



Summer Sparks Hope at Dawn's Place



A Glimpse into Life at Dawn's Place at a Time of Health Crisis

As I indicated in the April issue of our newsletter, the seven current residents of Dawn's Place are adjusting to the new reality that the COVID-19 restrictions have imposed. Staff, both day and night/weekend shifts, have worked to adjust the women's schedule that now includes creative alternatives.

Although being restricted "in place" is difficult for our residents and can trigger flashbacks, they are grateful for the safety and love they experience at Dawn's Place. I have heard the women say they know if they were out in the street during this time, they would be dead—a stark but truthful reflection on their reality.

However, in the midst of this most challenging season of our lives, there are also amazing signs of hope. Recently, one of our residents has successfully completed a culinary course with Philabundance and is now working part-time with Philabundance to prepare meals for homeless persons and others affected by food insecurity because of COVID-19. Because of her good efforts, she will be employed full-time with Philabundance when the shelter-in regulation is lifted. Moreover, in June, after her completion of the Dawn's Place program, she will move into the Transition House while looking for permanent, affordable housing. A former resident of Dawn's Place and the Transition House has been employed at two part-time jobs. With her earnings and the money she saved while at Dawn's Place, she rented a small house and is now reunited with her children. It was a glorious day for her when she transitioned to her new life in her new home surrounded by her family.

Another of our former residents contacted me to say she successfully finished her first "year" back to college after a hiatus of 17 years with her focus on a double major. At the end of two semesters and four classes, she earned four A's—a cumulative 4.0 GPA—all while working approximately 65 hours a week. She wrote, "If it wasn't for the time of healing and love received until I could learn to love myself at Dawn's Place, I wouldn't have the

strength and ambition I have today.” What a powerful testament!

When I reflect on these three women and all they have accomplished, my heart is overjoyed at their progress and I am profoundly grateful for your generous support which has made their progress and our mission possible.

You know well from your own experiences the challenges of our current crisis, so you will not be surprised that we have encountered many additional expenses because of the COVID-19 restrictions, Your continued financial support is even more critical today and in the days ahead. Thank you for your past support. If you can, please continue to walk with us and our residents in our mission of healing and new beginnings. No contribution is too small.

Finally, let us continue to pray for all those directly affected by the COVID-19 virus, their families, those who love them, and the medical professionals and all others who care for them.

We promise you and all whom you hold dear a daily remembrance in our prayer.

-Sister Kathleen Coll SSJ, Executive Director of Dawn's Place

[Visit our website to learn more about Dawn's Place](#)

Dawn's Place Needs Your Help!

Dawn's Place is Committed to Serving Our Residents During the COVID-19 Pandemic.



Dawn's Place has had to replace volunteers with paid staffing during the COVID-19 crisis. Any amount that you are able to donate would be so appreciated to help us keep our doors open during these unprecedented times.

[Donate Now!](#)

Legislative and Advocacy Updates

Victims of trafficking are often forced to commit crimes by their trafficker. [A2016 National Survivor Network survey](#) found that 91% of survivor respondents reported being arrested over the course of their trafficking. Many of these arrests were for prostitution, but not all. A survivor's criminal record may also include drug possession, retail theft, criminal trespass, and more serious crimes like robbery or aggravated assault. Recognizing the coercion and duress that causes trafficking victims to engage in this criminal conduct, 36 states have adopted some sort of remedy to allow survivors to clear their records. In Pennsylvania, the remedy is called vacatur—and it allows for a complete erasure of any information associated with the arrest. Vacatur is limited in Pennsylvania, and in many other states, to certain enumerated offenses, generally low-level misdemeanors. The remedy is also limited to offenses prosecuted at the state level; there is no federal vacatur.

At the end of January, Senators Kristin Gillibrand and Rob Portman introduced a bipartisan bill, the [Trafficking Survivors Relief Act](#), which would create a federal vacatur remedy. The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act, S.3240, would vacate and expunge non-violent criminal convictions for survivors of trafficking and provide an avenue for incarcerated survivors to seek relief and resentencing. The bill proposes several avenues of post-conviction relief. The most extensive protection is vacatur available to those convicted of non-violent crimes, however the bill goes further. It proposes making expungements available for those charged with, and not convicted of violent crimes, and the possibility of resentencing upon consideration of mitigating factors for violent offenses.

For vacatur eligible offenses, the bill proposes a similar procedure as many states: survivors submit a petition, in writing, describing supporting evidence and including any documents that show they were a victim of trafficking at the time of the offense. There then may be a hearing for the judge to review the evidence and consider several factors including whether the offense “was a direct result of the movant having been a victim of trafficking.” The entire process would take place under seal, meaning that it is confidential and not available to the public.

While, at this difficult time, it is unclear whether the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act will become law, it is important to see our federal legislature recognizing the injustice survivors face. Having a pending federal legislation may encourage states without a vacatur remedy to create one, and states with limited remedies to expand the protections. It is necessary that we take all steps to assist survivors in getting the justice they deserve, and this S.3240 provides a step in that direction.

The CSE Institute recently published the 2020 Report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, which discusses vacatur in Pennsylvania, [which you can read here](#).

-Shea M. Rhodes, Esquire

Dawn's Place Board Member

Director and Co-Founder of Villanova Law Institute to Address Commercial and Sexual Exploitation



Healing Stories

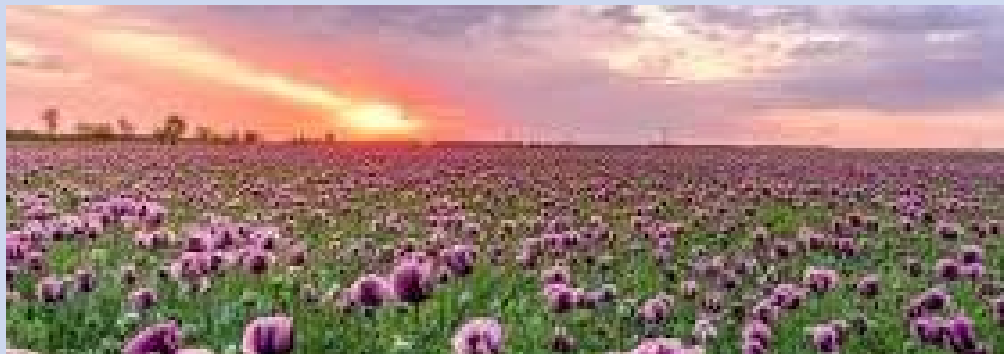
Coronavirus, COVID-19, or simply, Covid. Whatever you call it, it has changed all our lives forever. And it has impacted Dawn's Place.

When everything shut down, our staff moved to implement the plan that Sr. Kathleen had drawn up. That meant that the activities of our women were moved online. This includes such diverse activities as therapy, drug treatment, and yoga. Our dedicated staff changed their schedules and worked extra hours to make sure that our women were covered. And our Board members worked to find ways to cover the extra expenses and decreased donations due to the shutdown.

Meanwhile, on an entirely different front, lawyers from my office have been working feverishly to try to get people out of jail who have been charged with low level offenses. Jails are very risky places to be when viruses run rampant. And the newspapers are full of stories about Philadelphia city officials dealing with the homeless population in an attempt to prevent the spread of the virus. Even among those with housing in Kensington, there are news stories about hunger, and the increased difficulty in finding the next meal during the shutdown.

In the midst of all of this, I thank God for Dawn's Place. I thank God for our staff and our donors who make Dawn's Place possible. For all those in harm's way in the prisons and on the streets, for all of those suffering hunger and fearing illness, there are right now seven women who are safe, healthy, nourished, and cared for at Dawn's Place. During the current storm, Dawn's Place is to them, as it has always been: a house, a home, and a haven.

*-Mary DeFusco, Esquire
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