

Ready. Inspire. Act.

# RIA HOUSE



ANNUAL REPORT 2016



## LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heather Wightman

A friend of mine who has survived trafficking was gearing up to release her memoir in January for Human Trafficking Awareness Month. She asked me to give it a good read and let her know what I thought.

So, I did. And I said to her, “I am deeply moved by your asking each of us to FIND OUR VOICE.”

And so I ask you, how do we ‘FIND OUR VOICE’ when stress and division exist between our common selves?

For the woman who is stuck in a relationship that compromises her dignity or the primary care doctor who sees the same person every month for a vaginal infection or broken bone, we must FIND OUR VOICE if we are going to make a dent in this good work.

We must challenge the double standards we tell ourselves: that some of us need to suffer for others of us to thrive; or that some of us must be poor so that others of us can be wealthy; or even still, that when a man speaks, we are quick to forgive (understand) him, yet when a woman shares what has happened to her, we see her as complicit in her own trauma and abuse. We turn our minds off, or worse, we do not believe her.

I ask you to stand with RIA and speak up on behalf of our human dignity and our future. The women we serve need our love, our compassion, and

OUR VOICE.

Because of your support and since our incorporation as a public charity, RIA has met more than 150 beautiful women. We have provided more than 60 of these same women accompaniment through our Sisters Leading Sisters support groups, case management, peer advocacy & mentorship, and one-on-one clinical therapy. This year we opened our first office space in Framingham in May, and our second office space in Worcester in June.

Our respect and love of the women we work with provide me the courage and grace necessary to keep building RIA House. Our staff, our Board, our volunteers and interns, our consultants and funders provide me the strength. I stand in awe of our growing community.

The year 2017 promises to be our best year yet. RIA is working hard to provide supported housing to the women we have come to know. This support will be given to one woman at a time. With stable housing, growth and healing are possible. In the new year, I ask for your continued support, advice and generosity.

Please help us do this.

If you have time for a cup of coffee and a conversation, I would love to share with you much more about our work ahead.







# WHAT IS TRAFFICKING?

## **Human Trafficking**

Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery, a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that denies freedom to 20.9 million people around the world. And no matter where you live, chances are it's happening nearby. From the girl forced into prostitution at a truck stop, to the man discovered in a restaurant kitchen, stripped of his passport and held against his will. All trafficking victims (sex & labor) share one essential experience: the loss of freedom.<sup>1</sup>

## **Sex Trafficking**

Sex trafficking is when a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age. A commercial sex act is any sexual act in exchange for an item of value, including money, food, drugs and shelter.<sup>2</sup>

RIA House addresses the gap in services for women 18 years and older who have experienced sex trafficking and want support.

# A GLOBAL PROBLEM WITH LOCAL IMPLICATIONS

## The Industry

- The International Labour Organization estimates globally 20.9 million victims of human trafficking, totaling a \$150 billion worldwide industry.
- Of these, 4.5 million are victims of sex trafficking. They generate two thirds, or \$99 billion, of the \$150 billion human trafficking revenue.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2015 RIA House, William James College and the Imagine Foundation conducted a data mining study of the online commercial sex market via backpage.com in target regions from Boston to Worcester. The study estimated \$7.7 million in revenue exchanged in local markets over a three month period.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2016 arrests related to sex trafficking were reported in the following MetroWest towns: Framingham, Natick, Newton, Northborough, Marlborough, Milford, Shrewsbury, Southborough, Watertown, Wellesley and Westborough. This list is not comprehensive.<sup>5</sup>





The commercial sex market includes, but is not limited to, pornography, massage parlors, escort services, strip clubs and prostitution. There are three main parties involved in the commercial sex market. The first party consists of those who buy sex. These buyers fuel the commercial sex market with their demand for bodies. The second party consists of people looking to profit from that demand. These people, the traffickers, make sure that bodies are available. When a buyer pays for sex, the trafficker profits financially from the exchange. The buyer also profits from the exchange, gaining the sexual experience desired. The third party consists of those whose bodies are made available to be bought and sold. They are treated as if they are a commodity. The commercial sex market has normalized the commodification of human beings for the pleasure and gain of the buyer and the trafficker.



# THE COMMERCIAL SEX MARKET

As a crime of opportunity, sex trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and adults exists because of people taking advantage of others to satisfy the demand to buy sex, that is, to build and feed the commercial sex market.

It is important to note that the third party “commodity” may not have a second party trafficker, yet can often be indebted to other people on whom they have come to depend.



# WHO IS SHE?

Adult women are often groomed into the US commercial sex industry by trusted adults at the average age of 15 years old.<sup>6</sup> What makes children vulnerable to the commercial sex market can be further complicated by experiences of childhood sexual and physical abuse, neglect, betrayal, manipulation, witness to violence and false promises of love that may overlap with addictions in an attempt to cope.

Becoming an adult at the age of 18 does not suddenly provide these same women a sense of control over their lives, nor safety or emotional freedom. Often under duress, many young women find themselves with criminal records. Shame, mistrust and fear of retribution can make it extremely hard to trust anyone. In addition, traffickers and buyers can maintain a level of psychological control over their victims in a process so intense, it has been compared to the brainwashing techniques of cult leaders.<sup>7</sup>

**SHE COULD BE ANY OF US.** “If a woman tolerates this treatment of her fellow women, if she accepts it under the banner of ‘liberalism’ or anything else, then she must also accept that she herself is only removed from prostitution [the commercial sex market] by lack of the circumstances necessary to place her there” (Moran 183).<sup>8</sup>

## This Is Not The End Of Her Story

The exit out of the commercial sex market is a fight against a culture that simultaneously commodifies people while it ridicules and shames them for being that same commodity. Within all of us there is a will to survive and thrive, and there comes a time when, despite vulnerabilities, threats and fears, this ‘will’ wins out. We as a community must bear witness to this. Not every woman survives. Supporting women with love, compassion and opportunity is the work of RIA House.

# IN THE VOICE OF A SURVIVOR

**JASMINE MARINO**

**‘THE DIARY OF JASMINE GRACE’**

“To answer the nagging question that many people ask, ‘**why doesn’t she just leave**’, is a deeper issue for some women because the trafficker could be the only person who ever treated her special or made her feel loved. Think about the girl who was sexually abused as a child, if she is not helped at the time of the abuse, her internal dial and self worth is turned so low that getting paid for what was taken from her as a child seems like an upgrade. That is why women coming out of the sex industry need to be seen as someone’s daughter. They need healthy, supportive, safe and empowering relationships so they can bloom into the women they were designed to be” (61-62).<sup>9</sup>



Our **VISION** is a world where PEOPLE are **NOT** victimized,  
**EXPLOITED**, bought or sold, FOR the sexual gratification  
of **ANOTHER PERSON**.



# VISION & MISSION

Our mission is to stand with and support women with experience in the commercial sex market by providing a range of community based services.



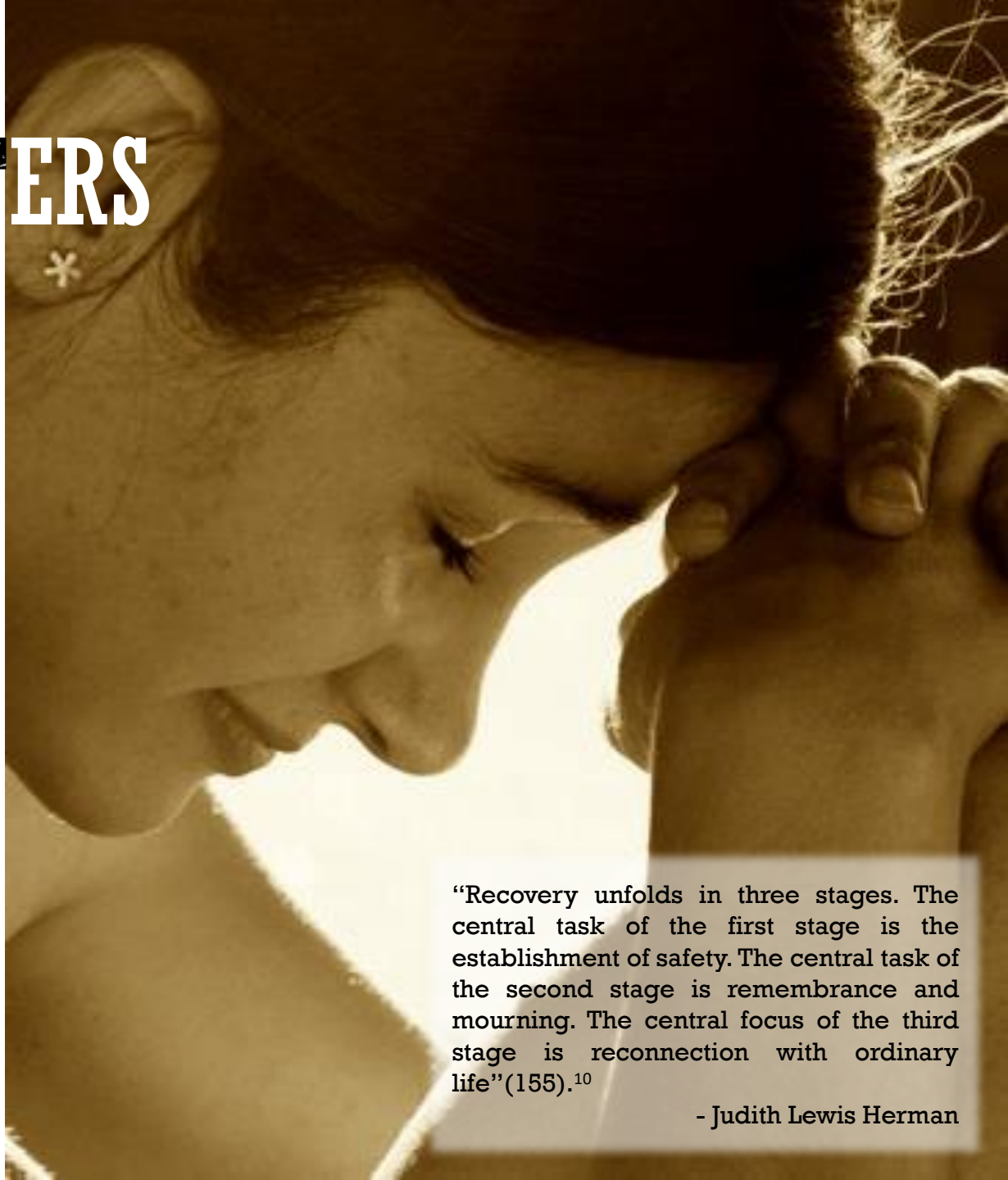


# SISTERS LEADING SISTERS

Traditional programs do not always address the specific needs of women who have experienced the commercial sex market. Many women find that they want extra support that is sensitive to the complicated experiences they have had.

## Our Service Model

Our service model, Sisters Leading Sisters, is one of accompaniment in a journey towards wholeness and healing. Accompaniment is a trauma-informed approach to care that requires an understanding of how power held over another human being affects a person's sense of safety and control. We use a survivor-engaged, clinical team approach, with small caseloads and the capacity to provide mobile support across levels of care. In addition, team members have extensive complex trauma training and receive ongoing clinical supervision. We incorporate clinical and healing practices in every step of support, with a specific sensitivity towards the sexual trauma that results with engagement in the commercial sex market. We work with women both in the community and in prison.



“Recovery unfolds in three stages. The central task of the first stage is the establishment of safety. The central task of the second stage is remembrance and mourning. The central focus of the third stage is reconnection with ordinary life” (155).<sup>10</sup>

- Judith Lewis Herman



# ALL OF OUR SERVICES ARE FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL

We support each woman through her own process of securing needed resources. We meet her where she is at and support her as she controls her options and choices.

## A Glimpse Into Our Work

We serve as a secure base for women who feel they need additional support or have no place else to go. In 2016 we had women stop by to plan what to say during an important meeting, give voice to their struggles, ask questions about resources, sort through donated items and receive validation, assurance and support. We had women stop by to talk over past relationships, current situations and future hopes. In conversation they identified problems in their day to day struggles, as well as their own strengths and strategies to overcome them. We provided bus passes to help women get to new jobs or to make their way to safe shelters. We satisfied phone needs so women could be available for a job interview or stay in contact with their support network. We grabbed meals and went to the movies. We accompanied women to court, to probation appointments, to the hospital, to shelters, to furniture banks and detox facilities. We advocated on their behalf when necessary. We have consistently run Back to Self and Empowerment groups across the region. And overall these little things have made a big difference in allowing women the chance, little by little, to build relationships of trust and empowerment.

### Case Management

We provided resources for homeless and domestic violence shelters, crisis hotlines, food pantries, clothing and furniture banks, job opportunities, rental assistance, educational opportunities, legal services, day programs, mental health care, drug treatment facilities and health care clinics.

### Clinical Therapy

We supported women as they talked over past events, present challenges and future hopes.

### Peer & Survivor Mentorship

We met women for coffee, meals, recovery meetings and recreational activities.

### Ongoing Groups

We offered Empowerment and Back to Self Groups in prison, half-way houses and our offices.

### Advocacy

Upon request, we have served as an advocate in court, with other social service providers and at medical appointments.

### Accompaniment

We provided consistent, non-judgmental and empowering relationships to promote long-term recovery.

# RESEARCH



# AWARENESS

We believe that research plays an important role in our work to support the lives of women. When done well it gives relevant information to help us, as a movement, move forward with heart and knowledge towards something better.

In 2015 RIA House performed a three month data-mining study in partnership with William James College and the Imagine Foundation. The study monitored the online commercial sex market in targeted regions of Boston and Worcester from March 1 through May 31. The research team collected data on almost 17,000 ads for commercial sex that are estimated to have generated \$7.7 million in revenue. By analyzing patterns within these markets, important inferences can be made about sex selling and buying trends in these regions of Massachusetts.

We believe that it's not enough to serve women with experience in the commercial sex market. We must also use our voices to educate our communities about its reality. People don't want to believe it's happening in their neighborhoods. They just want to believe it's happening somewhere else. We must use our voices to educate our communities about the systems and circumstances that make engagement in this market possible and to see with compassion those whose bodies are made available to be bought and sold. America should be land of the free, not for some people, but for ALL people. Only when we work together and use our voices to speak truth and when our actions speak as loudly as our words, only then can we offer freedom to all people.

Study results are used by organizations across the state to substantiate the reality of the sex market and validate the lives of the people who are affected by it. Study results are also used by local safety officials during routine trainings to help build awareness and an informed response to care.







# *With your help* **IN 2016**

“To the **WOMEN** who have had the **TENACITY** to **SURVIVE** in the most challenging of circumstances **WE**, at RIA House, **SEND** you a loud, heartfelt **MESSAGE** that **WE ARE HERE**, we **CARE** and are **WORKING** on your behalf.”

- Karen Masterson, Board Member

- 70** Women received information regarding our services through RIA staff.
- 30** Women participated in ongoing groups in the community and at South Middlesex Correctional Center (our local women’s prison).
- 6** Women sought RIA staff & services after leaving prison.
- 33** Women benefited from peer & survivor mentoring relationships with RIA staff.
- 8** Women initiated clinical case management or therapy services.
- 5** Approximately 5 women received clinical support services each week.
- 1** Woman received a free graduate course at Wheelock College in the Masters of Social Work program.
- 2** New office spaces, one in Framingham and one in Worcester, gave us space to call our own.



# HOUSING IS OUR NUMBER ONE NEED



## Where Were These Women Living?

11 Were in temporary housing situations (shelters and half-way houses).

1 Of these women was in a safe home (one of only three homes and 17 beds in New England for trafficking victims).

3 Were living with their traffickers.

4 Were living on the street, 2 exchanging sex for a place to stay for the night.

2 Were in substance abuse treatment programs.

1 Was couch surfing.

1 Was living in a subsidized room.

1 Was at serious risk of violence from her trafficker. Her location is currently unknown.

\* We do not have housing information for every woman we work with.



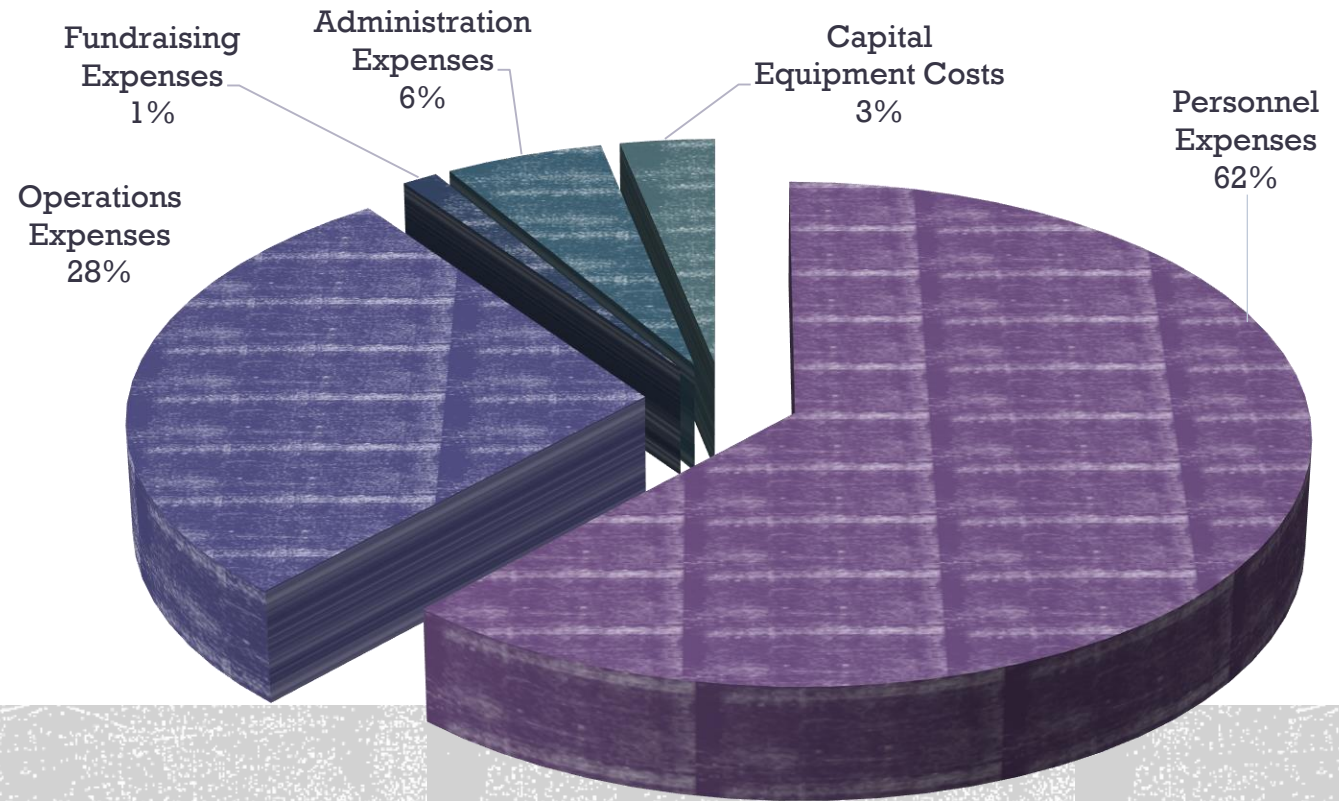
# HOW WE SPEND OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Our total spending in 2016 was \$87,660.

Services that directly benefit the women we support, including expenditures on basic needs, are represented on the chart by Personnel and Operations Expenses.

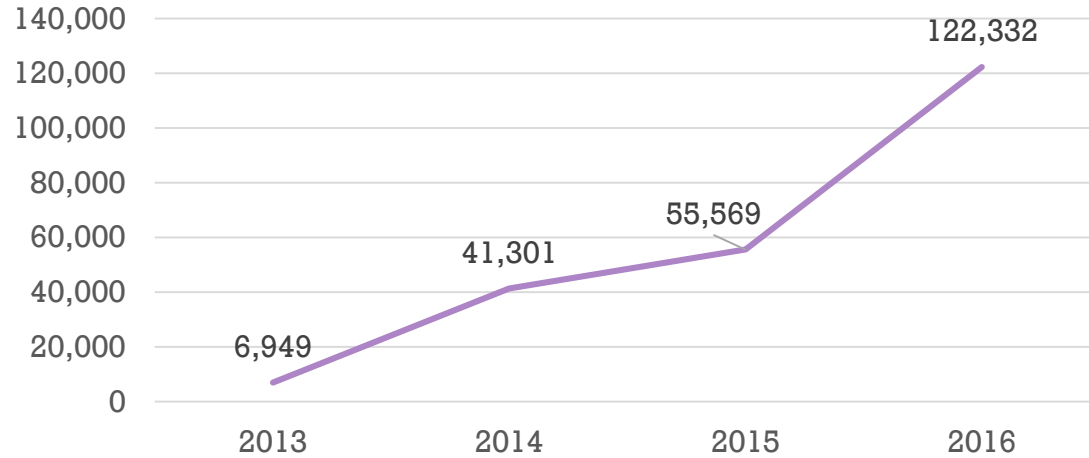
Since our inception, volunteers have provided more than 10,000 hours of work.

Each of the executive, administrative, accounting, development, and marketing responsibilities have been, and remain, in kind. However, as we strengthen and grow our services, the need to sustain our organizational infrastructure is critical.

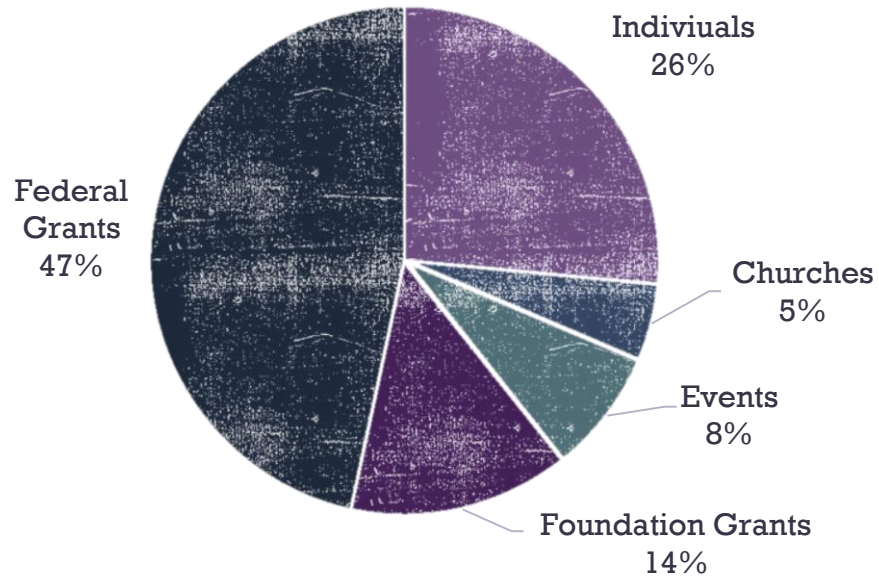


**NINETY** CENTS of every **DOLLAR** RIA House spends goes **DIRECTLY** towards services FOR the **WOMEN** we work with.

## Financial Growth



## Revenue Sources



# REVENUE SOURCES AND FINANCIAL GROWTH

The focus of our growth is on housing. We are committed to identifying new investments and investors which will allow us to support one woman at a time with housing. Along with that is the need to financially support management and development positions to ensure continued success.

## We Can't Do It Without You

It will take \$600,000 to both support housing in our programming and sustain our management team. Individuals can make a one-time or monthly contribution to RIA House via our website using paypal or by mailing a check to our Framingham address. There are other ways to give. Please consider connecting us to people who may want to invest in RIA House; a gift in the transfer of appreciated securities, real estate properties, life insurance policies; or a gift by bequest. RIA House can provide you with additional information and assistance in taking advantage of any of these methods of giving.





# THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

*We couldn't do this without you.*

## FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Your belief in RIA House and our vision has brought about exciting work this year, what an encouragement to us. And what an encouragement to the women we serve to know that there is an invested community standing with them. Thank you to: Amilia's Light, First Parish Church of Concord, First Parish Church of Sherborn, First Parish Church of Stow & Acton, General Federation of Women's Clubs of Massachusetts, Lincoln & Therese Filene Foundation, MetroWest Health Foundation, RIA Board of Directors, The 200 Foundation, VOCA Grant, and many families & individuals.

## IN KIND STAFF CONTRIBUTIONS

Full-time Executive Director, Part-time Grant Writer, Part-time Grant Researcher, Part-time Payroll Manager, Social Media Coordinator, Social Work Interns, our many Volunteers who help us with Administration, Event Planning, and more.

## COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

We value your partnership and support in this work; we couldn't do this without you: Amirah, Bakhita House, Bethany House Ministries, BU School of Social Work, Common Street Spiritual Center, Community Health Link, Dept. of Homeland Security, HEAL Trafficking, Highpoint, Kendall Street Drop In, Lasell College, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), MA Coalition to End Human Trafficking (MCEHT), MGH Freedom Clinic, My Life My Choice, NewLife Home Refurnishing, Newton Wellesley Hospital DV & SA Dept, Phoenix House, Project REACH, St. Vincent's Hospital, Serenity House, Shadows, SMOC, State Police, Salvation Army, Town of Framingham, United Way of Tri County, Wayside Youth and Family Services - TEMPO, Wheelock School of Social Work, William James College, and unnamed others.

**A special shout out to Bags of Hope, Framingham Police Department, South Middlesex Correctional Center & Wesley United Methodist Church.**

A photograph of two hands, one from the left and one from the right, reaching towards each other to form a heart shape. The hands are silhouetted against a bright, glowing sun in a clear sky. The overall image has a light purple or lavender tint.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Heather Wightman** Founder, Pres. & Executive Director • **Diane Miller** Vice President • **Dianna McNeish** Treasurer • **Karen Masterson** Secretary • **Rev. Lucy Marshall** • **Megan Honigman** LICSW • **Rebecca Keys** • **Lisa Jackson** • **Jen Maseda** Advisor

**WE INVITE YOU TO WORK ALONG WITH US.**

[www.riahouse.org](http://www.riahouse.org)



# CONTACT US

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## REFERENCES

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