



Email to Amazon from COO and Board Chair

Subject line: St. Mary's: A Resource Center for the Community, Now More than Ever

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. And these are undoubtedly extraordinary times! In this spirit, I am writing to let you know our plan of using our critical resources, including funds from the ongoing Amazon match, to support our existing residential and training programs, so that we may continue to serve as a multi-faceted resource center for the greater community. We want to thank you for your generosity, which is helping us fulfill our mission during these dire times.

St. Mary's Center, perched on top of Jones Hill in Dorchester, has long been a sanctuary not only for homeless women and children, a healing environment for the abused and traumatized, but has also served as a beacon and a resource for our community. For more than 25 years, St. Mary's is proud to have been on the cutting edge in response to teen pregnancy, trauma, family homelessness, poverty, hunger, under-educated and under-employed women.

We have long served as a resource for the community. Through our innovative programming and collaborative partnerships, the community can safely access wide-ranging education programs, including high-quality early education; workforce development opportunities; an adolescent after-school and summer job training program; food pantry services; comprehensive health care; also free community meeting and recreational spaces.

The current pandemic situation greatly threatens our ability to continue delivering those services. The risks to St. Mary's and our community have never been greater; the need has never been more desperate.

We want to thank you again for your investment, which is helping us continue to meet these urgent and critical needs.

I want to give you an idea of where we stand at this point, as we re-tool to meet the even greater needs resulting from this critical situation. Through the beginning phase of the pandemic crisis, St. Mary's has continued to provide all residential services to a total of 210 residents. We recently had to close all new intakes to our programs and are in the process of transitioning our educational and employment programming to a virtual platform.

At the same time, due to an abundance of caution, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has outplaced children from Bridge Home, our program that provided emergency residential treatment for children who are victims of abuse and neglect. This has accelerated the necessary closure of the program.

Additionally, Covid-19 has increased the urgent need to provide resources to our staff. We have had staff and families impacted directly by the virus. We have seen a steady increase in salary expenses due to staff needing to be self-quarantined, to stay home with children who can no longer attend school or daycare or are in a vulnerable category.

All of this has resulted in necessary staff layoffs and, as with so many other organizations, we are feverishly navigating the unemployment application process, and helping in the search for alternative job opportunities. We have also helped employees respond to school and daycare closures, and ill family members.

While we are working closely with our staff, there are also mothers in our residences who have lost their jobs. We need to ramp up to help them in the same way. There are those in our community who cannot access the resources that we would normally provide. We need to ramp up to help them – even virtually.

With the immediate rise in unemployment, there may very well be a corresponding rise in homelessness amongst the working poor in our community who have suddenly found themselves without a job and unable to make ends meet. We need to be positioned to be there for them.

Your generous contributions will help us meet these urgent needs.

While our original campaign to use Amazon funds to construct a physical resource center for the community was viable at the time, St. Mary's is now responding to the urgent need for direct services that will be the front line resource for countless women, children, adolescents, and families. We believe this is the time to respond with critical resources without resorting to new construction – which would be foolhardy, at best, in a recession.

With the use of Amazon funds, not only will we be able to continue with our existing program offerings, but we will also be able to expand certain programs to provide additional shelter, stabilization services, and education services for the community.

We hope that you agree with our plan to focus our critical resources, including Amazon's, to provide direct services and our expertise, to some of the most vulnerable women and children in the Commonwealth.

Thank you!