

*“50  
years  
of  
hope”*



**Common Ground**  
*helping people move from crisis to hope*

# Annual Report 2020-2021

# LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO



**HEATHER RAE**  
PRESIDENT & CEO



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**DOUG WRIGHT**  
IMMEDIATE PAST  
BOARD CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Common Ground's 2020-2021 Annual Report. It has been another year of managing through the pandemic. Common Ground has continued to provide excellent and compassionate services to those in crisis and is uniquely positioned to do even more.

While the shootings in Oxford did not occur during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, I want to share an update on our efforts. Common Ground was proud to be a part of a community-wide effort, led by Oakland Community Health Network, in providing support for the students, teachers and families impacted by this tragedy. Common Ground was on site within hours of the shootings and continued to meet with individuals for several weeks. We have been asked by the State of Michigan to open a Resiliency Center in Oxford to provide a place for those needing counseling and other services related to this horrible event.

In this report, we will provide an update on our plans to add a Behavioral Health Urgent Care program to our community. This has been a major focus for us this year. We will be opening virtually this spring with a physical location to follow in the fall, and we look forward to serving many more people.

You will read about our efforts to support victims of human trafficking; a profile of a long-time volunteer and we will also share some highlights from our 50th Anniversary celebration. The actual anniversary was in June, so technically we are still celebrating.

Common Ground again enjoyed a solid financial performance, and we thank you, our donors, for your support. Our ability to provide services when and where they are needed depends on people who believe in our mission. Thank you for helping us help others move from crisis to hope.

**Heather Rae**  
PRESIDENT & CEO

## RESPONDING TO OXFORD



Common Ground was honored to participate in the community-wide interagency crisis response to the November 30, 2022, Oxford High School shooting.

Hours after the shooting, Common Ground had two advocates in Oxford High School, supporting the front-line high school teachers and administrators late into the evening, who were required to stay and participate in the police investigation. For the next several weeks, Common Ground Advocates, Therapists, Crisis Responders and Nurses answered the call of Oakland Community Health Network organizers and spent a collective 144 hours supporting the Oxford community at planned events. Furthermore, Common Ground management worked countless hours behind the scenes to collaborate with community partners. Hotline workers on both the Resource and Crisis Helpline and MiCAL increased normal staffing patterns to ensure full hotline coverage in case of a surge in outreach. Additionally, internal systems were set up to provide daily support sessions to Common Ground workers to debrief on their difficult and emotional experience in Oxford.

After months of initial crisis response, the Oxford community, along with county and state supporters were ready to move into a new phase of long-term support, with the knowledge that healing from a mass violence event takes years. Common Ground was asked by the State of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and by the Federal Office of Victims of Crime to establish an Oxford Resiliency Center that could offer long-term healing to anyone impacted by the tragic event.

Funded by The State of Michigan through a grant by the Federal Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program, Common Ground will manage "All for Oxford" Resiliency Center, which will be a welcoming place where people feel comfortable connecting with others while finding appropriate services to assist in the healing process. Importantly, the creation of All for Oxford is being guided by the Oxford Community, for the Oxford community. Our center is devoted to promoting mental and emotional wellbeing by providing opportunities for people to come together, find support, restore the community's sense of safety and security, and help each other heal.



# COMING SOON! BEHAVIORAL HEALTH URGENT CARE (BHUC)

It is widely known that the lack of behavioral health crisis services and access to ongoing psychiatric care is a national issue, which is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. When people must wait for a psychiatric care appointment, often for weeks, they get sicker and have no choice but to go to a hospital emergency department for immediate psychiatric help or suffer at home.

As Common Ground has done for 50 years, we are listening to our community's call for behavioral health urgent care that is 'on-demand', meaning that when you have an urgent behavioral health care need, such as crisis therapy or psychiatry, you can get help day or night regardless of the type of insurance you have. The concept is like medical urgent care, which is all around us and provides care before the person's condition gets worse, requiring a trip to a hospital emergency department.

We are very excited that the Common Ground Behavioral Health Urgent Care (BHUC) will open through a telehealth platform at the end of April 2022. The virtual BHUC will offer the convenience of crisis therapy, psychiatric evaluation and prescription medicines, if needed, without waiting for an appointment or needing transportation.



Our BHUC physical location will open in southern Oakland County in late summer 2022. The walk-in site will include crisis therapy, crisis psychiatric evaluation and prescriptions, if needed, as well as recovery coaching and care coordination, so that each person is connected to ongoing services to maintain mental well-being.

## MAI, HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED?

Mai (My) Kazakos-Resh is a part-time crisis specialist for MiCAL (the Michigan Crisis and Access Line). This is Mai's second time working for Common Ground. She started volunteering in 1971, while still in high school. Mai found the work rewarding and continued to volunteer during her first two years at the University of Michigan. After graduation and completion of her graduate work, Mai's career took off. She has held leadership positions as a Chief Technology Officer and Chief Operating Officer.



Shortly after she retired, she received a call from Common Ground about coming back to work on the crisis line. We had the opportunity to speak with Mai about her experience:

### How has Common Ground changed since 1971?

The focus in the 1970's was mostly on drug use, whereas today's callers cover a much wider spectrum of issues most dealing with mental health. I would also say the agency has changed. It feels so much larger and business-like. One thing that hasn't changed is the amount and intensity of the training.

### What drives you to do this work?

My parents immigrated to this country and became lawyers. They brought with them a strong work ethic, a commitment to their community and desire to give back. They instilled that in me. I would also say that I love crisis work!

### What should people know about Common Ground?

We are there (in people's lives) when no one else is. It is important work and we do make a difference!

# A SURVIVOR-CENTERED RESPONSE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING

WRITTEN BY: ALLIE MERCER

Human Trafficking is prevalent in Oakland County and beyond, and government and non-profit organizations, including Common Ground, have been working to fight the crimes and support its victims.

The creation of a Human Trafficking Unit within the Oakland County Prosecutors Office in January 2021 was an important step toward using innovative methods for fighting this crime. Among others, the Madison Heights Police Department Special Investigation Unit has brought an impressive number of cases to the unit. Many of these victims were then referred to Common Ground's Victim Assistance Program for Human Trafficking. This chain of collaboration led to the creation of a direct collaboration that is now known as Michigan Ops Team Investigating Violent Exploitation (MOTIVE).

MOTIVE's mission statement is as follows:

**Our MOTIVE is to provide a survivor centered approach to help those escape exploitation, provide individualized support towards recovery and investigate those responsible.**

What does this mean in action? After signing a Memorandum of Understanding between Madison Heights Police Department and Common Ground in July 2021, a human trafficking advocate from Common Ground now works directly within the police department's special investigation unit. By combining the resources of these two agencies, MOTIVE provides immediate on-site assistance to survivors of human trafficking in southeast Michigan and beyond. MOTIVE combines expertise in investigations, advocacy, intelligence and outreach to pursue impactful joint operations in this discipline.

A major gap to service in the past was that once a victim was identified by police, there was no process to support victims while an investigation moved forward. Often victims of trafficking have unique needs, so for them the barriers to receiving help independently can be daunting. This is where the human trafficking advocate bridges the gap in service and acts as a case manager, helping victims achieve their individual goals and fulfill their needs.

This collaboration allows law enforcement more time to focus on investigating those responsible for victimization while the advocate helps survivors navigate the complicated path toward recovery that can include: working with the medical and mental health system; dealing with the criminal justice system; housing or relocation assistance; substance treatment programs; immigration and identification challenges; signing up for government assistance programs; and securing transportation.

### About the author:

Allison Mercer has worked in victim advocacy for five years and has been at Common Ground since December 2019. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice and Sociology from Oakland University along with a Master of Science in Law Enforcement Intelligence and Analysis from Michigan State University. She recently completed an internship through the U.S. Department of Probation, Eastern District of Michigan. Allison is an experienced Victim Advocate with a demonstrated history of working with Human Trafficking, Child Abuse/Neglect, Sexual Assault, Trauma and Foster Care.





# COMMON GROUND 50TH CELEBRATION

Staff, guests and volunteers gathered at M1 Concourse in Pontiac in October to celebrate Common Ground's 50th year of helping those in need. Over the years, we have helped more than 1.5 million people move from crisis to hope! Through the generous support of sponsors and donors, the event raised funds that got us closer to our goal of providing Behavioral Health Urgent Care to the community.

Guests enjoyed an evening of thrill rides around the M1 racetrack in sports cars driven by professional drivers. They also experienced a strolling dinner, musical entertainment and a special 50th anniversary program. Evrod Cassimy, WDIV morning anchor, emceed the program, which featured a moving speech by Kate Richards, Oakland County native and mental health advocate, as well as presentation of the inaugural Kay White Legacy Award to Kay White, current Common Ground Board of Trustees Chair, by Common Ground President & CEO Heather Rae.

Many thanks to our generous sponsors including the Mental Illness Resource Association (MIRA), Beaumont, Great Lakes Wine & Spirits, AVL Creative, Blue Cross



*Pictured from left to right: former State Senator Mat Dunaskiss, State Representative Brenda Carter, County Commissioner Angela Powell, County Commissioner Charlie Cavell, former Pontiac Commissioner Randy Carter, and County Commissioner Chuck Moss.*

Complete of Michigan, Hearst Autos, the Hour Detroit, ITC, Planning Alternatives, Vella Strategic Philanthropy Group, Versalta, the Harold and Marion Gordon Foundation, Kay White, Glidden and Kreitsch Wealth Management and Amy and David Wood, M.D.

We also received congratulatory messages from community leaders throughout the state including Governor Gretchen Whitmer, Oakland County Executive David Coulter, and Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard.

## Common Ground Board Challenge!

Common Ground will be adding Behavioral Health Urgent Care to the crisis continuum. The Common Ground Board of Trustees felt they needed to make a statement to potential funders, partners, and the community about their commitment to the project.

Initiated by Dr. David and Amy Wood, the Board has contributed more than \$70,000 to the project! Every Board member made a pledge and has fulfilled that pledge. This support has made an incredible impact on the project and really helped the fundraising campaign reach its goal of \$1.2 million.



Artist: Julie Dawson

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# COMMON GROUND BY THE NUMBERS

50 years ago Common Ground was founded in 1971 by a group of students, parents and community leaders who were concerned about an increase in substance abuse and suicide among young people.



**#1** largest crisis center in Michigan.


\$18 million in revenues during our last fiscal year.



**50%** growth in the last 5 years.

315 employees throughout Michigan.



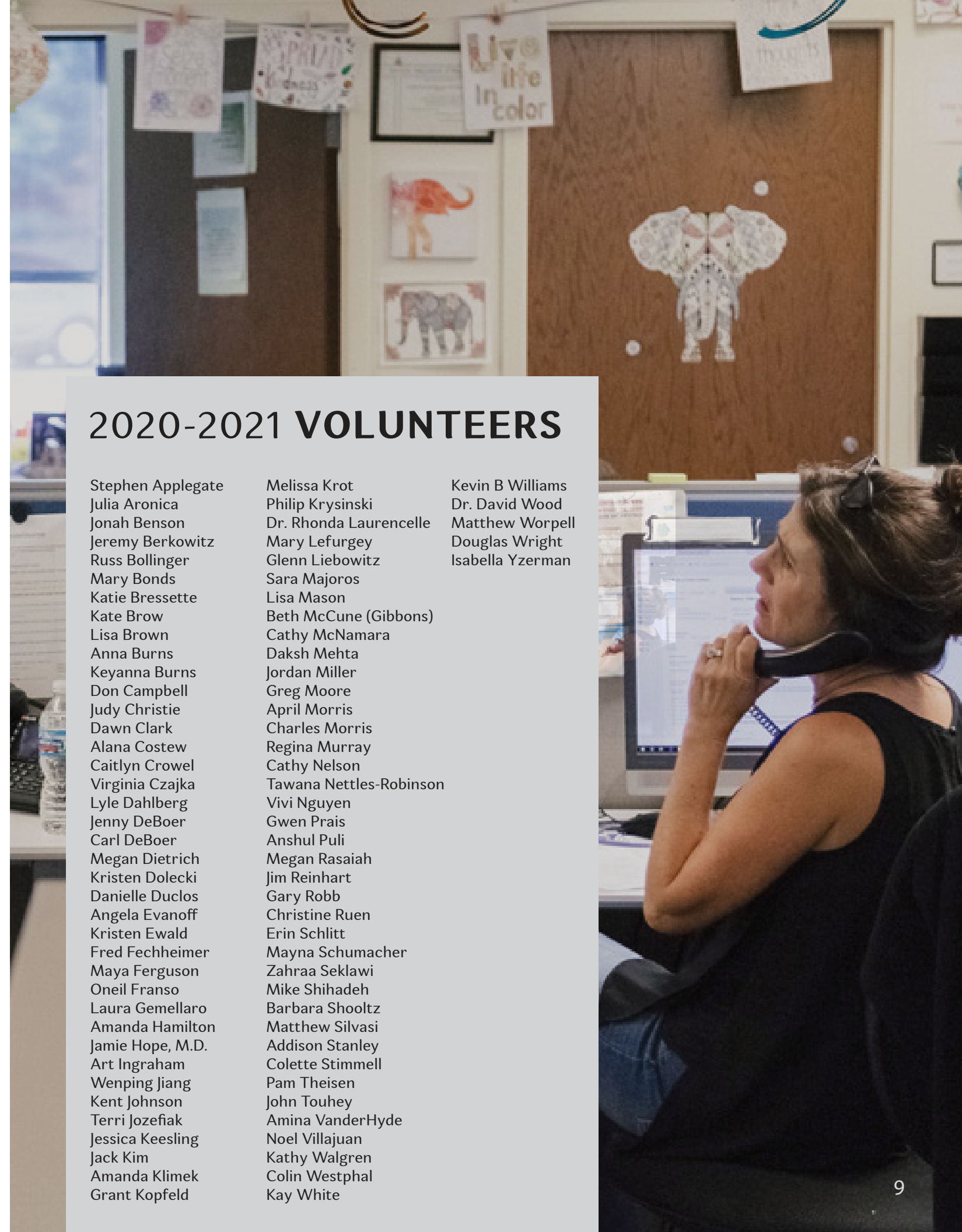
 8,477 volunteer hours during our last fiscal year.

549 donors giving annually.



**90%** of all fundraising goes towards programs to help move people from crisis to hope.

24 hours a day 365 days a year we are here to help people in crisis.



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