

## Making Mental Health Services Accessible to All





# How \$125 Can Help Restore One's Dignity



Practicing good personal hygiene benefits physical and mental health but depressive symptoms (e.g., impaired cognitive functions, reduced energy levels) make maintaining a self-care routine more difficult. Laurel House Community Support Services counselors addressed the topic of self-care with residents in need, providing personal hygiene product packages, education and encouragement.

Our culture sometimes takes an unsympathetic approach to issues such as lack of cleanliness that are often associated with mental illness, poverty and homelessness, frequently viewing them as personal failings. Thus, the topic of hygiene as part of

a mental health conversation can carry a stigma and is difficult to broach. Additional barriers may be an individual's level of illness, an inability to establish a personal care routine and the lack of resources for personal care products.

On a social level, those participating in the program benefitted from reduced isolation and loneliness. For some, overcoming the issues that may separate them from interpersonal contact resulted in an opportunity for employment, increased engagement in community (social and spiritual) and being welcomed and encouraged to join movie nights, artists' and music workshops, and barbecues with other residents.

Thanks to generous donations from **First Congregational Church of Greenwich Women's Fellowship** and **St. John's Community Foundation** of Stamford, Laurel House was able to purchase brand name and culturally preferred products for 60 Supportive Housing residents at a cost of \$125 per gift bag. The gift packages were met with enthusiastic thank yous, smiles and tears of gratitude.

Daryl and Staff at Laurel House,

I received a Personal Care gift package from you guys. It was amazing and consisted of everything that I use + was low on.

Having had a series of health issues in past months, it meant everything to me to get that package.



# A Message from our CEO and our Chairman

Dear Laurel House Friends and Supporters,

Thank you for the confidence you have shown in our work and the investment you have made in mental health recovery. Your generosity has helped Laurel House serve 920 individuals, the greatest number ever served, and helped more individuals get and keep jobs, succeed in post-secondary education, and live more independently in the community. Our Program Outcomes are shown on page 13.

While we have reached and served a greater number of individuals and families in need this year, we have not increased staffing. You will however notice the growth in the Salary & Benefits line on our Summary Income & Expense page necessary to ensure that the skilled team we've cultivated stays with our organization. We invest in their professional development and recognize their contributions. As opposed to staff being considered overhead in a business, clinicians and counselors are the "products" clients need to help achieve their goals.

Private donations have sustained our innovative delivery of services. rtor.org, a free service of Laurel House, receives no public funding. It continues to address the demand for connection to mental health services, offering rapid referral to expert treatment and compassionate aid to families navigating the mental health landscape. This year, 2,104 individuals engaged with our two rtor Resource Specialists for personalized response to their requests. An increased percentage of underserved communities of color were among those requests. And we now have a year's worth of results to determine that our Thinking Well clients served virtually have the same positive outcomes as in-person, removing barriers to access to service, such as transportation. We continue the in-person sessions in our Resource Center, onsite at college and high school campuses, and at other agencies as requested.

The Sound Steps Wellness Walk/Run we held in the fall drew new supporters to Laurel House. We will host a second Walk/Run on October 26th at Stamford's Cove Park. We are grateful for the enthusiastic participation and support of our Champion for Recovery and Town Champions honored at our 40th anniversary celebration held April 27th at Delamar Greenwich Harbor. Please see photos of the honorees and attendees on pages 11 and 12.

Our third annual Social Work Racial Equity Scholarship drew an exceptionally strong group of Black and Latino social work graduate students competing for the \$10,000 scholarship. We will increase the second-place scholarship amount this coming spring, signifying our commitment to cultivating more social workers dedicated to serving local communities of color. See page 6 to view the three talented recent award recipients.

Your continued financial support is critical to maintaining our life-changing programs. You are helping individuals and families in need of mental health services achieve their hopes and dreams to succeed in the community.



Linda M. Autore  
President and CEO



Kenneth A. DellaRocco, Esq.  
Chairman, Board of Directors

# Supported Education

One of Laurel House's evidence-based programs, Supported Education (SEd) assisted 126 program participants with a mental health condition in: choosing a post-secondary school or vocational certification, or working toward a GED; applying for admission and financial aid; selecting and enrolling in classes; and accessing on-campus disability support services/accommodations. We are one of five Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) contractors to the state of CT, serving students from Greenwich to Bridgeport, and have continuously achieved the highest rating category of Exemplary in the annual DMHAS Fidelity Review.



*Rachel, SEd program participant, is a cum laude graduate of Sacred Heart University*

We provide services on college and high school campuses and at the Resource Center, both in-person and virtually to remove barriers to access. Counselors share learning strategies and coping skills to manage symptoms and offer ongoing counseling support to build and transfer skills for greater self-sufficiency. For students who move to an out-of-area campus, counselors identify all available on-campus disability support to help the student transition.

Counselors also work closely with the participant's therapeutic team to relay clinical observations of improvement in psychiatric stability, social engagement and increased self-confidence. The families of Supported Education participants receive wraparound services as needed from rtor.org Resource Specialists to ensure the success of the student. The Specialists help families connect with a therapist or benefits, find a new treatment provider for the student, and/or provide psychoeducation regarding the student's mental health condition or treatment. 26% of the Supported Education students in FY24 required the assistance of a Resource Specialist for family support. This combination of Supported Education with wraparound services for the family has been crucial to the success of at-risk students.



*Janet King, The Community Fund of Darien Executive Director, presents a grant check to Linda Autore, CEO, and Krista Biello, LMSW, SEd and Thinking Well Manager*

Laurel House has received significant and sustained funding from the Greenwich Department of Human Services (GDHS) as a Community Partner for the delivery of Supported Education to Greenwich residents. GDHS provides direct and indirect services to the residents of Greenwich, connecting people in need to the essential resources in the community and neighboring areas. These resources include health care services, behavioral health services, educational and employment opportunities, food support, personal safety, emergency shelter, and immigration services. The Town of Greenwich is a model for the use of Supported Education as an early intervention with high school and alternative school senior students, creating a successful trajectory in post-secondary education and vocational certification for young adults dealing with social and emotional issues.



Thank you to the generous grant funding of the Supported Education program by: The Dammann Fund, Inc.; The Goodnow Fund; Greenwich Department of Human Services; People with Disabilities Foundation; Pitney Bowes Foundation; Savings Bank of Danbury; Stanley Family Foundation; and the Tudor Foundation. Thank you to The Community Fund of Darien and First County Bank Foundation, Inc. for their generous grants to Supported Education with wraparound rtor.org Resource Specialist services for families of the students. Thank you Rotary Club of New Canaan for continued client assistance to Supported Education participants.



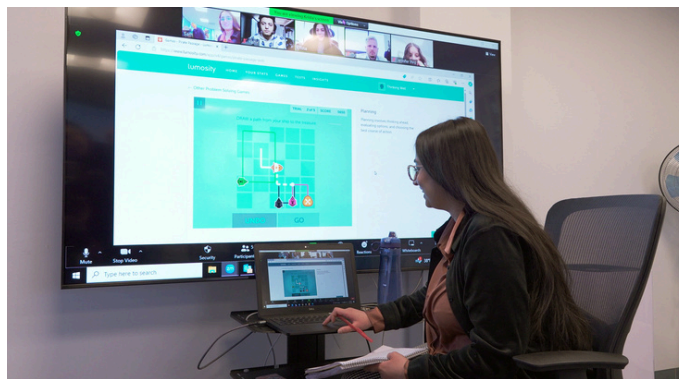
# Thinking Well

The goal of Thinking Well is to improve quality of life, increase self-confidence, and to help those with a mental health disorder become more participative members of their local communities. Laurel House is one of only three providers in CT and the only one in Fairfield County certified in the therapeutic intervention developed by thought leaders in Neuroscience and Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

A pre- and a post-assessment identify the cognitive domains that can benefit from improvement and the level of improvement achieved in attention, working memory, verbal learning, reasoning and problem-solving, and processing speed.



*Johane participates in an in-person session in the Harrison Hoffman Thinking Well Center*



*Samia Malik, Laurel House Supported Education Counselor and Certified Cognitive Remediation Specialist, leads a virtual Thinking Well session*

138 participants benefitted from Thinking Well in FY24. 100% who completed sessions (10, 20, or 30, as they chose, with two per week, hour-long sessions) and took a post-Assessment improved in at least one of five cognitive domains. 91% improved in two domains, 72% in three and 37% in four of the five domains. 5% improved in all five domains. The program's success is also measured in clinically observed improvement in functional skills for nearly all of the participants: increased self-confidence; engaging better socially; getting a job or taking on more hours at work; volunteering; pursuing post-secondary education or vocational certification; living with greater independence.



*Omar and Jennifer Piro, Laurel House Supported Education and Employment Counselor and Certified Cognitive Remediation Specialist, review his progress*

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Thank you to Greenwich United Way Community Investment Program and The Oaklawn Foundation for their generous support of Thinking Well.

# Supportive Housing and Community Support Services

Despite the price of Fairfield County's rental market being among the highest nationally, Laurel House continues to provide affordable and safe apartment living for individuals living with mental health disorders – critical to sustaining their recovery. Residents also receive critical support services as do other clients in the community who live in apartments not owned by Laurel House. 84 program participants received case management and counseling in recovery planning, Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), budgeting, and accessing community services. Clients benefit from regular outreach by counselors to ensure nutrition and physical and mental health are monitored and addressed, preventing relapses and hospitalizations.

Laurel House offers workshops with a skill building curriculum and therapeutic activities that focus on the interests and talents of the participants. In an environment of acceptance and encouragement, counselors and community volunteers engage participants to improve communication and coping skills, increase self-sufficiency, and to learn new skills for employment, social interaction, and greater independence in living.



*Colette Clarke, Community Support Counselor, leads a Wellness Workshop*



*Monthly Community Lunches and Activities*



*Weekly Artists' Workshops led by Jean Benoit*

Major improvements and upgrades were made in the program room of our Supportive Housing apartment building to facilitate workshops and to give program participants the most productive space. A significant American Rescue Plan grant made those improvements possible.

Each apartment unit also benefitted from the generosity of the Costa D'Oro Foundation which funded new refrigerators, microwaves, living room furniture, and new blinds for all apartments. The Foundation also paid for the painting of the hallways, doors and entrance to the building. Tenants are enormously grateful.



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Thank you to First Congregational Church of Greenwich Women's Fellowship and St. John's Community Foundation for grant funding in support of our Housing and Community Support Services' clients. Thank you Diddel & Diddel, LLC, Dolphin Cove Community, and St. Leo's Parish of Stamford for your support of clients' food and basic needs. Thank you Costa D'Oro Foundation for your significant support of improvements to our 6 Washington Ct. Supportive Housing apartments.



# Supported Employment



Employment Specialist Chase Bellini assisting Tasha in her dental hygienist job search

With the addition of two Employment Specialists in 2022, funded by DMHAS in response to their competitive Request for Proposal, we greatly increased our capacity to serve more clients in need. 142 individuals with a mental health condition received services in FY24, compared to 120 in FY23, 112 in FY22, and 106 in FY21. While we continue to experience a wait list due to the sustained demand for the program, the total resource of 4.5 full-time Employment Specialists allows us to conduct rapid intakes and produce successful outcomes and discharges, minimizing the wait time for new clients.

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program that Laurel House delivers is an evidence-based practice that helps individuals with mental health conditions find and keep competitive jobs (jobs not set aside for people with disabilities). The model focuses on the strengths of the program participant. It recognizes that work is a key part of recovery, as a job gives purpose, has a positive impact on self-esteem, provides a path out of poverty, and reduces isolation.

## IPS Outcomes

- Randomized controlled trials demonstrate that IPS participants are more likely to be employed, attain employment faster, hold jobs longer and work more hours. (*World Psychiatry*, 19, 390-391, Oct. 2020)
- In 28 studies, 55% of IPS participants worldwide gained competitive employment vs. 25% of control participants receiving other vocational services.
- **Of Laurel House's 142 participants, 66% gained competitive employment and 71% were employed over 12 months.**
- 307 U.S. IPS agencies served 19,609 people and reported a 42.5% competitive employment rate. (March 2024)

The same successful approach is utilized in our Mobile Employment Services (MES) program. Laurel House is one of only five organizations in CT contracted by DMHAS to provide employment services to individuals with an opioid use disorder, living in Recovery Houses in towns from Greenwich to Bridgeport. Given the nature of the transitional stay for just 90 – 120 days, it is a necessity to gain rapid placement in employment. 59 individuals received onsite services from our Mobile Employment Specialist vs. 53 and 35 clients in previous years.



Megan Habakangas, Mobile Employment Specialist, with a client

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) provides program funding. Using the same effective principles of Supported Employment, the MES Specialist provides targeted job development based on the participant's interests.

The Specialist builds relationships with employers through repeated contact, learning about the business needs of the employers, and introducing employers to qualified job applicants. Three large scale IPS trials for people with substance use disorders have been conducted showing employment outcomes significantly favoring IPS: Project BEES in the U.S.; the IPS-AD study in the U.K.; and a similar study in Norway.

# Advocacy and Community Engagement

Our team spends significant time in the communities we serve. Counselors meet program participants where they live, go to school and work. We give visibility to available services and facilitate access for program participants to local organizations, collaborative agencies, and Houses of Worship, in addition to medical and mental health services.

As advocates for mental health recovery, we are focused on making mental health services accessible to all and to ensuring that our services reach underserved communities. We do that by outreach to those in need but also by cultivating relationships with culturally competent providers to whom we can connect communities of color.

The Social Work Racial Equity Scholarship was awarded for the third year by Laurel House and rtor.org to cultivate more Black and Latino social workers committed to social change and to providing culturally relevant mental health care treatment for people of color. A \$10,000 graduate school scholarship and two cash awards of \$1,000 and \$500 were presented to the three talented winners.



Scholarship winner Isabela Yoguez (2nd from left), First Runner-up Sahmra Sawyer (2nd from right), and Second Runner-up Akilah King (center), with Vice President Jay Boll and Resource Specialist Danielle Leblanc



Mary Sheehan, Employment Specialist and Danielle Leblanc, LMSW, Resource Specialist engage with students at UCONN Fresh Check

Counselors representing Laurel House programs and rtor.org services participate in numerous health care events and college and high school fairs to ensure prospective clients as well as their families and other providers are aware of our services and can easily connect with us. Nearly 300 local health care providers receive a monthly calendar and updates regarding our workshops and programs, facilitating client referrals.

We raised visibility of our services and promoted mental health recovery in our first-ever Sound Steps 5K Wellness Walk/Run. 140 individuals supported the October 2023 event which will be held again on October 26th, 2024 at Cove Island Park in Stamford.

**SOUND STEPS**  
5K WELLNESS WALK/RUN



Thank you to J. McLaughlin, Darien and to Pilates Advantage of Wilton for giving visibility to Laurel House's and rtor.org's work and for your generous fundraising support of our programs.



*the*  
**pilates**  
ADVANTAGE



# rtor.org | Resources to Recover

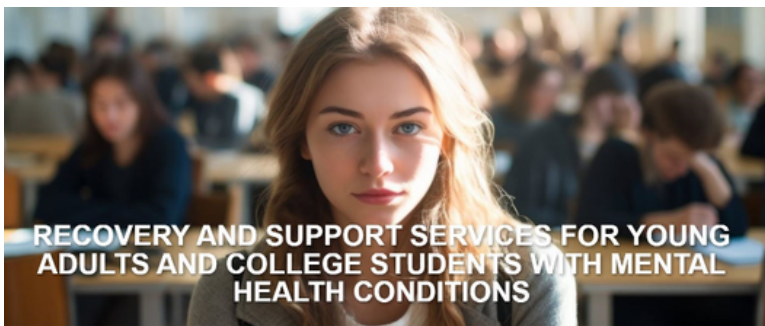
[www.rtor.org](http://www.rtor.org) helps families and individuals affected by mental health concerns. It is a free service of Laurel House, Inc. Visitors to the site can explore the extensive content including weekly blogs, information about diagnoses and treatments, and a showcase of over 170 Family-Endorsed Providers, or ask for help by email, LiveChat or phone to get a personalized response to an inquiry. Resource Specialists (RS) are knowledgeable and compassionate clinicians who take the time to listen closely to the needs of the caller and to understand the impact of the issues. They make recommendations regarding next steps including providing referrals and introductions to mental health care providers.

## FY 2024 rtor Services

- 2,014 individuals engaged with two Resource Specialists for personalized response to requests for help.
- There were 2,079,890 user interactions on the site.  
(Source: Google Analytics 4)
- 76% of cases are initiated by women.
- 65% are about a family member; 66% are about a young adult.
- 42% of clients are Black, Latino or people of color.
- 85% of RS service users need help finding a provider.
- 84% seek help identifying symptoms and understanding diagnoses.



*The series of six Failure to Launch blogs is most popular*



For many young adults, the role of families is crucial in providing encouragement and in understanding the challenges that students with mental health or social and emotional issues face. rtor Resource Specialists add their support to that of Laurel House's Supported Education counselors for a critical combination of services to the families of the students.



NEW CANAAN  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

New Canaan Community Foundation is a leader in bringing the community together to identify and prioritize residents' needs and in taking action to address the priorities.

rtor.org is honored to be one of the featured organizations on the New Canaan Behavioral Health Alliance website (NCBHA) which encourages, develops and supports a greater community awareness of behavioral health issues and resources through community partnering. The alliance's mission is to improve access to behavioral healthcare for New Canaan residents seeking help.



Please visit **rtor.org** to enjoy expert content, blogs, a Directory of over 170 Family-Endorsed Providers, LiveChat, and the opportunity to speak with a Resource Specialist at **203-724-9070**.

Thank you to New Canaan Community Foundation for grant funding in support of the rtor.org Resource Specialists.  
Thank you to Fairfield County's Community Foundation, Max J. & Winnie S. Rosenshein Foundation, Inc.  
and Near & Far Aid Association, Inc., for grant funding of rtor.org's Diversity Outreach program.

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Pamela Murphy  
Ralph Nazareth  
Pamela Pagnani (7)  
Jesse Robins  
Jennifer Sagastume  
Nick Salvador  
Marianna Siderides  
Laura Terry

William and Marie Woodburn  
Dan Woog  
John and Pat Wooten  
Worden Family Fund  
Anne Wright  
Mary Beth Young  
Michael Zelenz  
Melissa J. Ziegler Trust  
Ashley Zosiak  
James and Bonnie Zwernemann

## In-Kind Donations

Acuario Restaurant  
Linda Autore  
Bacio Trattoria  
Barbarie's Black Angus Grill  
Barcelona Wine Bar  
Bartlett Arboretum and Gardens  
Beal's Lobster Pier  
Jean Benoit  
Bianca Restaurant  
Big Y, Bethel  
Café Silvium  
Caramoor Center for Music and Arts  
Chuck's Steakhouse, Danbury  
Delamar Greenwich Harbor  
Elm Street Oyster House  
Flinders Lane Kitchen & Bar

Penny and Ray Foote, Jr.  
Hartford Healthcare Amphitheater  
J. McLaughlin, Darien  
Jim Barbarie's Restaurant  
K9 Resorts, Stamford  
l'escale Restaurant and Bar  
Le Fat Poodle  
Le Penguin  
LesserEvil Snacks  
Michael Marchetti  
Margin Street Inn  
Peter and Margriet McGowan  
Polly and Robert Morrow  
Noelle Day Spa  
Susan and Robert Nolan  
Osteria Romano

Prime: An American Kitchen and Bar, Stamford  
Pullman & Comley, LLC  
Richards Greenwich  
Rowayton Seafood  
Siren Restobar  
Stop & Shop, Danbury  
Table 104 Osteria and Bar  
Ten Twenty Post  
The Bar Method, Darien  
The Little Plucky  
The National Aquarium  
Twelve Percent Beer Project  
Craig Weidner  
Whole Foods, Danbury  
Wiggles and Giggles



# An Evening with Laurel House

More than 200 guests dined, danced, and enjoyed each other's company, plus a live auction and raffles, at our annual fundraiser held April 27th at the Delamar, Greenwich Harbor. Laurel House, Inc. Board Directors, Susan Marks and Vincent O'Banner, and Susan Nolan served as Event Co-Chairs. Proceeds from the event support underfunded Laurel House programs such as Supported Education, rtor.org, and Thinking Well to help meet increased demand for services. We are grateful for the generosity of the attendees for their support of mental health recovery.



**2024 Champion for Recovery**  
Immacula Cann, DNP, RN-BC  
Chief Nursing Officer, Silver Hill Hospital



**2024 Laurel House Town Champions (L to R)**  
Jill McCammon (Darien), Pamela Pagnani (Greenwich), Polly O'Brien Morrow (Stamford)





# An Evening with Laurel House





Laurel House, Inc. and Friends of Laurel House, Inc.  
Summary Income & Expense For Years Ended June 30

	FY 2024	FY 2023	FY 2022
Revenues:			
Public Funding (State of CT; HUD)	\$1,823,355	\$1,827,737	\$1,652,062
Private & Other Revenue Sources:			
Rent, Services	385,711	246,733	192,203
Private Funding	1,053,609	1,114,871	1,082,034
Total Revenues	3,262,675	3,189,341	2,926,299 <sup>1</sup>
Expenses:			
Salaries & Benefits	2,299,287	2,088,993	1,923,226
Operating Expenses	663,519	715,951	661,192
Development & Marketing	105,673	91,664	98,600
Interest	13,137	14,765	20,738
Total Expenses	3,081,616	2,911,373	2,703,756
Change in Net Assets	\$181,059	\$277,968	\$222,543
	% of Revenues	% of Revenues	% of Revenues
Public Funding:	55.9%	57.3%	56.5%
Private & Other Revenue Sources:	44.1%	42.7%	43.5%
Sources of Private Funding:			
Individuals	53%	47%	52%
Corporations	10%	10%	5%
Foundations & Organizations	37%	43%	43%

<sup>1</sup> Total Revenue does not include \$511,842 gain from the sale of 4 Washington Ct. duplex.

### FY 2024 Services

**Laurel House** provided services to **920 individuals**.

**rtor.org: 2,014 individuals** engaged with two Resource Specialists; there were **2,079,890 user interactions** on www.rtor.org.

**Social Rehabilitation: 796** individuals received services in: recovery planning, outreach, advocacy, peer support; participated in Writers', Artists', and skill building workshops; received meals; and participated in Laurel House wellness programs.

**Thinking Well (Cognitive Remediation): 138** participants; 100% who completed sessions and took post-assessment achieved improvement in at least 1 of 5 cognitive domains, 91% in 2 domains, 72% in 3 domains, 37% improved in 4 of 5 domains and 5% improved in all domains.

**Supported Education: 126** participants; 24% enrolled in Associate's; 21% in Bachelor's; 17% in Vocational Certification; 8% in GED; 2% in Master's; 6 % Undecided; 22% in High School.

**Supported Employment: 142** participants with 66% competitively employed; 71% remained employed over 12 months.

**Mobile Employment Services (MES)** provided onsite services to an additional **59** individuals with substance use disorders living at Recovery Houses.

**Community Support Services and Supportive Housing: 84** individuals received case management; coaching for activities of daily living, budgeting and goal planning; and access to safe, affordable housing.

**Mission: Help individuals and families achieve and sustain mental health to lead fulfilling lives**

**Laurel House, Inc. and Friends of Laurel House, Inc.  
FY 2024 Board of Directors**

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*Chairman*

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Trevor Crow, LMFT

John J. Feighery, Jr.

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Christopher P. Jordan

Susan J. Marks

Anjali Mathai, LMSW

Peter M. McGowan

Vincent E. O'Banner

Michael R. Parker, *Director Emeritus*

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Advisory Board**

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Christine M. Biddle

Andrew J. Gerber, MD, PhD

Glenn W. Houck

Anjali Mathai, LMSW

Polly O'Brien Morrow

Larry M. Rosenberg, PhD

**President and CEO**

Linda M. Autore

**Vice President and  
rtor.org Editor in Chief**

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Thomas M. Cooke

**Vice President of Operations**

John Wooten

**Clinical Director**

Denise Vestuti, LCSW

laurel  house  
resources to recover

***Where hopes and dreams soar***



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