



Ready. Inspire. Act.

**RIA HOUSE**

2017 Annual Report

# A LETTER FROM FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heather Wightman

I met a woman the other day who shared a piece of her story with me that I want to share with you. Her message to the world had two parts. The first was emphatic, if you haven't been through what she's been through, then you cannot fully understand how to help people like her. The second part of her message was an invitation, she said that to help prevent what happened to her from happening to others, we **MUST** listen to the stories of adult survivors to grasp how it is that a middle school aged girl gets addicted to drugs and then is groomed by men and women who exploit her youth to make money on her body.

Her words linger in my mind...after all that she's been through she remains both fearless and hopeful that there is another way. That as a community we can make it better for the children that come after us, that together we can support each other, and we can do that now, today.

At RIA House, we bear witness every day to the lives of women who we believe are deeply connected to us. Why do we believe this? Because we see ourselves as a collective, our voices breath as one organism. Our lives and struggles are woven together. What happens to one of us affects all of us.

This core value is what brought me to the work many years ago and what keeps me in the work day after day. I am not a survivor of the commercial sex trade to know personally what woman have been through, but what I am, is a peer who can be present, learn, listen and act. If I can prevent another woman from standing alone without a way out, then my every day is worth it.

This is my invitation to you, please join me.





# WHAT IS COMMUNITY?

Community is ...

The foundation under our feet that we walk on as children and leap off from in young adulthood. It **shapes** how we see ourselves and others. -KM / *Community is your family, so when your family isn't close and you are new, you immerse yourself in the community so as to connect.* -NP / Community is a group that works together to better each other individually and the group as a whole. They work **together**, reach out to each other and support each other. -GM / **Community welcomes new people in.** -JG / An inter-connected group of individuals in a specific geographic area. -MC / Connectedness; not by chance but by appointment. John 15:17 This is what I command of you: **love** one another. 1 Thes 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and **build each other up**. The dictionary says a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common; a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, goals; a group of interdependent organisms of different species living or **growing together** in a specific habitat. So community is God given to help us survive this journey on earth. -BK / **People you connect with over something you all care about. Those who have a common thread. People who have the same belief system.** -JF / *Community to me means having a group to feel a part of. There is a sense of **belonging** and something that is a common thread among those that are part of the community. I think to really be truly part of a community, that in addition to the benefits one receives, there is also a commitment to the overall good of the community. The most significant community I am part of is my synagogue community, then also the broader and more complex "Jewish community" as well as the "LGBT" community. There is a sense of **identity** as being part of community and definitely a sense of belonging and **connectedness**.* -MJ / To me community is a group of people who take care of one another and are there for each other when things get hard. It's kind of like a family that you're not related to but get to choose. -LK / **Sharing life together.** -KF / *In community we're reminded that we are **not alone**. Community helps to remind us of **our best selves** and challenges us to develop areas where we are getting stuck. Community holds us accountable. Community is **fun**. Community is connection and connectedness to **something bigger than ourselves**.* -DH / Community is like a bull's eye. The center is my family. The next thing out are my friends - the ones you can call at 4:00 in the morning and who could call you. Then friends and neighbors who you look out for and they look out for you. Then my town. Our country. Our world. Our universe. Each ring is supported by the other; **we shape each other**. Community gives us a sense of belonging and we belong to a greater world. Similar to the Japanese story of the red string of fate - I see us each having a string and our strings are ultimately all **connected**. Some connections are at our core and others at the edges. As we live and grow our string is more connected and our connections change through time. That is how I see community, all of our strings woven together. -KML

# BROKEN COMMUNITY

Healthy relationships and communities are life giving, but the reality is that our relationships and communities are not perfect. Though they are places of life and beauty, they house places of great pain. The commercial sex market is created in and sustained by our community. It thrives on our silence. Men in our communities pay to have sex with children. Adolescents learn about sex through images of violence depicted in pornography and mainstream media. Women and men bury the wounds of sexual assault and harassment, fearful that others will judge, blame or dismiss them. It is easy to believe that no one will understand the painful or shameful parts of our story and so we keep quiet.

Silence creates the illusion that all is as it should be while at the same time it isolates those whose reality screams that all is not right.

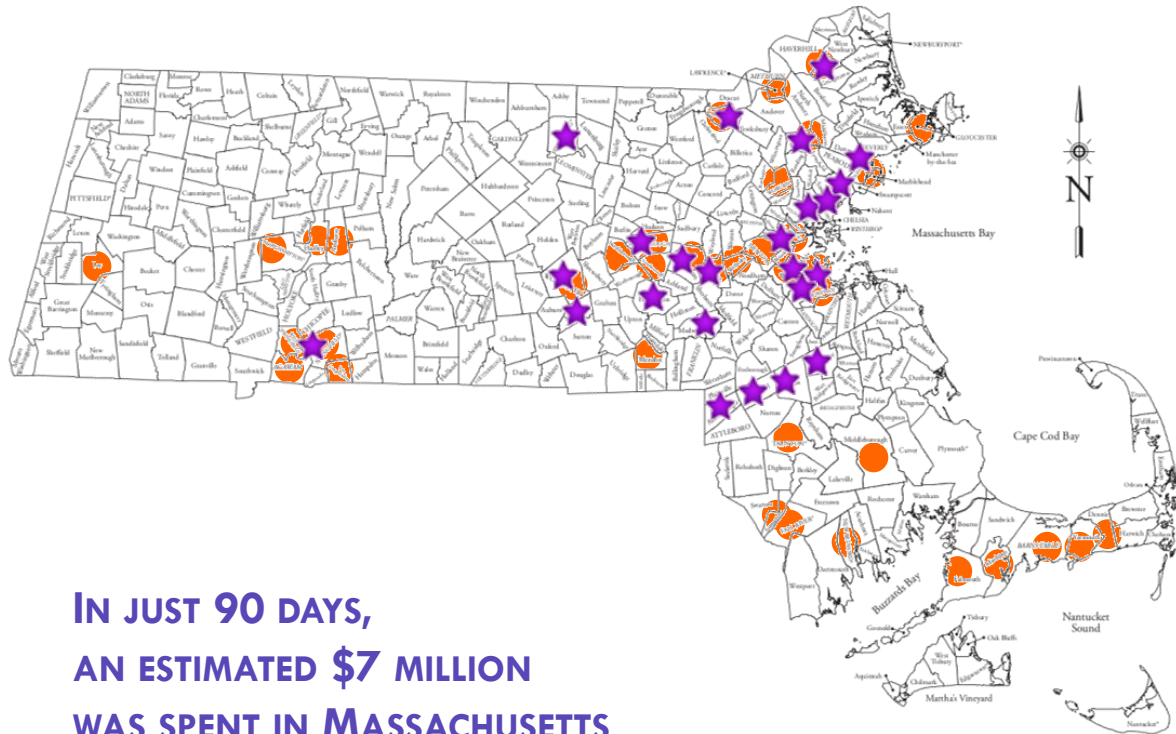
For women who continue to be exploited in the commercial sex market, RIA House offers safe space for silence to be broken. Speaking stories in spaces and relationships that are safe invites others to bear witness to our experiences and creates the opportunity to discover that others share similar stories. We are not alone. The community of women that is RIA House encourages voice and serves as a powerful antidote to the silence that gives space for the commercial sex market in our communities. When silence is broken, illusions fade and we can contend with what is instead of what we want to see.

**Research shows that individuals who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation face a continuum of symbolic, structural, emotional, sexual and physical violence beginning at a very young age. In the United States the average age of girls first exploited in the commercial sex trade is 15 years old<sup>1</sup>. Once a girl reaches age 18, she no longer qualifies for child protective services. With nowhere to turn, some women can continue in this life for years and often decades before finding a viable exit strategy.**

1. US Department of Justice Research Study (2015)

# WICKED LOCAL

## The Commercial Sex Market Exists Here



**IN JUST 90 DAYS,  
AN ESTIMATED \$7 MILLION  
WAS SPENT IN MASSACHUSETTS  
ON THE PURCHASE OF ALMOST  
15,500 WOMEN FOR SEX.**

- RIA HOUSE, WILLIAM JAMES COLLEGE & IMAGINE FOUNDATION – DATA MINING STUDY, 2016

● Dots indicate towns and cities where brothels, massage parlors, and hotels used as meeting places for sexual transaction were located; and where arrested traffickers and arrested buyers resided, as reported in the news in 2017. The list is not exhaustive.

- Agawam
- Amherst
- Boston
- Cambridge
- Dorchester
- East Falmouth
- East Longmeadow
- Fall River
- Florence
- Framingham
- Gloucester
- Groveland
- Hadley
- Hyannis
- Lawrence
- Lee
- Lowell
- Marblehead
- Marlborough
- Mashpee
- Mendon
- Middleborough
- Natick
- New Bedford
- Newton
- North Reading
- Quincy
- Roxbury
- Springfield
- Somerset
- South Dennis
- Southborough
- Taunton
- Wellesley
- West Springfield
- West Yarmouth
- Westborough
- Woburn
- Worcester

★ Stars indicate towns and cities where RIA House met women in 2017.

- Alston
- Boston
- Brockton
- Dorchester
- Easton
- Fitchburgh
- Framingham
- Hopkinton
- Lawrence
- Lowell
- Lynn
- Malden
- Mansfield
- Marlborough
- Millbury
- Millis
- Natick
- North Attleboro
- North Reading
- Roxbury
- Salem
- Saugus
- Springfield
- Worcester



# MISSION & VISION

RIA House

Our **MISSION** is to stand with and support women with experience in the commercial sex trade and its associated exploitation, trafficking and prostitution, by providing a range of community-based service.

Our **VISION** is a world where people are not victimized, exploited, bought or sold for the sexual gratification of another person.

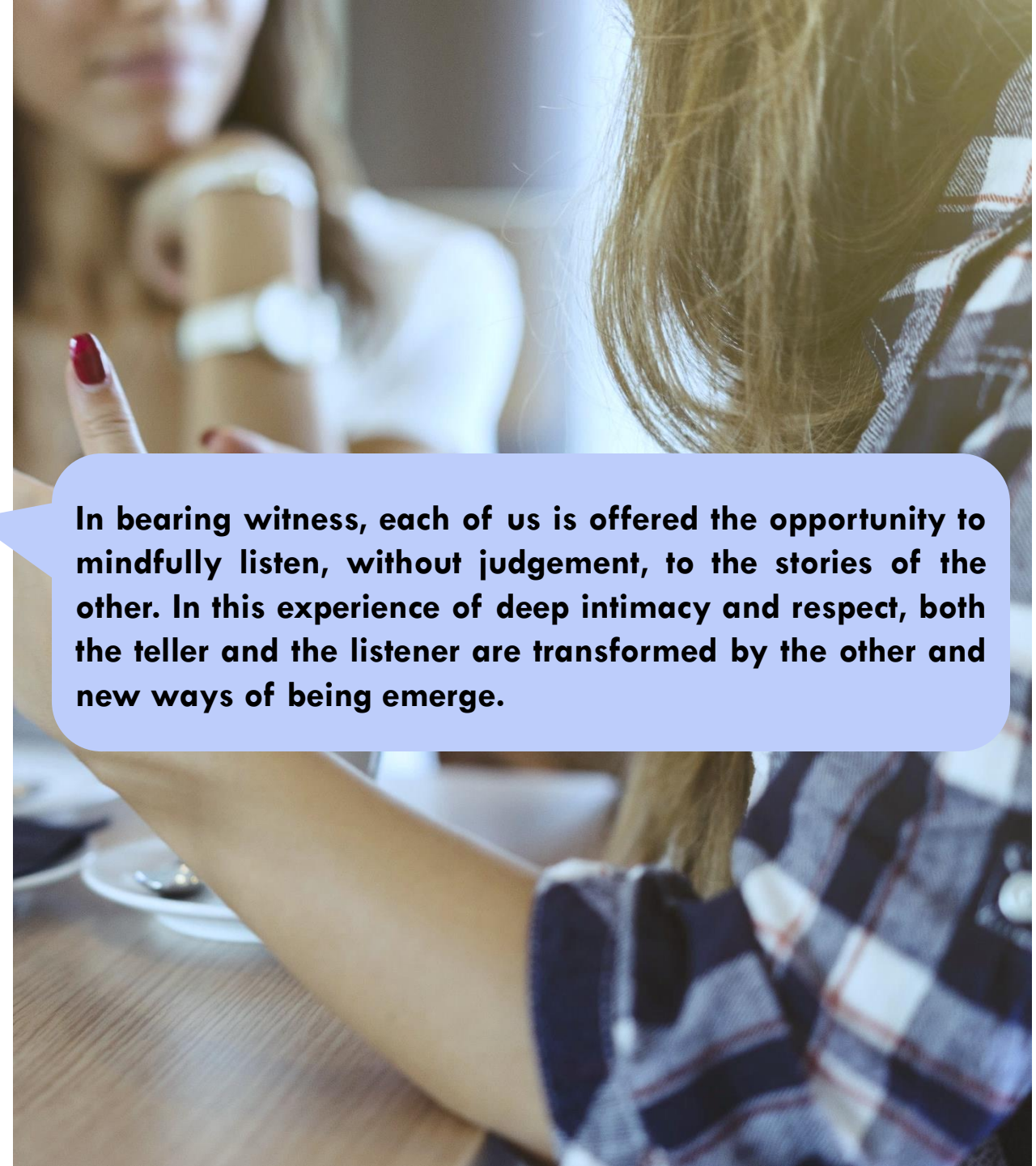
# OUR SERVICE MODEL

## Sisters Leading Sisters

Our model, *Sisters Leading Sisters*, uses a survivor-engaged, clinical team approach, with small caseloads and the capacity to provide mobile support across all levels of care. We walk with women as they are, on their journey towards who they are becoming. We bear witness to the reality of their experiences. Our staff have extensive complex trauma training and receive weekly clinical supervision. Our action-oriented, relational approach brings a compassionate community to each woman we meet by offering:

- One on one mentorship
- Case management
- Clinical therapy
- Groups
- Advocacy services

In 2017 an opportunity, in the form a Focus Group, was offered for women to meet together to provide feedback and suggestions towards improving services and increasing organizational impact. This Focus Group gave space for voices to be heard and facilitated connections among women who typically meet one-on-one with staff.



**In bearing witness, each of us is offered the opportunity to mindfully listen, without judgement, to the stories of the other. In this experience of deep intimacy and respect, both the teller and the listener are transformed by the other and new ways of being emerge.**



# A SNAPSHOT

## How RIA Works & Why It Matters



### How do women connect with us?

Through the community:

- Hospitals
- Shelters
- Police & DAs
- Emergency Responders
- Word of Mouth
- South Middlesex Correctional Center
- Service Providers

### What does support look like?

**In 2017 RIA staff met over 250 unique women.**

Just as each woman is unique, the support she received was distinct based on her circumstances, interests, goals and desire to engage. Here are a few examples of what support looked like: **Info & Referral** – Locating a food pantry within walking distance of her apartment / **Personal Advocacy** – Opening up her first bank account / **Emotional Support** – Offering her the opportunity to go on spiritual retreat and attending with her / **Emotional Support** – Reaching back when she reached out / **Emotional Support** – Reaching out when she didn't reach back / **Criminal/Civil Justice System Assistance** – Securing a lawyer to advocate for her in court, avoiding possible eviction / **Housing Services** – Contributing the security deposit for her apartment / **Housing Services** – Coordinating her stay at a local woman's shelter / **Emotional Support** – Facilitating a ride so she could comfort her daughter / **Safety Service** – Helping her locate a safe place when she called from another state wanting to leave her trafficker / **Emotional Support** – Showing up when her apartment building was on fire / **Housing Services** – Helping her identify housing options when she was released from prison

## Why does it matter?

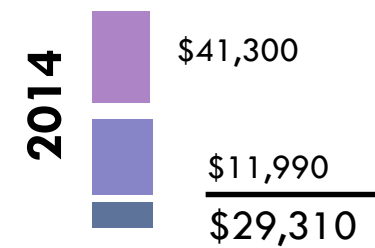
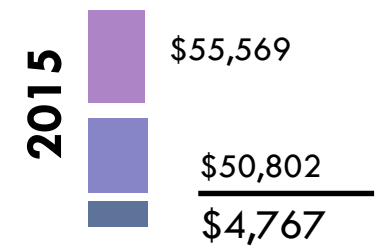
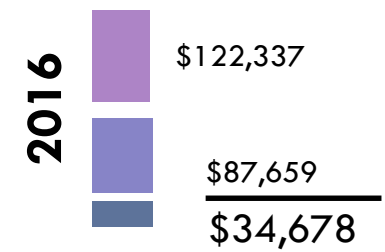
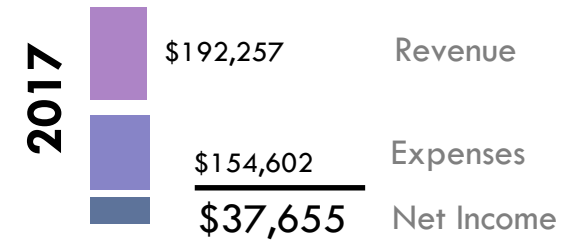
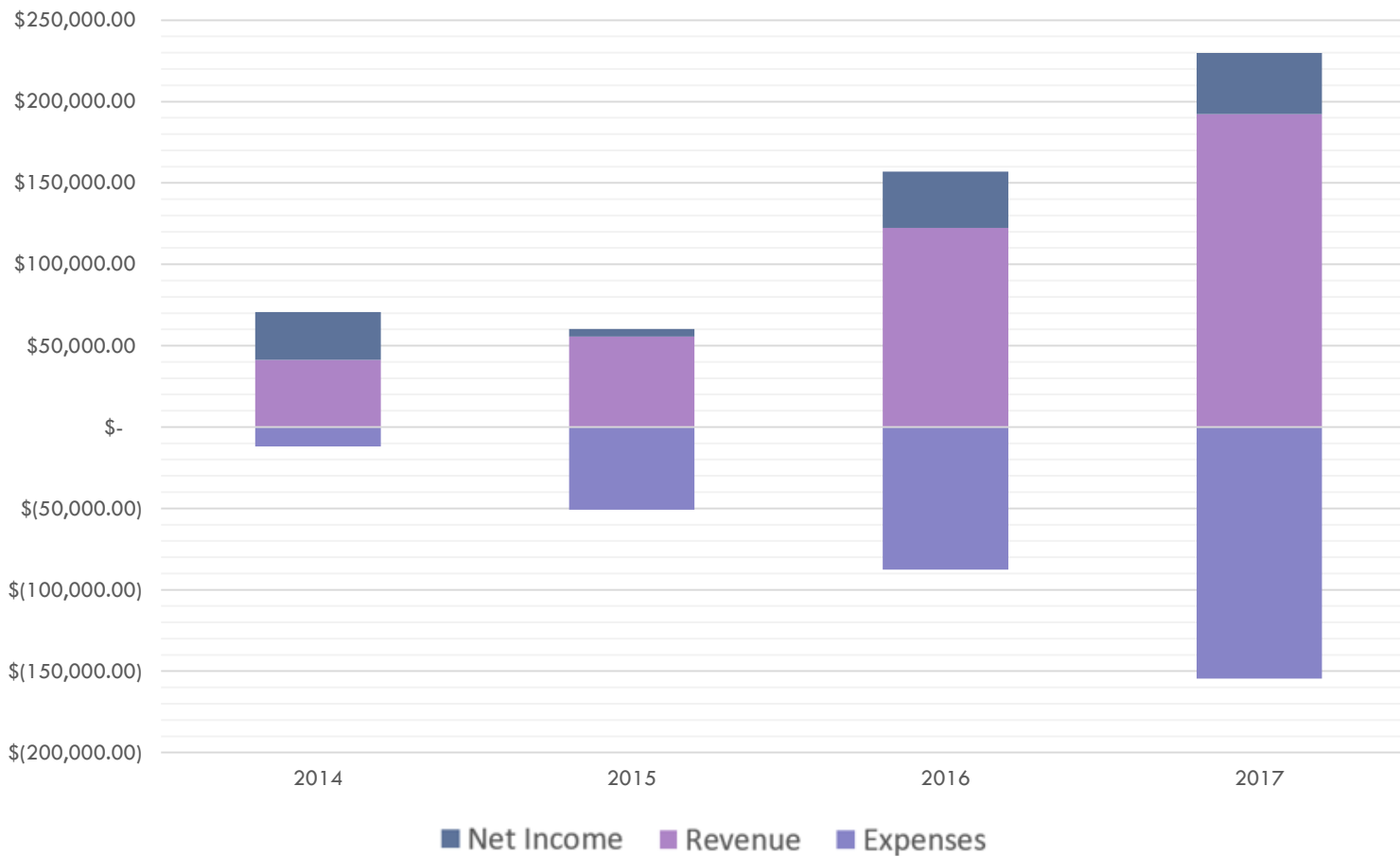
Think of someone who inspired and believed in YOU. Remember how they encouraged you to do the things you dreamed of? Remember how their support gave you courage for any challenge? There was someone to celebrate your achievements and remind you that setbacks are places to learn and grow. When you support RIA House you aren't supporting an organization so much as you are supporting a community of women. You are that person who believes in *her*.

Together with you: **staff relationships** gave space for **honest conversation** that helped guide her future choices / she found a **safe place** to share her story / she is **building confidence and trust** / though she came to the event unsure, she slowly opened herself up to the people and activity, and left **exuding joy** / she got a tax paying **job** / she had the courage to **leave an unhealthy relationship** / she had **someone to call** when she felt unsafe / she **got a ride** to her job interview / she called every few months and **someone answered** each time / she **learned how to budget** her money / she **stayed in school** / she had **someone to celebrate with** when she got her driver's license / she had someone **celebrate her** on her birthday.



# FINANCES

## Revenue & Expenses

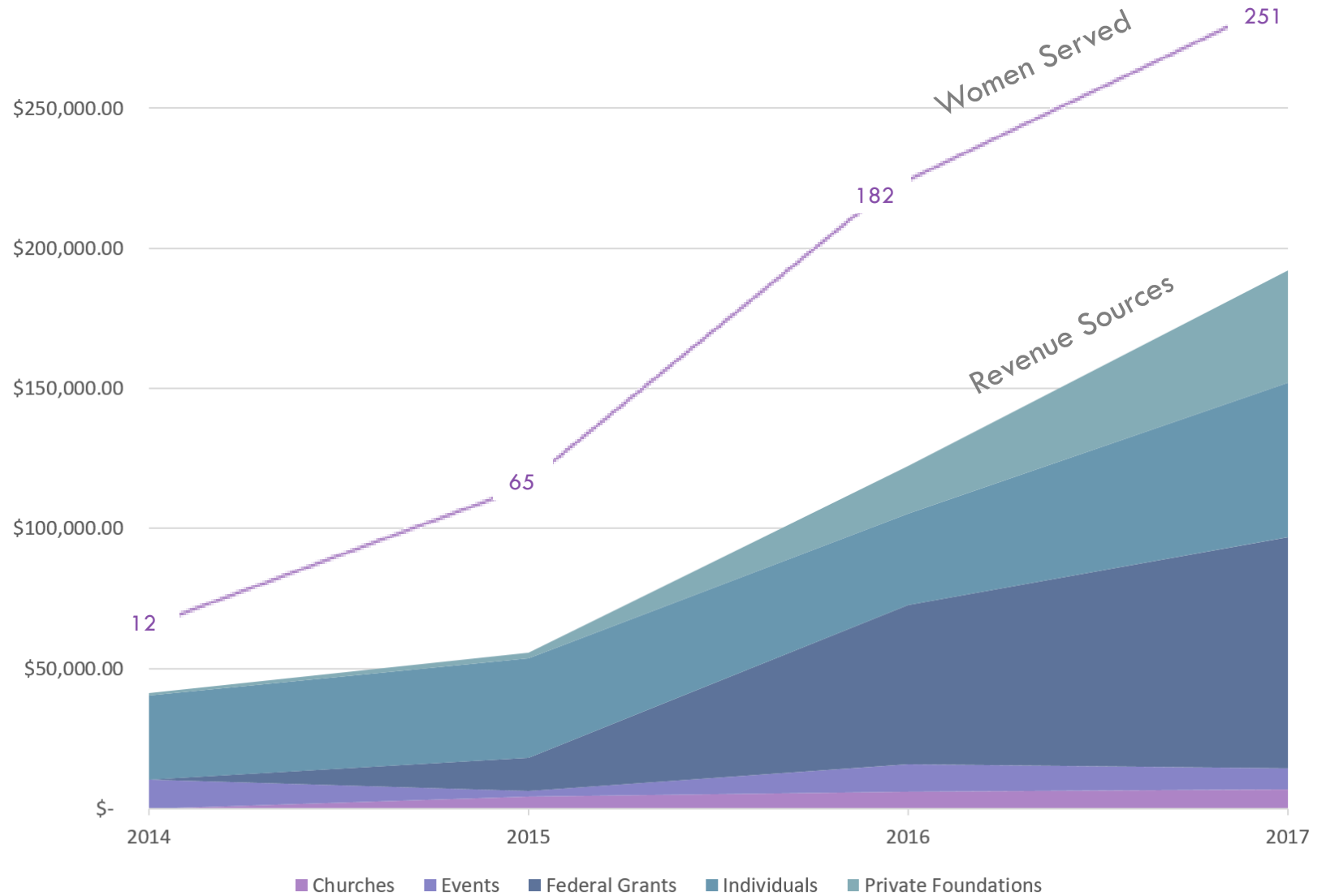


# FINANCES

## Revenue Sources & Women Served

Program establishment over time and integrity in accompaniment mean that more and more women are finding their way to RIA House. In December alone there were nine new referrals. Staff and volunteer commitment coupled with financial partners like you, allow more and more women the opportunity to engage in services each year.

By the end of 2017 we were serving at capacity and poised to grow.





It takes a community of people to make this work possible. We are delighted to count YOU as part of her community and to say that together we will be there for her. Together, in some small way, we will let our actions speak that love doesn't wait for perfection, love embraces us just as we are, with everything that has not yet changed and is still becoming (3). We are in this together because we see possibility.

### **FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Eileen Fisher, First Parish Unitarian Church of Concord SAC Grant, First Parish Church of Sherborn, First Parish Church of Stow & Acton, The Fred Harris Daniels Foundation, Lincoln & Therese Filene Foundation, MetroWest Health Foundation, RIA Board of Directors, The 200 Foundation, VOCA - which supports RIA House through the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance through a Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA) grant from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Wellesley Village Church, Women's Social Justice Committee through Wesley United Methodist Church and many families & individuals. Thank you.

### **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. Thank you.

### **COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS**

Amilia's Light, Amirah, Bakhita House, Bethany House Ministries, BU School of Social Work, Common Street Spiritual Center, Community Health Link, Dept. of Homeland Security, Dignity Matters, HEAL Trafficking, Highpoint, Kendall Street Drop In, Lawyers Clearinghouse, Linda Faye, Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), MA Coalition to End Human Trafficking (MCEHT), MGH Freedom Clinic, MetroWest Legal Services, Middlesex County District Attorney's Office, My Life My Choice, New Life Home Refurnishing, Newton Wellesley Hospital DV & SA Dept, Phoenix House, Project REACH, Rhodes House, Ruth Ann Shulman Baler, 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, YOU Inc, and unnamed others. Thank you.

**A special shout out to Bags of Hope, Framingham Police Department, MAPA Translations & Language Solutions, South Middlesex Correctional Center, Wesley United Methodist Church, William James College & Soar Management Consultant Group (Soar MCG) for helping us complete our 3 year Strategic Plan, 2018-2021.**



# THANK YOU

Donors & Partners

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

GET EXCITED

2018

At the end of 2017 there was a steady increase in new referrals, so we expect to meet many new women. / We are working to deepen and enhance our programming to provide the best support possible. This will include exploring a supportive housing model and creating more opportunities for the women we know to connect with each other. We have witnessed that **community enhances capacity** – women teach each other, offer opportunity to one another and heal collectively. / We are looking to fill new administrative positions to ensure that organizational growth is approached and sustained with integrity. / Staff will continue outreach and training for community partners such as Linda Fay Griffin House, YOU Inc, Beryl's House & Jane Doe Inc. / Interviews will be conducted as we begin adult attachment research in collaboration with William James College. /

“RIA House has given me a better opportunity to connect with other women with the same struggles as myself, which reminds me I'm not alone.”

“I feel safe and supported.”

“My mentor’s listening and support have been very helpful. She has helped me process events I previously couldn't and is a relief from isolation, which helps me continue making positive decisions.”

## WHAT SHE SAID

Women who have engaged in  
RIA Services

