on. That prompted my current AmeriCorps service, which has also instilled a great sense of pride. Next comes the Wood Bank that will provide heat to homes in need. These experiences mean I'm a little more serious than I used to be, but change should be expected with personal growth. I am consciously okay with that as I have chosen this current path and find myself more fulfilled for it.

Week Eight (3/2/25)

There are so many positive outcomes to derive from active listening, ranging from historical documentation to advocacy for marginalized individuals to helping a person get through a rough day that may seem too difficult to overcome. I've noted in previous reflections the fact that I have

done a LOT of active listening through my AmeriCorps service. So many of the people I have encountered, especially from the addiction community, have no one to turn to, no one to listen to their gripes, grievances, or concerns. I am fortunate to be married to my best friend. I know that at the end of a difficult day I can depend on her to simply listen, as she can depend on me to do the same, and that alone helps us to decompress enough that we are able to move forward, continuing the cycle of facing shit day in and day out. So many people aren't as fortunate. I sometimes wonder how they find the strength to maintain a semi-positive outlook.

There was a camp host during my summer at the USFS who existed in less-than-ideal circumstances. She was in her early 70s, single with no children, and had no place to officially call home. In the summer months she lived in a tent on her section of campground, which was one of the more secluded and less-utilized sections, receiving \$14 a day in pay to ensure campers had paid their fees and following the rules of the forest; she also kept the campground bathrooms clean. In the winter months she moved to Florida, where she lived in her car and provided sitting services for elderly individuals.

Most of the people associated with the Forest Service disliked her. She was "grumpy," according to them, and hard to work with. I never found this to be the case myself, probably because I took the time to consider her situation. She had standards for how she felt the forest should operate, but they weren't unreasonable. They were the result of the pride she took in her position and her love for the land.

One day I was able to take my own truck up to her section. It was rare

that she received visits or saw her section receive the kind of maintenance attention that it deserved.

I spent four hours straight cleaning and mowing the individual sites of her campground, making them presentable in a way that she appreciated. When done, I sat at her site for my lunch break and listened as she first shared her thanks, then later her frustrations for others at the forest not showing her and the site similar respect.

The one-sided conversation then turned into a much-needed therapy session about life in general. She eventually broke into tears, and I was forced to console her on a couple occasions, though I mostly listened.

Later, when others on the crew asked why it had taken so long to catch up with them, I conveyed that Margaret had needed an ear. "That must have been horrible!" a couple of them stated. "Listening to her crazy ass ramble." Only it wasn't. Not even remotely horrible.

Forty-five minutes went by and she was in a much better place mentally and I had learned so many fascinating facts about her and her late mother who had immigrated to America from Ireland.

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wasn't. Not even remotely horrible. As I explained to this small group of people, all of whom had some kind of partner in their life, she does not have the luxury of coming home from a hard day to someone who can serve as a filter.

No one responded, which itself said a lot about the recognition that was being processed in the moment.

I see too, however, that by listening I did more. I provided the affirmation she needed that her work held meaning, that she was not just a homeless person squatting on federal lands for a mere \$14 a day. She was a caretaker for the precious lands that she loved, serving her country in her own honorable way. And someone appreciated her efforts!

Week Fourteen (4/20/25)

I am a grinder. Always have been. It's one element of my generation that (generally) we can take pride in, the fact that we get after it. Work hard, play hard. That's been our motto dating back to those high school jobs we took on in Mall courtyards and fast-food restaurant chains—or in my case, the local state park. Sprinkle in the half dozen lawns I mowed as well, in between the hours of playing basketball with friends and partying up secret hollows, and you get the full-throttle madness that defined the spirit of Gen X. It's still a prevalent lifestyle among many of us. My best friend works 40 hours a week for the USPS, serves as an officer in the Army National Guard, and puts in another 15-20 hours a week delivering food through the Grub Hub app (living in Northern Virginia requires everyone to grind in that way to meet the costs).

I teach full time as a professor of English (which requires me to drive three and a half hours round trip twice a week to Dublin, Virginia), run a lawn care service (all these

years later, I have half a dozen yards in my care, again), serve my community through AmeriCorps, participate in a Graduate class, cut, split, stack, and deliver firewood for my burgeoning wood bank, and haul my daughters all over God's country to various extracurricular activities. The grind is who I am.

And I have come to learn just how hard it is to shut it down on the rare occasion I catch a break. Even so, I sometimes daydream (especially as I am getting older) of something more than this fast-paced and fleeting existence. It's not possible, of course, at this stage of my life without my actions creating an avalanche of disruptive consequences. There are others to think of. Bills to pay—people who need someone like me to rise to the occasion, instead of taking the easy way out.

For those who can afford to look elsewhere, or do not have others depending on them in the same way I do, "walking out and walking on" (as Wheatley and Deborah Frieze recommend in their book, *Walk Out and Walk On*), makes perfect sense.

Wheatley's anecdote about the bath water serving a purpose beyond cleanliness reminds me of my father's situation as a child. His family of two adults and three children lived, at that time, in a two-room shanty that had been built by repurposed lumber from over the hill, what comprised the barn of my three-great grandfather's farm. One room was a kitchen and the other was a large living area partitioned by curtains. No bathroom was needed since an outhouse stood around back, but

when it came time to bathe there was a single metal tub that would be filled with hot water taken from the coal stove and everyone shared

I love the statement in *Walk Out Walk On* that "What matters is not *what* we choose, but *that* we choose." I hope this is what occurred when I chose to enroll in AmeriCorps, when I chose to launch a wood bank, and when I chose to take this class.

that same tub of water, so that the last person to bathe did so in the filthy remnants of all that washed before them. This was 1950s backwoods Appalachia. This was a cultural norm. I don't know what happened to that water after the final bather squeezed the last drop of life from it, but it most certainly got its use.

It's interesting, though, to consider how a couple decades later people like my father were annoyed by the good intentions of fellow Americans who volunteered to eradicate

poverty in Central Appalachia, as we see mentioned in relation to the need to "do good" for places like India and Mexico.

His family unit had not recognized a problem with their bathing arrangement, which was eventually replaced as the children grew older with indoor plumbing. They had managed just fine to stay upright

and healthy, on their own. That is the biggest lesson I have taken from this book. Resiliency has many different shades.

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I'm still grinding, yes, but I'm doing so with a mission in mind that looks vastly different from the one I sought to fulfill only a short year ago, before my first AmeriCorps experience with Energy Express. I look forward to seeing what a future of "walking on" looks like after having taken the first crucial steps. >

Ben is a Professor of English at New River Community College and author of two books of poetry, Darker Still and A Welcome Walk in the Dark. We can add Ben, a.k.a., a self-described "grinder," to our list of "Change Agents." While he was taking this class, he filed "Yeshua's Hearth, Inc." as a nonprofit entity in West Virginia. Yeshua's Hearth will supply firewood to folks who depend on wood to heat their homes. In June, he was selected by the Appalachian Regional Commission to take part in a READY NONPROFITS training program "to build internal capacity and strengthen services to help Appalachian economics thrive." Congratulations, Ben!



Three out of Eight Collaborative Interviews with Nonprofit "Change Agents"

[Editor's Note: The remaining five interviews will appear
in the Spring 2026 Graduate Humanities.]

1. You End Homelessness By Housing People

An Interview with Traci Strickland, by Makayla Hosey

Traci Strickland, Executive Director of the Kanawha Valley Collective, was interviewed by Makayla Hosey, Student, Marshall University Graduate Humanities Program. The in-person interview occurred on Tuesday, April 8, 2025, 2:00pm-3:10pm, at Kanawha Valley Collective's office in Charleston, West Virginia.

< Makayla Hosey: When I walked into the office, I was greeted by Traci Strickland and a staff member, Kassi Pauley, who I knew prior, and she introduced us. I asked Traci to begin by sharing her job title and what that consists of. To explain this, an explanation of the Kanawha Valley Collective itself was needed.

Could you use some more money?

For a number of years, we were basically operated by the executive directors of the men's shelter, the women and families, and of Covenant House. They all had their own organizations, and they came together as a planning entity for ending homelessness in Kanawha, Boone, Putnam, and Clay Counties. I started contracting part-time as director with the KVC and then, in January 2020, enough funding was secured to make my position full-time. They also hired a second employee for the continuum's database. Ten weeks after we were hired, the pandemic hit. And everything changed.

We went to a lot of meetings with the health department. And I always asked, "Where does somebody experiencing unsheltered homelessness quarantine? Where do they isolate? Like...If you get sick, where are you sick at?"

We began to work with hotels within a 50-mile radius of Charleston to provide shelter for unhoused COVID-positive individuals, under the condition that they would "de-COVID" the room each time the room was turned. We then partnered with a second hotel, to house people

who *didn't* have COVID but couldn't go to the shelter due to the outbreaks. We ended up housing more people in the hotels than in our emergency shelters at the time.

Since we needed to seek more funding for hotels I wrote a grant for \$60,000 and we were awarded \$75,000. A couple weeks later the funders called and asked, "Hey, could you use more money?" And I'm like, "Sure." And I'm thinking, you know, they're going to throw another 15 - 20 grand in. No. [Their donation] went from \$75,000 to \$800,000.

Wow. (Laughter) That's incredible.

It was something. On one side, we had the planning instrument for coordinating all of the efforts to end homelessness. And on the other side, we had our rapid re-housing. We received another grant to offer community-based support services to people once they move into housing.

In June of 2023, we took over operations of the men's shelter, which is now the Equinox Men's Shelter. The condition of the building was so bad that the city of Charleston Sanitary Crew refused to come in and help us empty it... I've got some rockstar staff who were like, "We're gonna do it." So, we emptied the entire shelter, and, all in all, did probably about \$150,000 just in extermination, cleaning, new bunk beds...It's like new everything.

Along the way, we started getting some funding that we partner with other agencies to funnel. It's a big undertaking with a lot of moving parts. We grew faster than we had staff. The plan we had for this small agency of four or five people has now become an agency of 18 to 20 people. That's kind of the collective in a nutshell.

Thank you so much for explaining that. It's really impressive how y'all were able to adapt like that.

WARMING CENTERS

The next questions are a little more specific: Tell me a story. When have you had a sense of wonder, surprise, or delight because collaboration between nonprofits went beyond anticipated limits?

Seven years ago now, we were sitting in one of our monthly meetings and somebody asked the question, "What happens to people who were unsheltered when it gets cold?" The Red Cross only opens shelters in response to an event or an emergency.

Margaret O'Neal at United Way and I were like, "All right, let's try to open a warming center."

We got asked "How do you know people will come?"

To which I said, "How do you know they won't?"

We opened our first night at the community center. They gave us this room that we fit 25 cots in. You could barely walk between the cots. We had 28 people show up that first night. It was so funny because one of us said, "We're just gonna have a place for them to come in and sleep. We're not gonna have anything to drink. We're not gonna have anything to feed 'em. We're not gonna do all this stuff. It's just gonna be a place to come in and sleep."

And I'm just like, "Okay, whatever."

The United Way, who had never ran a shelter before, actually took the first night. In the evening, somebody from City Council brought in a stack of pizzas and coffee, and somebody had a deck of cards. They ended up sitting around, the United Way staff and people using the warming center, eating pizza and talking.

We discovered two things that night. One, we needed a bigger space, and, two, of course we're gonna feed people because that is where the humanity and the engagement is. You talk differently and more informally around a table eating than you do across a desk with a client.

We moved to a gym in the Salvation Army but needed to move to the Breen Neighborhood Shop. Cabin Creek provided either healthcare or referrals on site. A woman from Bible Center Church began to coordinate food with churches and nonprofits in the area. For six years, they were entirely volunteer-based and would find supplies wherever they could.

Then last year the city of Charleston decided that they were going to fund us. Being able to hire people, mix them with volunteers—because we had some strong volunteers that didn't necessarily want to get paid, also didn't necessarily want to fall into the staffing structure of how we scheduled shifts, but they wanted to come and just do certain things. We have, usually, a volunteer or two who comes in and actually serves

"The Kanawha Valley Collective (KVC) is a Continuum of Care dedicated to preventing and eradicating homelessness in improving homelessness services and removing barriers in housing in Kanawha, Boone, Clay, and Putnam Counties. Our common goal is to address the underlying causes of homelessness, rapidly re-house the homeless, and remove barriers to the homeless remaining stably housed."

[Editor's Note: *The following organizations are members of the Kanawha Valley Collective. Makayla interviewed only the Executive Director of the collective, Traci Strickland.*]

Salvation Army

(301 Tennessee Ave)

**Food, Clothing, Emergency utilities
and rental assistance**

Kanawha Charleston Health

Department (108 Lee St E)

Medical and Dental assistance

United Way Square

(1 United Way Square)

**Resource referral, United Way,
Kanawha Valley Collective**

Covenant House

(600 Shrewsbury St)

Food pantry, COVID-19 testing

Centralized Assessment Team

(1015 Smith St)

Intake assessment's and referrals

Equinox Men's Shelter

(505 Leon Sullivan Way)

Sojourners

(1418 Washington Street East)

Family and Women's Shelter

meals and then leaves. And we have a few volunteers that love working the sign-in desk. They'll come in and work the sign-in desk usually, at the times that are busiest, so, the staff can take care of other stuff.

It's grown from 28 people on a night when it was 10 degrees with us not being able to do any more than three nights, to maybe 60 people in a building with paid staff and volunteers providing an unlimited number of nights in a row.

So, I mean, you're just looking at something that's grown from this little volunteer thing to something that kind of has a life of its own in some ways. It was really just some people coming together saying, "We're not gonna let people freeze to death ... on our streets ... Nobody should."

There's a lot of people in a shelter. And a lot of personalities and a lot of issues . . . I mean, staying in a shelter is not easy. It is not dangerous. It's not what you see on TV. But that doesn't mean it's easy because it's just a lot. In the evenings, everybody's there, you can just feel the energy of 60 people in a building. It's just a hum, like electricity.

We need another alternative for people who are experiencing homelessness with as low barrier as possible. We ask very little of them. People can come and go. There's not a curfew. One of the first questions I get asked is, "If I go, can I leave?"

It's like, "Yep. You can go and come back, as many times as you want."

We know people leave to use substances. They trust us to the point that they will tell us where they're going, so that if we don't see them return, we go look for them to make sure they're okay. The last thing they hear before they leave is, "Please come back."

The one that sticks out to me the most is... my fear was that we couldn't keep him safe. He was pretty psychotic, which was why he had to leave. He came back the next night, and he came back the night after that, and he's like, "I feel like I need to apologize to you." I'm like, "For what?" He's like, "I feel like I might have been out of control a couple of nights ago." I'm like, "You do not need to apologize."

We see people in their worst days. When they show up again... It's gone. There's no point in shaming people. Because we're just glad they came back.

This is now full-fledged living, breathing thing that just started from us sitting across the table going, "Hey,

what happens when it gets cold?" "I don't know." (Laughter)

I'm excited to see where it continues to grow.

Same.

WHY DO YOU DO THIS?

Without being humble, what was it that you brought to the experience?

Blood, sweat, and tears...

Traci's office neighbor, Kassi Pauley, from the other room shouts out: "Knowledge and drive." (Laughter)

It's probably stubbornness more than drive. The question for everything we do here is: how do we help people who are experiencing homelessness? I have a theory, or a philosophy, or something... And, so, I'll ask you. Do you know how to end homelessness?

I hesitated as I tried to come up with an answer. "No," I finally said. "Short answer: no."

Hey, Kassi, "How do you end homelessness?"

(We wait a moment before laughing at Kassi's silence.)

"Show up every day."

She says it nicer than I do...So, you end homelessness by housing people. I mean, that's the answer.

But when you house people...you show them that you give a shit...that's at the core of everything we do.

Christmas Eve, always strikes me. Because... the people that come in are like, 'why are you here?' And it's like, 'Because it's 15 degrees outside.' And they're like, 'But don't you have somewhere to be?' And it's like, no. I mean, nowhere more important than this place here right now. The Jewish community and the Muslim community have stepped up around traditional Christian holidays so that other people can celebrate their faith tradition and they volunteer. They're like, "We don't celebrate Christmas, but we know people do."

To answer your question about what I bring is stubbornness and drive and, you know, passion. A lot of people bring a lot more, I guess physical work ethic to it, but I'm just the one going, "We're going to do this. We're going to figure out how to get it done."

Speaking of the people around you...other contributions, so, coworkers, friends, and family.

Whoever you would like to talk about for the story that you told.

There's Margaret and Kerri Cooper at the United Way. And my staff extraordinaire next door, Kassi Pauley. It's really about finding people who have strengths that I don't. And keeping them around—not just share your vision but who can complement your weaknesses.

What visions and strategies were in place organizationally to support this experience?

None. (Laughter) Literally none. You know, warming centers predate the KVC having staff. We had zero structure for any of this. Honestly, the other part of the structure is money. We had intestinal fortitude and the desire to do what was right. And around that came structuring and money.

Three Wishes

If you could have three wishes to further collaboration between organizations, what would they be and how would you know they worked?

I think my first wish would be for a shared pathway to [end homelessness].

The second thing I would wish for is more money.

What would you do with the money?

We need more housing. I have people with housing vouchers that we can't find a unit for, which is problematic. We need more money put into our housing stock so that it is safe and affordable. You always need more services.

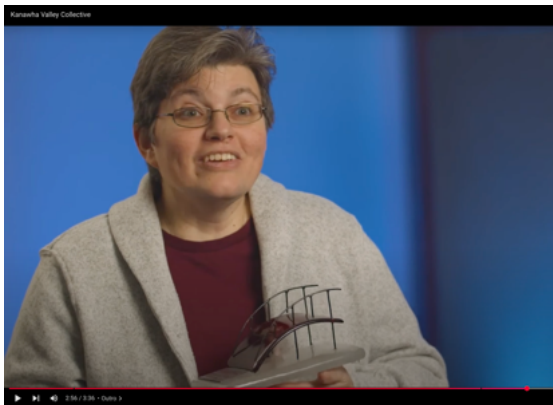
"My third wish is that I could really use more federal and state support. Working all this time to lower barriers for people experiencing homelessness and then having a change of rules is frustrating.

So, yeah...shared vision, more money, more government support." administration that is putting up more barriers to people experiencing homelessness and poverty, it's frustrating.

So, yeah...my three wishes are: shared vision, more money, more government support.

Thank you for this interview. Before I end the recording, I'll just ask if there's anything else that you want to share or for me to add or take out at all.

You don't have to take out anything. I literally talk about homelessness all day. I'm good if you're good. >



Traci Strickland, Executive Director of the Kanawha Valley Collective, received the "Change Maker" award from The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, June 2, 2021. She considered it a "collective" award for the Greater Kanawha Valley Collective because as she was receiving the award, "there were probably 150 staff out working on making people's lives better." Source: <https://tgkvf.org/kanawha-valley-collective-2/> (Accessed 9.9.25)



Afterword

I was blown away by what Traci Strickland and the KVC have accomplished, as well as for her hopes for the future. It's inspiring to hear about the work she has done to help the Charleston community, while going from balancing a full-time job and being part-time at the KVC to being full-time at the KVC when the COVID pandemic hit. Writing up her interview has reminded me of the passion and excitement that I felt while in the KVC office, listening to her stories. It's exciting to imagine how the KVC will continue to grow. – Mak Hosey

Makayla Hosey has a bachelor's degree from Marshall in psychology with a double minor in creative writing and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. She is in her fourth semester pursuing a master's in humanities and an Appalachian studies certificate.

2. ALL Hands On Deck

An Interview with Hannah Mitchell, by Emma Hicks

(This interview takes a different approach to transcribing.)



Hannah Mitchell, local volunteer, and President of the Board of Directors for Love Hope Center for the Arts was interviewed by Emma Hicks, Student, Marshall University Graduate Humanities Program for her Non-Profits in Appalachia Class (Spring 2025). The in-person interview occurred on Thursday, March 27, 2025, 4:30-5:30 p.m. at Love Hope Center for the Arts, in Fayetteville, West Virginia.

< Emma Hicks: Hannah Mitchell gave me the interview release form I'd sent her and, looking for a "quiet" place to conduct our interview, she guided me down to the basement. The two-story building with steep stairs to the front door and a bell tower housing the Love Hope Center was constructed in 1912 and was the first African American church in this community.

Hannah Mitchell explained "Its deeply rooted history of service, togetherness, community, engagement, congregation, solitude, and love has resided in these walls since the beginning. I can't imagine the building being anything but a place that serves the community."

The building has been painted blue with white trim and is fronted by a large, bright red and blue "cube," created by founder and popular local artist, Jamie Lester. The colors and the cube signal something else is going on in what used to be a church. It's now a modern art gallery, studio, and exhibit place. Speaking of which, the sounds of voices and hammers from the floor above becomes a soundtrack for our interview.

Hannah Michelle: "Sorry we're installing a quilting exhibit right now. Make a note of that in there!" [Laughter] We settle in a temporarily vacant stained-glass studio and begin the interview.

Emma Hicks: Alright! So I'm here with Hannah, who so graciously agreed to do this interview with me. I asked her to introduce herself, tell us what her role is within the organization, and explain her responsibilities within this non-profit.

Hannah Mitchell: I am the President of the Board of Directors for Love Hope Center for the Arts, but I have a lot of other roles here. We do a series of events. We do exhibits. We have two studios. (Carl, who is 80 years old, teaches stained glass classes. He teaches people from Lewisburg to Hinton.) And I supervise all of that. Everyone enjoys their time spent in here because it is a unique art gallery. I do the day-to-day of the business and the organization and monitor everything.

Could you tell a story when you've had a sense of wonder, surprise, or delight, collaborating between your nonprofit and another nonprofit and if this went beyond anticipated limits? And could you also go into gritty details so we can see how it smelled, tasted, sounded, and felt. [Laughter] That's a lot!

The first thing that comes off the top of my head is a festival in the second week of August for the folks of the New River Gorge called "Artist of the New." Multiple nonprofits from West Virginia are involved, such as West Virginia Rivers, and the Humane Society, and other non-profits like those that have booths and help

with marketing. There's music, there's food trucks, and, of course, there's an art exhibit inside that is all New River Gorge artists. There are several vendors and also performative vendors like "The New Roots Community Farm." It's really an ode to this area that we all live in.

As far as my senses go, the festival tends to be loud [she says, with a smile in her voice]. For tasting, the Thai food truck comes every year, and the first thing that comes to mind is her great food.

I just saw her! [Laughter]

Yeah, she hustles man! For smells, there's lots of different smells, like the paint for the walls in the exhibit, the different kinds of food, the people, and we're out in nature right by a creek. As far as feeling -- a strong sense of community and accomplishment.

What do you think you personally brought to this experience to make it memorable?

The "Artists of the New" Event was created by the former director, Stacey Tope, who came up with the name, and me, who wanted it to run seamlessly that first year hoping that every year, people would come back.

Were there any other contributions that were beneficial to helping it run smoothly, like coworkers, friends, or family members?

We do calls for volunteers. Someone messaged us recently and said, "Hey, I just moved back to the area and I'm looking to get involved in the art gallery." We'll never turn anyone down because we can't run without them. It's a lot of "this person knows this person." This community is amazing at sharing their talents. If I need a sound person, a microphone, if I need anything, they help. A lot of people offer their in-kind services to us, which says a lot about this community. And our Board and the Founders really helped that first year.

Can you give an example of how your Board supports collaborations within the community?

Our Board cultivates Appalachian culture and arts culture. It is "All hands-on deck," creating a way for us to give opportunities to artists and people within this space. A lot of the people we bring on are already working in the community. We have an attorney, someone who's worked in nonprofits, and an art teacher, who all bring something to the table to make us successful.

What kind of strategies were there to support the experience?

I own a digital marketing business, so I took to social media. Sending out newsletters helped people know exactly what's going on every month, showing tons of faces and people that you know.

We started this organization, going a mile a minute. We were, "Events, events, events, events, events!!" We realized we need to get the structure going with the help of a consultant before we bring on all these events.

[Laughter]

How do you maintain those partner/collaborative relationships?

A lot of communication. We had an event last week and every business in town was sharing it. We try to return that favor!

We're going to start having a monthly event called "Arts and Company." We'll bring in business owners, nonprofits, and town leaders into meetings to collaborate and work together. We're doing that as part of Tamarack Foundation for the Arts. We want to ask, "How can everyone contribute to this community?"

So, how do you get into contact with the different artists that you've brought in from other places?

Our founder is a well-known artist named Jamie Lester. We started off with his connections and grew from there. The Tamarack Foundation for the Arts helped us promote and make it into what it is. They always share all our events, which helps us, because they are on a much larger scale than we are.

How do you ensure a transparent and open relationship when collaborating?

A lot of our relationships are opportunities for people, and we are here to provide those opportunities. To have open and transparent relationships is the biggest part of what we can offer.

Did you find any organizations or individuals that really showcased your mission when collaborating?

Our Thomas, West Virginia, show was an "aha moment" for us--they brought their community into our community. It was a huge exhibit with tons of artwork. We had a closing reception where they brought music, and it was a great event because it showed Fayetteville

and Thomas together. We thought, wow, "This is an opportunity."

Currently we are hanging our first quilt exhibition, "Quilters." It's not in Lewisburg, it's *here*. This is our opportunity to showcase traditional art.

I love the deep rooted, Appalachian connection. I think that's awesome. The class that I'm doing this interview for is to showcase Nonprofits in Appalachia. It's great to see.

It's cool for us too because you wouldn't believe the number of quilters in this area, but you wouldn't know, because it's your grandma. Some in the exhibit are from other areas, like Thomas, but a lot are locals, from Fayetteville and Oakhill.

"Artist of the New" is something we want to provide community members. The opportunity to exhibit their artwork and to enjoy themselves.

So, yeah, maybe this will be this artists' debut or breakout. It'll help them soar! Have you done any other traditional Appalachian focused exhibits?

We've had a few folk-art focused Appalachian exhibits. We've had an artist from Wales, named Peter Stevenson. His focus is Appalachian folk tales. He has family in Welch and writes books based on his family. He uses an old Appalachian way of storytelling with a cranky, which is also a thing from overseas. We've done a few folk-art exhibits.

Do you see aspects of Love Hope expanding? I know on a local level, it's been awesome. Do you see that kind of expansion at the regional or national level, and how do you see that change happening?

We just had a meeting in Montgomery, West Virginia, with those involved in the Arts Conference. We had a collaborative experience to figure out, first, "How can we help them [other non-profits] get their arts organization to where we are?" And secondly, "How we can house something in their space?"

At the regional level, we see a lot of out-of-state exhibitors through open calls. People come from Syracuse, NY, and Wisconsin, to show their artwork here. It is a unique experience, because you don't get that anywhere unless you go into a big city.

Expansion for us, is collaborating with other communities.

I want to switch gears here and learn about the funding aspect. Do collaborations impact your ability to secure funding?

Yes, 100%. We would not exist without funding. [Laughter] A lot of our funding comes from the Greater



Kanawha Valley Foundation. We have also started a partnership with Tamarack Foundation for the Arts. We'll also source artists or other businesses to help us get grants etc. We are at the mercy of other people when it comes to funding and grants. It's a huge part of a nonprofit.

If you can make any three wishes to further collaboration between Love Hope Center for the Arts and other organizations within the community of Fayetteville what would they be? How would you know that they worked?

I would like to see more branching out to other arts organizations. We have a hub of artists here that we claim as "Fayetteville" artists or "Love Hope artists." I would like to see opportunities for them in other spaces that aren't here, like Montgomery.

I would like to incorporate the ballet, a dance class, and branching into other parts of the arts. We have had some musical events, but we haven't visited other areas.

Even, like, theatrical arts?

There have been a lot of requests for film, so visiting filmmakers. I want to offer more to bring in different people. We went to the Arts in the Communities conference last week in Huntington and met a film maker named Dave Lavender.

My third wish would be that the New River Gorge community keeps this place successful. We have a lot of support, I just hope it stays through the years and brings new, young, and old people in.

I would know that they worked with the increase in the variety of people, the constant support and creating beneficial events. I hope to include Love Hope Arts in different towns and different shows, like a Flip Art Show, and collaborating with Theater West Virginia.

My last question is are there any future collaborations that you hope to explore?

We would love to begin "Arts and Company" in the New Year, to bring everyone to the table. We hope to gain new collaborations with business owners and townspeople. Begin the conversation, "How can we all benefit/mesh? "What can we do?" Of course, Artists of the New will happen again. Our art exhibits have changes coming, different shows, and a big celebration for a popular local artist and her friends. We have some good things on the horizon!

Thank you again for meeting with me! >

Afterward

I value the work Hannah does at Love Hope Center for the Arts. Throughout the interview I heard in her voice the dedication and determination she has for the organization. Being only a volunteer, Hannah has shown through the events she has introduced to the community that she is determined that the arts and history thrive in Fayetteville. She helps create opportunities for community members to showcase their artwork, no matter their profession. Ordinary people, adults, children of all ages, are encouraged to participate in classes and workshops to learn new skills and hobbies. >



Emma Hicks is a native West Virginian, originally from Buckhannon. Her home is now located in Summersville, where she has had the opportunity to be involved in AmeriCorps programs at both the New River Gorge National Park, and Ascend WV in Fayetteville. Emma has a Bachelor's Degree in Outdoor Recreation

Management from Davis and Elkins College, where she was part of the Outdoor Adventure Club, planning events and providing outdoor recreation opportunities to students. She first became passionate about non-Profits through her journey as a West Virginia 4-Her, where she saw the lasting impact that non-profits have on individuals and communities.

3. Never Make a Judgment

An Interview with Marra Jerrome, by Tucker Williams

(This interview takes still another different approach to transcribing.)

< Marra Jerrome, a "Family Navigator" at the Huntington City Mission was interviewed by Tucker Williams, Graduate Student, Marshall University Sociology Department. The in-person interview occurred on April 18, 2025 at 10:00-10:40 a.m. at Marshall University's Joseph M. Gillette Welcome Center.

In addition to being a Family Navigator, Marra is a graduate student in the final semester of Marshall's Social Work program and uses over 10 years of experience in the non-profit sector to supplement her success in her professional and academic careers. She has an extensive background in collaborative work with other non-profit organizations around the city. She's employed her multi-faceted

skillset to help families and individuals who look to the Mission for beneficial resources.

I set up two recording devices and tidied up our sitting space in MU's Welcome Center, hoping to create a setting that was familiar enough to be comfortable, but one that would also facilitate intentional conversation. I prepared her for the interview by giving a quick run

through of some of the questions I would be asking.

Exceptional Experience

I began by asking Marra to tell me a story about a time when she felt an overwhelming sense of joy or excitement, or one where her expectations were exceeded by the success of a collaborative project. I encouraged Marra to include all the nitty-gritty juicy details, allowing me to fully place myself into her shoes and understand how she felt during this experience.

"It is literally probably one of the most sensory-overloading things," Marra said in a softer tone than she'd carried in the conversation thus far. *"Sometimes it's a whole experience...I've had people come into my office and cry about the situations that they've been in, and being able to just see a smile on their face really just warms your heart,"* she recalled with a smile on her face.

I was curious how this welcoming approach could alleviate hesitation in an individual or a family looking to reach out for help, which led to my asking "Do you think that makes people more comfortable to come and look for help--if they know they'll be treated correctly and with compassion?"

Marra's face lit up at the opportunity to answer this question, and a bursting "So Much! SO much!" response lit a bright fire under our conversation.

She recalled a particular instance which clearly left a lasting impression: *"Sometimes they'll sit down, have a cup of coffee, and they'll just break down. Giving them the space to have a conversation and talk about everything that they're going through...We listen to that. We listen to what's going on, and **they really feel heard at that point.**"*

For Marra, this is the *Why*—being able to put a million different parts into motion and seeing them come together to create a positive change for a family in need. *"When*

*we all work together, and collaborate on different things, we can really wrap these families up with different resources; it really makes the difference. **It's why I do what I do.**"*



Marra's Contribution

Marra's position as a Family Navigator has provided her with a Santa's Sack of available resources and connections, and she's nearly perfected the art of networking and collaborating.

Her most memorable contributions were made when helping connect children to resources that would ensure healthy growth, and her pride was on full display when remembering some of her contributions, almost as if she'd never before taken the time to stop and think about the work she'd been doing.

"I connect people to Lily's Place, and the Children's Home Society. I connect them with resources to get school supplies, or shoes, or clothes, anything like that...I've got a connection with Big Brother/Big Sister, they also go to the Boys and Girls Club. I try my best to make sure that these kids have the necessary resources."

Marra also understands how important it is to simply show up for these kids or their parents and dedicates much of her time to being that friendly face or those

open arms. **She wants her people to know that she will be there.**

"If they need anything at any point in time, I'm going to show up. I'm going to throw a party for the kids, or we're going to figure out when we can do a movie night or a game night."

Walking into work and hearing that "Hi, Miss Marra!" from her clients is the anchor that keeps Marra's feet on the ground. I commended Marra on the joy it brings her just to be able to be present for her clients, and noted how refreshing it must be for her clients to be able to build that kind of relationship.

Other Nonprofit Contributions/ Collaborations

Marra allowed herself a moment to gather some ideas before we were off to the races. She began by explaining her role as Family Navigator at The Huntington City Mission, and since accepting her position she has had the opportunity to collaborate with several other organizations within the city, highlighting collaborative projects with Lily's Place, an organization that battles substance use disorder, and Harmony House, which focuses on providing shelter for unhoused families and individuals. Because she primarily works with families and finding them the necessary resources, Marra is quick to extend gratitude for the countless contributions that each of these organizations have made. "I've worked a lot with Lily's Place, being able to get children and families to do therapy.

They've given so many resources... And then Harmony House has been absolutely amazing. Children's Home Society has [also] helped so much...They've even housed one of our families, and Lily's Place and the Children's Home Society got the kids beds, cribs, and even filled an entire playroom...

it was probably one of the most amazing things I've ever seen.



Huntington City Mission

The Mission was founded in 1939 as a "soup kitchen" for homeless men. Eighty-five years later, we are still providing the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, education, and case management programs, not only to homeless men but also to homeless women and families and to low-income community residents.

The Huntington City Mission is the only full-service shelter in a 50-mile radius of Huntington, WV. Daily, the Huntington City Mission provides shelter for nearly 150 individuals, including an average of 20 children each night between the ages of birth to 18.

We help the homeless find work, teach them how to sustain jobs, budget their money and find permanent housing. The Huntington City Mission is one of the oldest non-profit, charitable institutions in Huntington. The Mission is governed by a Board of Directors composed of local business men and women. The Mission's shelters are open 24/7, 365 days a year.

These clients are able to get the medications that they need, they're able to get the recovery that they need, and they're able to sit down and talk with a therapist during those situations; we're really able to meet them where they're at."

Marra and I discussed how much of a haven Huntington has become when considering folks looking for and actually receiving the help and resources they need, and having people like Marra who are willing to open their arms and accept people with a smile on their face.

I inquired further into how this

process makes her feel, seeing that all of her and her co-workers' hard work has paid off and that they've been successful in putting a family on the right path to a healthy and happy life.

Marra is well aware of how important empathy and compassion are in such a tense field of work and is dedicated to instilling an uber-empathetic attitude when working with families at risk. She mentioned how much help she's gotten from Anchor of Hope, a behavioral health program within the City Mission that prioritizes mental health and crisis prevention. Marra's gratitude was far from absent in remembering the people who have made her job easier. *"It has made such a difference in moving forward with that kind of relationship."*

Family and Co-worker Contributions

After hearing about Marra's dedication to her role and her selfless contributions, I wanted to know more about how she ended up where she is now, and what contributions came from others (friends, family members, coworkers, etc.) that have helped shape her experience.

She begins explaining her family's deep roots in both counseling and volunteer work. Marra actually worked with a non-profit in Columbus for over 10 years before moving to Huntington. She knew from an early age that she wanted to build a career around helping people, and her family was key in providing the foundation for that dream to become a reality. Her baseline was simple: **"I just wanted to help people."**

Hearing her express so much gratitude, so much appreciation for her parents and their guidance made me want to give my own parents a call.

Marra's nuclear family hasn't been the sole contributor to her exceptional experience, though. Her coworkers have also become a

family: *"We all try to give the space to be able to be a family for each other and support each other whenever we need."* She spoke softly again, taking a moment to realize how much she truly does appreciate the support system she has around her.

In a field where each day presents new opportunities and new obstacles, Marra and her team have learned to go with the flow, letting them become more adaptive and effective. *"We don't know what's going to happen next week or [the next day], but we always say that we're going to take on whatever is coming in front of us and we're going to be there for the community as much as we can."* She continued to praise the strength of her community and her teammates.

Three Wishes for Future Collaboration

I asked Marra to make three wishes for future collaborations that could make an experience like hers even more memorable. Her first wish, after pondering for a moment, was for more time.

More time in a day, where she's able to reach out to more organizations or more families, expanding the missions tool kit and incorporating more organizations and volunteers. With a jam-packed schedule, she already makes the most out of what open time she *does* have, but she's hopeful that the mission will continue to grow in terms of counseling and volunteer members, where more tasks can be tackled at once.

Marra's second wish surprised me, and was one we both believe could strengthen the entire Huntington community.

She wished for business around the city to remain open minded, and to take the time to come into the mission, or to Lily's Place, or Harmony House to meet these communities, and get the chance to learn about the mission and the work they do on a personal level.

We talked about how beneficial this could be for the clients she works with—she demanded a new approach when considering underrepresented communities. *"So many people want to make judgements and [stigmatize], but they really do not know these people,"* she said as she tried to calm herself down a bit. She advocates for acceptance and compassion when she mentions her clients and her community, understanding that they've lived entire lives before coming to her.

Her final wish was for a better socialization system for her clients. She hoped for a community center or social space that's readily available. *"A community center in a more centralized area can build a lot of socialization, and get people to move around and do different things, just keeping them going."*

WWMD (What Would Marra Do?)

I asked Marra if she could say something to communities that

haven't had much experience with organizations like this. What would she say to shed a positive light on, or try to de-stigmatize these resources or communities?

She leaned forward. **"Never make a judgement,"** she stated with more intention in her voice now than throughout the entire conversation. **"I would say, come and learn. Experience it. Take a tour of the mission, go and talk to Harmony House, go and talk to Lily's Place."**

Marra understands that, for these communities, listening makes the difference. **"These people are human. Humanize them."** >

Afterward

Her closing remarks were filled with energy. I was stoked to have the opportunity to let Marra share her story.

T u c k e r Williams works as an Enrollment Counselor at Marshall University while earning a master's degree in sociology.

He is also a 2025 Generation West Virginia Fellow.

He's an Ohio native but has grown to love Appalachia since his move to Huntington and hopes to continue his education and career in the state of West Virginia, focusing on Appalachian Culture.

In his free time, he enjoys golfing around the state, kayaking when the weather permits, and remaining an active member of the Huntington community.



Keepers of the Long-Term Agenda

All citizens should have the opportunity to be active, but all will not respond. Those who do respond carry the burden of our free society. I call them the "Responsibles."

They exist in every segment of the community—ethnic groups, labor unions, neighborhood associations, businesses—but they rarely form an effective network of responsibility because they don't know one another across the segments.

They must find each other, learn to communicate, and find common ground. Then they can function as keepers of the long-term agenda.

Attributed to John W. Gardner, Founder, Common Cause

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Cat Pleska, Faculty member of the Graduate Humanities Program, is pictured here (bottom right) after receiving a 2024-2025 Council of Chairs Award for Excellence in Teaching English for the College of Liberal Arts.

Congratulations, Cat!



Recent **GRADUATES**

Dylan Haynes '25

MA, Literary Studies

Project Title: "Reflections on Contemporary Appalachian Literature: Defining Freedom in an Exploited Region"

Heather Lauer '25

MA, Cultural Studies/Arts & Society and Certificate in Appalachian Studies

Project Title: "Pop Culture in Appalachia: West Virginia Pop Culture Conventions"

Anna Osborne '25

MA, Cultural Studies/Arts & Society and Certificate in Appalachian Studies

Project Title: "Remembering Bolling School and School Desegregation in Greenbrier County, West Virginia: Oral Histories and Commemoration"



*If you have something to share,
please let us know.*

Congratulations, Courtney!

*We just wanted to
pass on some great
news about MA in
Humanities student
and UC's Reference
and Instruction
Librarian*



Courtney Danielson.

*She was recently
among a group of horror short story
competition winners for her piece,
"Hell for the Holidays," which appears in
the new anthology, Head for the Maw. She also
recently published two other short stories in the
anthologies Your Body, My Rage (horror)
and Morgana le Fay (historical fiction).*

