

Marian House Helps At-Risk Women Cultivate Independence



(Jon Clements/for the Examiner)

Myra Swann, left, has been with the Marian House for more than three months. She teaches newcomer Linda Oliver, from Baltimore, how to use the electronic calendar that all residents must follow each day.

Aug 14, 2007 by [G.M. Corrigan](#), The Examiner

BALTIMORE - Marian House's motto is "women moving from dependence to independence," and this \$1.6 million, 22-employee nonprofit has a track record to support its claim.

"This program really is about rehabilitating women and getting them productively back into the work force and into society," said incoming Marian House Executive Director Katie Allston of the group's customized housing and rehabilitation efforts. "We take people who are motivated to change their lives."

"Marian House provides a holistic and comprehensive continuum of services for homeless women who have lots of other issues — starting with poverty — that they must deal with productively to get a new life," said Sister Augusta Reilly, a Catholic Sister of Mercy whom Allston will succeed at month's end.

Founded in 1982 as a haven for women ex-offenders or those with chemical dependence, sexual abuse, or homelessness issues, Marian House provides transitional and permanent housing, customized rehabilitation and psychological counseling, life skills and educational assistance and employment help for women who want to improve their lives.

Since its inception, it has aided about 1,000 area women with housing and rehabilitation needs. And since the 1994 launch of its scholarship program, 13 clients have earned general equivalency diplomas, 30 have earned college credits, 10 have earned bachelor's degrees and four have received master's degrees.

"They probably are the premier organization for women's welfare [locally]," said Mary Joel Davis, executive director of Alternative Directions. "They treat the women as people who can make it. It's a very caring, peaceful place."

Integral to this effort is Marian House's transitional housing facilities — which now serves 65 women and their children — where 24/7 supervision and support is offered to clients undergoing program treatment.

Marian House also offers permanent housing options — serving almost 100 women and children — and the nonprofit is renovating a downtown space for its new 19-unit affordable-housing unit. It will be made available to clients and low-income Baltimoreans in September.

"We are trying to [relieve] women's dependence on many things — abusive male partners, the welfare system," Assistant Program Director Jessica Statesman said. "We want them to be truly independent in every way."

Marian House

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