

Finding hope. 2020

REPORT TO
OUR
COMMUNITY





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MESSAGE FROM VILLA LEADERSHIP

This Report to Our Community 2020 will go down in Villa history as a commemoration of one of the most challenging years the Villa – and our World – have ever faced.

COVID-19 hit hard, racial tension saw new and sometimes overwhelming highs, and as an organization, we had to respond quickly, creatively, and with compassion to bring those we serve through safely. Youth, adults and families, as well as our courageous staff, all looked to the Villa for guidance.

This report will outline for you:

- **The Villa's response to COVID-19**, and how our proactive measures positioned us to be uniquely helpful to our community.
- **The Villa's response to racial injustice** – the next level of the Villa's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging initiatives.
- Finally, and most importantly, HOPE. In these pages we have interwoven successes and silver linings from the stories of those we serve, including inspiring highlights from **Elizabeth's wonderful year!**

There is always HOPE. Youth, adults and families struggling with chemical dependency, mental health concerns, or recovering from trauma, have always found sanctuary with our caring professionals. You have been our partners through the most challenging of times. You have always helped the Villa, and those in our care, hold on to **HOPE**.

Thank you for your steadfast support.

Dawn DePerrior
Board Chair

Christina M. Gullo, MSW, MBA
President/CEO



Please note: all individuals photographed for the Villa of Hope 2020 Report to Our Community followed safe, CDC guidelines for physical distancing and masking.

ELIZABETH'S WONDERFUL YEAR

During a recent visit to Hope Place with her family, Elizabeth was calm and cheerful as her active young girls played hide-and-seek in the lobby. She was a patient Mom, and her kids think she's a "fun Mom."

This past year, in the midst of a global pandemic, Elizabeth had the best year of her life.

Productive and fulfilling, the year began with mental health services at the Villa's Behavioral Health Clinic, to help her stabilize; and then a network of strong and timely connections to other services that changed the course of her future.

"I used to be unable to control my thoughts," she says. "I had a chaotic childhood. And into adulthood, my mind would just keep going and going, and sometimes I would have emotional outbursts that would scare my kids. I would take myself to Hospital Emergency Departments, at times, for help. Unfortunately, sometimes I also had the police called on me, by other people. I was a wreck." Getting back on her medication regimen at the Villa clinic was key.

She was fortunate also to be able to pursue art therapy at the clinic, and had not been a patient for long there before her therapist encouraged her to visit Hope Place, which opened in February of 2020. "It was such a different program than I had ever been to before," she said. "They don't call us patients, like the hospitals do; they call us **their guests**. And I was able to do activities to occupy my mind, to go into the sensory room to relax; I was able to bring my kids. It was awesome." She also mentioned she used to be shy. Today she is bubbly, talkative, and open, thanks to the caring support she found there.

But this is not where the story ends. Her children were also connected with services. Destiny, the Hope Place Program Manager, encouraged her to join a women's support group. She asked Elizabeth about her goals and dreams, and Elizabeth opened up about really wanting to pursue a trade; but knowing it would be difficult without her high school diploma.

Not an obstacle. Soon, with Destiny's coordination, Elizabeth had enrolled in the BOCES TASC program, and began to complete all the necessary course work. There were interruptions due to the pandemic; but she forged ahead. The depth of her commitment to her goals can perhaps best be seen in the fact that nothing has come easily for her – in all sorts of weather, she has taken the bus, or has walked to her mental health appointments, to her visits at Hope Place, and to her classes – **and, quite impressively, she has succeeded.** She is establishing a stable life, for herself and her family.

Within the next six months, she plans to take her high school equivalency exam, her first step toward a future career.

"My life is so much better today because of Villa of Hope," Elizabeth says, and then she beams. "I really did find hope." 🌈



Hope Place, located at our Watertown Park facility, is a psychiatric diversion program which has seen skyrocketing visits and opportunities to help our community during the COVID-19 pandemic – all during its very first year of operation.



Destiny Brown-Hernandez is the Hope Place Program Manager (above), and friend to many.

At left, Elizabeth and Albert relax at Hope Place with their daughters, Kaliana, Brooklynn and Cyan who had just finished their snacks. Through Villa programs, and staff encouragement and connections, Elizabeth is on track to complete her high school equivalency exam in the next six months. Her goal is to pursue a career in culinary arts.

THE VILLA RESPONSE TO COVID-19

When whispers of a potential State of Emergency due to COVID-19 began, Villa of Hope's Executive Leadership Team created a "command center" and within eight hours had a plan in place with the Operational Leadership Team briefed and preparing to implement. Daily briefings (7 days a week) for ELT and OLT teams began. The Villa was ready BEFORE the Governor issued the stay at home order.

In our residential programs, Villa Leadership planned for a COVID-19 isolation cottage, and a COVID-19 quarantine cottage, both of which needed to be mobilized for campus youth who fell ill. These proactive measures were also complimented by programs already in place to serve our folks in the community: Hope Place, which opened in February, became an in-demand hub for Rochesterians who were in need of supplies, food, and referrals to assistance of all kinds. The Villa's website became a COVID-19 Info Resource. And as the County was setting up systems to serve our community, Villa staff voluntarily stepped forward to man the County COVID helpline, fielding over 600 calls in 5 months.

Alan, a Villa youth, said at the time, "When I got COVID, I was scared, but the staff told me I would be okay. And I got better." Villa employees who worked with COVID + individuals were able to stay in hotel accommodations to keep their families at home safe. The staff themselves reported feeling safe, supported, and recognized for their efforts taking care of the people we serve. 🌟



In the face of great uncertainty, it was our staff on the frontlines who emerged as our heroes. There was no shortage of volunteers who were willing to work in our cottages with kids who were ill. They donned their personal protective gear each day. While the dress code at the Villa had changed, the care and dedication remained the same.

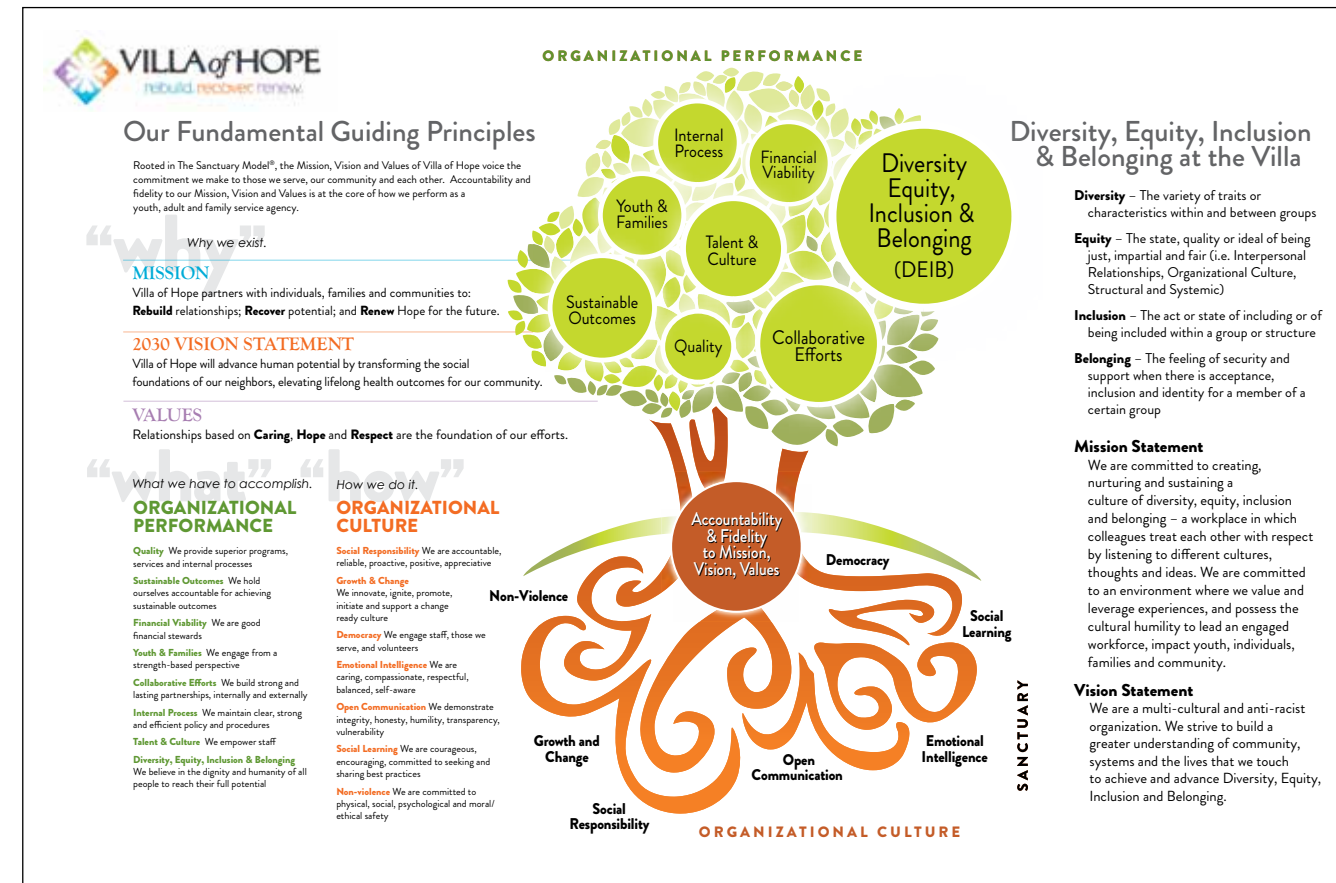
Other programs and departments were able to transition to remote work, and our clinic welcomed a TeleMed appointment format that allowed patients to stay connected with therapists and psychologists.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING

“As a community and a Nation we are experiencing trauma.

The events in our community, our Nation, and the world over the last few weeks and months are traumatic. Losing loved ones to a pandemic, heightened racial tension, rising anxiety and unemployment are just a few of the events that many of us do not face on a daily basis. Some of these are temporary, but the issue of structural racism is one that has been around far too long. As a white, female CEO, I can never truly understand what my black and brown colleagues feel; yet I am in pain and heartbroken.”

These words, written by Villa President and CEO, Chris Gullo in June 2020, were aired on television, continued



The Villa's official Fundamental Guiding Principles poster was re-worked this year to highlight our DEIB mission and vision. This document can be viewed in greater detail by downloading it on our website, at <https://www.villaofohope.org/about-us/sanctuary/>

DEIB, *continued*

on the radio via the Villa's podcasts; were in the pages of Rochester Business Journal, and are immortalized on our website (see <https://www.villaofhope.org/black-lives-matter/>) during a period of heightened racial tension that marked 2020, and continues.



Danielle Roque,
Manager of HR
Operations

Danielle Roque, Villa Manager of HR Operations, has been at the Villa for 4 years, and remembers when the conversation first began about a diversity initiative at the agency, prior to the events in the past year. "You hear a lot about social justice, and you see a lot of companies jump on the bandwagon to give the appearance of engagement in social issues. And then you see it fall off. I started off slightly skeptical about the Villa; but you know a company is committed when they put their money where their mouth is." And that is what Danielle observed: first, the Villa invested in the expertise of Mary Pender Greene Consulting (MPG), for ongoing training in structural racism.

Then the Villa added Wynndy Turner to the Executive Leadership Team as our Chief Human Resources and Diversity Officer. She had enthusiastically joined the Villa for the challenge – and the important work – of building out this new position, and taking stock of the Villa's culture, policies, practices and procedures to make sure that DEIB was a part of the Villa's very fabric. Staff were engaged to help draft a mission and vision statement for the Villa's DEIB initiatives.

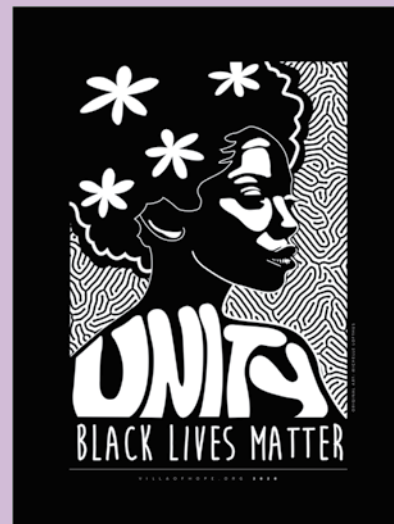
Danielle was soon able to attend the Society for Diversity to complete the necessary work to become a Certified Diversity Practitioner; and along the way, Danielle states, "I became a believer that this is real."

"The reason for a commitment to DEIB," says Wynndy, "is really, holistically, our mission. That's at the heart of it. It's all about the clients and our community, and our own individual transformations. It's about how we move as an organization in our community – we need a solid foundation as staff to be able to better serve others. And it's holistic because it is also for our staff. We want our staff to be able to bring their true selves to work everyday."

Those we serve were also invited into the process of creating our Villa Diversity identity. In the summer of 2020, youth in our school and community programs participated in an art contest, run by youth interns in our Workforce Development program, and judged by a small group of Villa staff, selected by the students. The winning entry is the "Black Lives Matter – Unity" art pictured at right, created by Villa of Hope School senior, Michelle. She finalized the art for silkscreening during her Villa Workforce Development internship.

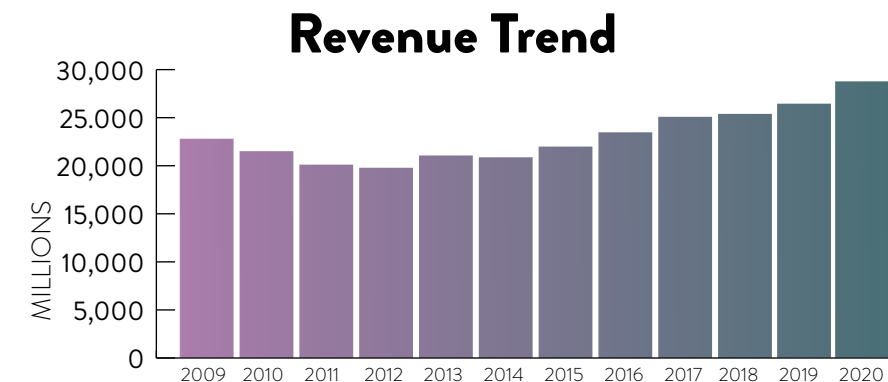
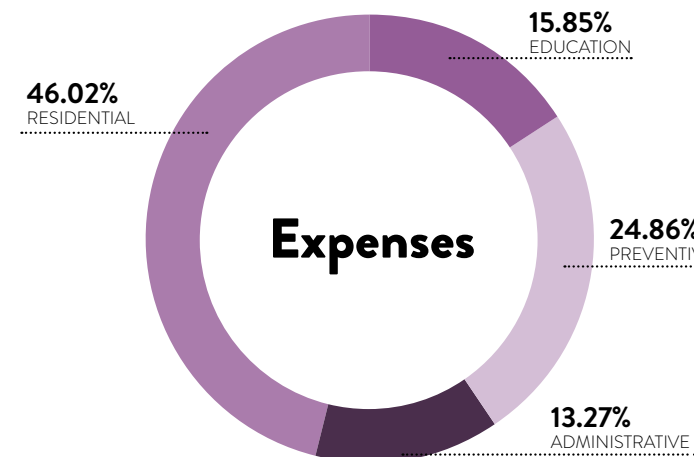
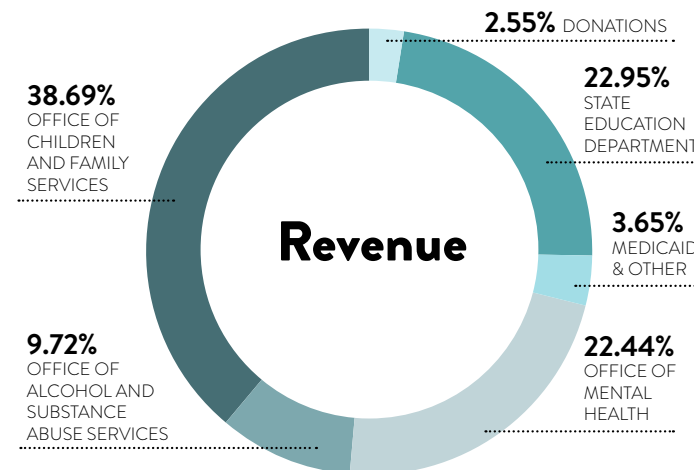
In the words of Chris Gullo, "We are focused on equity and equality. We are focused on helping reduce the effects of generations of trauma in our community and our country. We are focused on giving Hope."

As a Villa and a community, we continue to have much work to do. 🌈



Michelle (pictured on page 2), Villa of Hope School senior, is the artist behind the winning art selected for Villa t-shirts and posters (above).

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS



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