



MENTAL ILLNESS RECOVERY CENTER INC.



FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we've all navigated the sea of changes brought on by Covid, we've needed to make many adjustments to our expectations, to how we socialize and interact with others and how and where we work. Hopefully most of us have learned to live with and offer grace – to ourselves, our loved ones and friends, and our neighbors.

Imagine what navigating through the pandemic has meant for our unsheltered neighbors. Many resources they might have used in the past weren't available. Healthcare became even harder to access, including behavioral healthcare. Our unsheltered neighbors likely don't have smart phones; and even if they do have a phone, they probably don't have an unlimited data plan to participate in telehealth visits.

During the first year of the pandemic, we saw a spike in demand for help meeting basic needs. Mirci's homeless outreach workers started seeing larger and more widespread unsheltered groups. We saw more children's clothing and toys at abandoned camps. We became alarmed at the unmet need.

Just as we were becoming almost overwhelmed, federal funding through Emergency Solutions Grants specific to Covid relief became available. Mirci's outreach team quickly expanded to include additional outreach workers, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, nursing staff and support services. Most importantly, Mirci opened an outreach center for our unsheltered adult neighbors. It's a place where they can be triaged and referred for physical healthcare, with a psychiatric clinic on site to provide behavioral healthcare. We provide hours of mobile psychiatric services each week to hidden areas in our community, weekly Covid testing, access to DHEC-provided hotel vouchers for those who contracted Covid, showers, laundry facilities, food, and the list goes on.

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What stands out the most to me is the grace with which our unsheltered neighbors have sought and accepted these relief resources. The warm and accepting atmosphere created by our outreach team is constantly modeled by our neighbors using the outreach center. When I visit, everyone quickly greets and welcomes me in their space; and when I leave, all wish me well.

As we move forward, I wish for each of us grace – for ourselves, our loved ones and family, and ALL our neighbors – to make the adjustments to navigate post pandemic. I wish for our community a regional response and cooperation among leadership to access federal funding available to lift the unsheltered among us into housing, provide much needed treatment for substance use disorder, and provide equitable mental health treatment for all.

Just perhaps with grace, cooperation and leadership, we can turn the "lemons" from the pandemic into "lemonade" and see a stronger, more inclusive and equitable community on the other side. A community with far fewer unsheltered neighbors and much more equitable treatment for mental health and substance use needs.

Julie Ann Avin



MIRCI

mental illness recovery center, inc.



HOME AGAIN, AT LAST

Sara, a high school graduate, vividly remembers the traumatic day in 2020 when she and her boys, ages 2 and 4, were evicted from their Columbia apartment. She was 27 years old and 5 months pregnant.

"It was one of the hardest days of my life," Sara said. "I packed what I could into a friend's car. As for everything else - our furniture, all our stuff - I couldn't believe it, all these people - my *neighbors* - were just standing there watching me, waiting to swoop in and claim the things I couldn't carry."

It had taken only a few short months for Sara's life to fall apart. First, her long-time partner broke up with her, offering no financial support. Within weeks, she learned she was pregnant. A minor wreck resulted in an unaffordable car repair bill not covered by her high insurance deductible, so she was left without transportation. Then the Covid shutdown ended her daycare center job.

"I felt almost numb," she said. "I thought, God, you're going to have to make a way because I do not know what to do."

A friend gave her and her children a place to stay for a few weeks while Sara frantically called shelters and various public services. Toby's Place, a religiously-affiliated shelter for women with children told her that if she was willing to abide by strict rules, she could live there for up to two years. Sara agreed, and she and her boys moved into the shelter where they - and eventually her new baby - shared one room. For the next 24 months, she attended the required Bible and group classes, met regularly with a caseworker, took medication prescribed for her severe depression and anxiety, and day by day, tried to rebuild her broken self esteem. Toby's Place did not rush her to find a job, and the staff provided Sara with support and everything she needed for her new baby.

Still, it was a time of tremendous stress.

"I felt so scared and worried about everything, I couldn't even bond with my baby daughter," she said. "I had to

attend classes after she was born to help me establish that maternal bond."

Sara said she had a hard time relaxing primarily because she knew she and the kids would have to leave Toby's Place at the two-year mark. Although she eventually began working and saving some money, she couldn't imagine how she would be able to afford the sizeable deposits or the furniture and supplies they'd need.

Then, one day, Sara's caseworker told her about a partnership Toby's Place had established with Mirci for shelter residents with a mental health diagnosis.

"When Mr. Terrance (Mirci's Outreach Coordinator) told me that Mirci could find me permanent housing if I wanted it, it seemed almost unbelievable," Sara said. "Even before the eviction, as a single mom, it was so hard to make ends meet. But Mirci would limit the rent to what I could afford, so it made the impossible seem possible."

A few months later, Sara unlocked the door to her new three-bedroom apartment.

"I knew what Terrance *said* Mirci would do, but until the day it actually happened, a part of me wouldn't allow myself to believe it," she said. "When we walked in the door, I was stunned. Mirci had given us *everything* we needed - a table, chairs, couch, beds, sheets, pillows, silverware and dishes."

When she closed the door of her new home behind her, Sara said she was flooded with utter relief and peace of mind. At the same time, her boys were so excited to have a bedroom of their own again, they exhausted themselves running in circles, laughing.

"I thought to myself, after everything that has happened, we're finally home again," Sara said.

Today, Sara sleeps soundly. She is working as a cashier, and the kids are enrolled in daycare. There's food in the cupboard thanks to the SNAP benefits Mirci helped her obtain. She sees her Mirci mental health caseworker monthly and she appreciates how quickly Mirci responds when she runs out of her medication. She feels she is a better, stronger person for her harrowing journey. Still, she is grateful that Mirci's mental health support staff remain available by phone 24/7.

"Today, I feel a sense of hope," Sara said. "I'm determined to make a good life for my family."



MIRCI SAVES HEALTHCARE SYSTEM MILLIONS

Your gifts really make a big difference in the lives of those we serve, as shown by a 2022 data analysis by the S.C. Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office (RFA). The RFA tracks inpatient hospitalizations, emergency room visits and state agency health and human services. Each year, the RFA links that data with privacy-protected Mirci client data to gauge the reduction in hospital use and cost savings to hospitals directly related to Mirci services. The 2022 analysis revealed that:



Hospitalizations dropped by 41% the year after starting Mirci services.



Schizophrenic disorder-related visits to the emergency department dropped by 56%.



Hospitalizations related to mental illness or substance use disorder dropped by 69% after starting Mirci services.



Specialty psychiatric hospitalizations dropped by 73%.



Emergency department visits where mental illness/substance use was the primary reason decreased by 56%.



Considering all hospital services combined (inpatient general, inpatient specialty and emergency department visits), total charges for services in the year following Mirci enrollment were almost **\$5.7 million** less than charges for services in the year prior to Mirci enrollment.



YOU ARE PART OF OUR SUCCESS

Mirci opened its unique adult outreach center in March 2021 in response to the pandemic-fueled surge in need seen when many public services and charities closed their doors. This created severe hardship for people experiencing homelessness and mental illness.

Today, about 140 people a month use the center - to take a shower, wash clothes, get a meal and other essentials, meet with a doctor and mental health professional, and apply for supportive benefits and housing. Initially funded by a federal pandemic emergency response grant, the center will require local support to continue addressing our community's unmet needs. Thank you for being part of the team that makes this urgent work possible! Your support truly matters. To donate, visit mirci.org.

Tax information: Under IRC Section 170, individuals giving to a 501(c)3 organization that is a public charity (e.g. Mental Illness Recovery Center, Inc.) may deduct contributions representing up to 50% of the donor's adjusted gross income if the individual itemizes on his tax returns. Corporations may deduct all contributions to 501(c)3 organizations up to an amount normally equal to 10% of their taxable income.





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