

THE COMPANION

The Newsletter of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Summer 2018

Issue 26



Encountering the Divine

by Ruby May Miller, 2017-2018 Volunteer
A Graduate of Stonehill College



Reflecting on this transformative year of service, the words that rise to the surface of my thoughts embody a call that I responded to but, until embarking on the journey, did not fully understand: Practice God's Justice. Each month, BSVM staff prompted me to meditate on the question, "Where have you seen Christ in service?" What I have lived in my ministry is not only seeing Christ, but more importantly touching Christ. The intimate act of taking a hand, rolling back a shirt sleeve, placing the blood pressure cuff on a wrist and arranging an arm gently on the chest of another individual has been a most humbling and profound experience. It has taught me that practicing God's Justice is not some grand or pious act of service. Instead, I have encountered the Divine in the simplest of actions—actions that acknowledge the dignity of each individual I encountered. I found God's Justice in meeting others where they were, offering my respect and presence, even if the only material help I could provide was a blood pressure reading. Reflecting on my experience of practicing God's Justice, two areas stand out for me, proximity and sharing.

Continued on page 10

Editor's Corner

Olivia Steback - BSVM Program Manager

“To the brave and brokenhearted, who have taught us how to rise after a fall. Your courage is contagious.” – Brené Brown

The choice to participate in a year of service is one of courage. For the six volunteers who recently said good-bye to BSVM, and for all past and future volunteers, it is also one of vulnerability. They commit to a year in close, intentional community and to opening their hearts to their community members and those they serve. By making the choice to take steps towards these graces, the volunteers allow courage and vulnerability to more deeply move into their lives. This move brings them to spaces where they meet brave, openhearted individuals. As BSVM Director, Shannon Curran, writes in her closing ceremony statement, the volunteers' lives are changed from this time of learning in the University of the Vulnerable. They learn that courage and vulnerability go hand in hand, we all experience falls, and that God walks with us as we seek to rise.

Within this issue, Beatriz Cuevas and Ruby Miller share experiences of walking with others in their vulnerability. They sense the life-giving force that moves through relationships when we bring our whole selves to moments of connection. It is through these moments of authentic connection that God's Justice takes shape in our world. Through quiet moments of courage and vulnerability, both the volunteers, and those they are in relationship with, experience God's presence within their beings.



Director's Corner

Shannon Curran - BSVM Program Director

I am pleased to announce that Steven DeLaney joined the staff of Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry this past May. Beginning with this 2018-2019 year of service, our community of Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers will be based both in East Richmond and in West Baltimore. In his role as the BSVM Site Leader, Richmond, Steve will guide and accompany our volunteers in Richmond as they walk with us in our mission of creating “transformation through service with others.” From his years as a full-time volunteer, to his work in prison ministry, to his role as a Campus Minister and theology teacher,

Steve brings a rich and deep experience to this role. Please join me in joyfully and gratefully welcoming Steve to Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry.

Meet Steve DeLaney

BSVM Site Leader, Richmond

Hello – my name is Steve DeLaney. I live in Williamsburg, Va. (about 40 minutes east of Richmond) with my wife, Allison, and our two sons. My wife and I met serving in a postgrad service program in Chicago, very similar to BSVM! For the past 20 years I have worked in varied ministries with young people – as a jail chaplain in the juvenile detention center in Chicago, in restorative justice work, as a high school theology teacher, and most recently as a parish youth and young adult minister. I love the opportunity to work in communities dedicated to service and spiritual growth, and I am very excited to support the new BSVM community in Richmond!



The Art of Discernment

by Beatriz Cuevas, 2017-2018 Volunteer
A Graduate of Stanford University

One of the reasons I chose Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry was the strong emphasis on spiritual growth. As part of our experience, we gather for formation on Thursday mornings to reflect on faith and spirituality using readings provided by the program. This year, we read and discussed *Companions in Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* by Margaret Silf. As the title suggests, this book discusses ways people may incorporate Ignatian spirituality into their daily lives.

Companions in Christ has been relevant to my journey as a BSVM volunteer. It has been a helpful guide as I seek to incorporate my Catholic faith into my daily life, serve in the Renal Department, and plan for my life after completing my year of service. One aspect of Ignatian spirituality that is currently really relevant to my life and the life of my community members is the process of discernment. We will each begin a new chapter in our lives. Some of us will move back home, some of us will begin graduate school, and some of us will start new jobs. As I discern what comes next for me, I find myself turning to the *Companions in Christ* book and to our BSVM spiritual director, Joy Aker, for guidance.



Beatriz (l) and Sr. Nathalia Lundolo (r).

“I am grateful to the patients who have shared themselves with me and have also offered me the opportunity to share myself with them.”

One quotation in *Companions of Christ* has especially resonated with me as I discern my next steps, “Distinguishing between what is life-giving (the solid rock) and what is life-denying or life-threatening (the quicksands). This is the art of discernment.” I have been giving myself the space to reflect on this quote. Finding time for this reflection time, a time of quietness and solitude, can be challenging amidst my responsibilities at work and at home. When I do find time to reflect (in the evenings, weekends, and during retreats), I ask myself, “What is life-giving to me?”

After reflection, I have come to the realization that listening to others, especially when I am with them one-on-one, is life-giving to me. This year, I have spent a lot of time getting to know the patients in the Renal Department through our many conversations. I am grateful to the patients who have shared themselves with me and have also offered me the opportunity to share myself with them. One patient I bonded with this year is Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith was a storyteller. She would often tell me stories about herself, her career trajectory, and her children and grandchildren. Somedays Ms. Smith might be feeling a little under the weather or tired, but on most days she greeted me with a smile. Listening to the funny story of her grandchild who would only eat french-fry shaped foods, about her career, working as a Girl Scouts leader and teacher, was a gift to me. This applies to all of the patients I got to know this past year in the Renal Department.

As I discern my next steps after this year of service I think about my future roles. I hope to continue to be with others and to intentionally listen to them and their stories with an open mind and open heart.



Meet Elizabeth Tittle

A Graduate of Villanova University

What have you found surprising about your experience with BSVM thus far?

I am blown away by the love I have been shown during my time with BSVM. While I certainly expected to create deep connections with those around me during my year in Baltimore, I have surprised myself with how deeply I feel those roots and those connections. From my community members, my coworkers, and the kids at work—their kindness and compassion radiate to all those around them and inspire me to want to be that same light for others. I have truly been blessed

this year to be surrounded by such beautiful individuals, and I cannot wait to see how these connections will continue to grow for the rest of my time here in Baltimore and even beyond.

What is one item on your “bucket list”? Why is it important to you?

During, my last weekend studying abroad in Auckland, New Zealand, a few of friends and I traveled several hours to the eastern most point in the country and watched the first sunrise in the entire world. It was after this weekend that I added seeing the last sunset to my bucket list. Hoping to see the last sunset in the future, with the same friends I saw the first sunrise with, would make this bucket list moment even more special. Those who know me know just how much I fell in love with New Zealand, the people I met, and the friendships I made. I think this item on my bucket list speaks to the significance of my time in New Zealand and how much I grew, changed and learned while I was there.



Meet Narda Salinas

A Graduate of St. Edward's University

Who has modeled being ‘good help to those in need’ in your life? Describe why you are inspired by this person.

My grandmother Pompilia, or mamita as I affectionally call her, has always been a model of ‘good help.’ Her resourcefulness is only exceeded by her welcoming personality. While raising more than a dozen children, both her own and others, she has always made everyone feel like part of the family. Within her community she may not be the chattiest lady, but she forms ties with others through her genuine concern and optimistic attitude. To this day, she continues to show me

what it means to serve others and support them in their time of need.

What is the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

“Don’t compare yourself to others. Everyone is writing their story, and we are all in different chapters,” a dear friend once told me after I confided in her that I was worried that I was not accomplishing what people my age should be accomplishing. Her words have taken on different meanings for me. One meaning is to be proud of my own accomplishments, regardless of what others’ accomplishments might be. Another meaning is to extend that same courtesy to others, because everyone is going through different experiences.



Two amazing Sams: Fr. Sam Lupico (l) with Sam Ting (r)

Meet Sam Ting

A Graduate of Loyola Marymount University

Describe an influential experience that led you to a year of service.

By serving in the Greater Los Angeles area for about three years of my undergraduate career, I was able to see many problems that impoverished communities face. Through many of those experiences, I met many wonderful children at an elementary school where we served. Many of the kids indirectly taught me so much about growing up in underserved communities and not having proper resources available. After seeing how the children looked up to me and were always so happy when I would read with them or simply run around the playground, I devoted myself to experiencing and attempting to understand the difficulties that come with living in an impoverished neighborhood.

What is one item on your “bucket list”? Why is it important to you?

Hiking the Half Dome in Yosemite National Park is on my bucket list. Yosemite is one of my favorite places, and I have been in awe of the Half Dome ever since I saw it in person. Conquering a hike as grand and majestic as the Dome would give me the confidence to believe that I can conquer anything if I set my mind to it. Conquering that would symbolize that my life is in my own hands and that I can achieve more than I previously thought.



Volunteer Claire Kimilu's family traveled from Philadelphia and Kenya to support her at the closing ceremony

Meet Claire Kimilu

A Graduate of Villanova University

What have you found surprising about your experience with BSVM thus far?

As I began my journey with BSVM, I was most excited to develop community within this new place called SOWEBO. I looked forward to fostering relationships with my five community members, coworkers, and the patients of the fifth floor. I was hopeful about how these people would enrich my story and influence my personal growth. What I did not anticipate was how quickly I would become attached to these new faces—how quickly they would become my family and how quickly SOWEBO would become “home.”

Perhaps more than I could have expressed before, I have felt very much at peace here in SOWEBO, and this is largely because of the people who touch my life on a daily basis. It is a peace I’ve come to know through the support of community members who have accepted and encouraged me—especially in moments of vulnerability—as we’ve walked this journey together. It’s a peace I felt from the first days of my service—welcomed with open arms by my staff and mentors at Outpatient Behavioral Health. Perhaps most profoundly, it is a peace that came even in my earliest encounters with the patients of the fifth floor who deeply moved me with their openness and willingness to share their stories with me, a stranger in their midst. These patients have become much more than familiar faces to me. They have become my community. Adopting me, they have taught, inspired, and encouraged me ministering to me far more than I have to them. Helping to mold me in this journey of learning through service, the patients, along with my fellow volunteers and coworkers, have become and will remain a part of me.

Celebrating Service to Others

BSVM Director Shannon Curran's Remarks to our 2017-2018 Volunteers at the Closing Ceremony

Today, we celebrate the service that Beatriz Cuevas, Claire Kimilu, Ruby Miller, Narda Salinas, Sam Ting, and Elizabeth Tittle have shared with us and with the Bon Secours Baltimore Health System this past year.

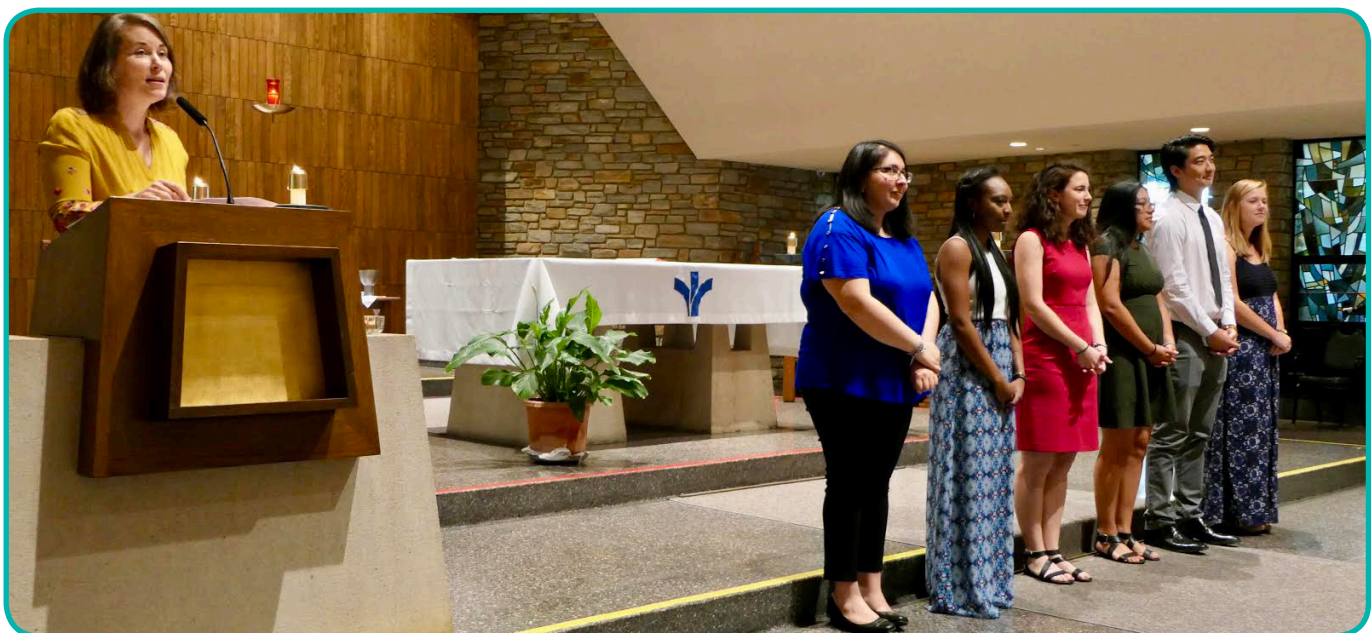
The volunteers recently read and reflected on Jean Vanier's book *From Brokenness to Community*. In this rich text, Vanier shares deeply about how living in community with those who are vulnerable put him in the position of being taught by his fellow community members. Prior to beginning the L'Arche community, a community where people both with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, Vanier was a Professor of Philosophy. He moved from the academic life of being a professor at a top University to living in community with, and therefore becoming the student of, many who could "neither read nor write," who "move[d] slowly or clumsily." And "some [who could not] even speak or walk or eat on their own".

Yet, in his move from the University of the Learned to the University of the Vulnerable, Vanier received new life. This new life came not from bandaging wounds, but from opening them up. It came from being in communion with others—when Vanier learned how to open his heart to the pain and suffering of his community, he began to feel the hardness and pain in his own heart. For Vanier, uncovering his own brokenness and wounds brought healing and new life.

Volunteers, you came to us straight out of the University of the Learned and, from what we have heard and seen this year in witnessing your experience, you stepped into and shared fully of yourself in this University of the Vulnerable. In this University, your patients, clients, children at the family support center, co-workers, neighbors, and fellow community members have each helped you uncover new life.

In our responsorial psalm today, we will ask to receive life through God's justice (Ps. 119:40). Like Vanier, it is through God's justice or striving to live in right relationship with others that you received new life.

Volunteers, after communion today we will honor you, and the new life that you tasted this year through deepening relationships and building new ones, with a blessing.





***Clockwise from left:**
The '17-'18 group led the meditation hymn at our closing liturgy; Volunteers hold the prayer crosses given to them during the liturgy; Fr. Sam Lupico, a good friend of BSVM who celebrated closing liturgy, and BSVM Director Shannon Curran enjoy time together before mass begins; Many thanks to the Sisters of Bon Secours for inviting the '17-'18 Ministry Volunteers to share in their charism.*



Walking with Jesus, Rekindling the Flame: 2018 BSVM Alumni Retreat

by Regina Fleck, BSVM Recruiter

In a dimly lit chapel at the Bon Secours Retreat and Conference on a Saturday in mid-April, several former Bon Secours Ministry Volunteers lit candles and stood in a circle together. With joined hands, they prayed, recalled their formative time as Ministry Volunteers, and reflected on the ways they would bring their retreat experiences to their home communities.

Throughout the Alumni Retreat weekend, Elaine Ireland served as the retreat leader, guiding the attendees—Meghan Krueger (BSVM 14-15), Julie McCracken (BSVM 12-13), Matthew Parra (BSVM 13-14), Kathleen Pormento (BSVM 10-11), Celina Santiago (BSVM 16-17), Amanda Scanameo (BSVM 16-17), and Faith Yusko (BSVM 16-17)—in remembering the ways they shared in the Sisters' charism during their year of service in Southwest Baltimore. Additionally, alumni in attendance were given the opportunity to reflect on the myriad ways they have remained committed to compassion, healing, and liberation since completing their year of service. In their professional lives, they have all selected roles that enable them to serve others. Represented among the group were social workers, physician assistants, public health advocates, and campus ministers. One alumna, Kathleen Pormento, shared that she currently works as a physician assistant on the Oncology Unit of a New York hospital and credits her year with BSVM as impacting every interaction she has with patients. It was invigorating for all retreat attendees to discuss the ways in which they have carried their tools for community-building with them in both their personal and professional lives.



The gang's all here! Current volunteers, sisters, BSVM staff, and Alumni came together for liturgy during the Alumni Retreat.

During the retreat weekend, past volunteers flipped through scrapbooks from their respective years of service, reminisced about co-workers at the Bon Secours Baltimore Hospital, met alumni from other years, and even demonstrated their expertise in Bananagrams. Along with time to socialize amongst each other, there was space for contemplative silence. As one retreatant remarked, "The prayer time was so, so valuable to me and I am grateful for it. I did not expect to enjoy it as much as I did."

BSVM was blessed by the presence of several Sisters of Bon Secours and the 2017-2018 volunteers, who attended a portion of the retreat, as well. The 2017-2018 volunteers led the group in song on Saturday evening. During one session, Elaine introduced scripture passages that corresponded with BSVM's 5 pillars; grow spiritually, learn through service with others, practice God's justice, develop community, and live simply. When it came time for the large group discussion, the group offered ideas as to what it means to be a disciple. "Faith-filled," "focused," and "imaginative" were some of the descriptors offered by those at the session. The Spirit was definitely moving, and continued to move, throughout the liturgy celebrated by Fr. Patrick Besel. It was impossible to ignore *God's presence shining* on everyone, as was proclaimed during the responsorial psalm. BSVM Director, Shannon Curran, remarked how deeply this phrase was felt among the Bon Secours community that weekend.

Wrapping up the retreat weekend, participants discussed how to develop life-giving community wherever

Continued from previous page

they live. Meghan Krueger remarked, “I’m excited to bring reinforced energy for the BSVM Alumni Chapter back to Boston. I’m looking forward to planning the next event with this group. The discussions about building community gave me more courage to take risks when putting ideas for community-building events out to this - or any - group.” By the end of the weekend, the BSVM Alumni community was confident that in walking with Jesus, the flame that burned so brightly during each participant’s volunteer year was rekindled.

Special thanks to Sr. Bernie Claps, Sr. Alice Talone, Sr. Elaine Davia, Sr. Pat Dowling, Sr. Rose Marie Jasinski, Sr. Fran Gorsuch, and Sr. Nathalie Lundolo for attending the Saturday afternoon events. Finally, thanks to Sr. Nancy Glynn who graciously joined alumni for lunch on Sunday. Their presence was such a blessing and helped to make the Alumni Retreat weekend a joyful, prayerful, and rejuvenating experience!



Current volunteers met former volunteers at the retreat and it was magical.



Sr. Bernadette Claps (l), Elaine Ireland Retreat Leader (c), Sr. Alice Talone joined the Alumni Retreat.



Sr. Rosie and Sr. Fran commissioned the alumni on the final day of the weekend. BSVM is so grateful!



Sam and Narda share a laugh.

“By the end of the weekend, the BSVM Alumni community was confident that in walking with Jesus, the flame that burned so brightly during each participant’s volunteer year was rekindled.”

Continued from cover page

Up until this year, it has been all too easy for me to live my life removed from poverty. My quaint house sat in the middle of a clean, suburban neighborhood where there was never any concern for assault or theft. My neighbors were well-cared for so in order to reach out and serve, I had to seek material poverty in the nearest city and even there it wasn't always obvious. My first day in Southwest Baltimore I was struck by the poverty almost like a slap in the face—there was no avoiding it. As Sister Fran Gorsuch once put it, “The streets look like toothless smiles on faces,” two houses here, one missing or burned out, then three abandoned followed by one showing some small signs of habitation. The gaps in the smiles and the infrastructure mirror the gaps and potholes in the healthcare and social services responsible for holding the neighborhood together.

This spring, we were fortunate enough to attend a talk at Loyola University given by Bryan Stevenson, a highly acclaimed lawyer who is best known for fighting the injustices of the death penalty and mass incarceration. The part of his talk that struck me most highlighted the need for proximity. He drew attention to the fact that we cannot have a chance of solving the problems of racial and social injustice without first being proximal to the places where these acts of injustice happen most frequently. Without the proximity of living next door to poverty and all the implications that come with it, I would not have been exposed to the issues that those struggling in material poverty face day-in and day-out. Through my experience with BSVM, I had the opportunity to live in close proximity to my neighbors and to become aware of the injustices they face. These experiences were large steps towards my understanding of practicing God's Justice, but they did not complete the picture.

Before coming to Baltimore, when I thought about what this year would be like I imagined myself helping. I thought that this help would come in the form of services or actions I could provide, much like changing batteries in the blood pressure cuffs we use, or printing 50 copies of the newsletter to hand out. What I could not have imagined was that serving in this community required emptying myself, casting off any and all preconceived notions or innate prejudices that are a part of our society. As I served, I began attempting to walk in the shoes of my new neighbors. This journey to empty myself and find humility led to the most powerful manifestation of sharing through touch.

There is a great deal of trust required to give a hand and take a hand. I recognize the amount of trust it takes to allow someone to help you, especially in areas of health. As a result, I have great respect for that sacred space. With the permission of the residents of the many communities I have served, I have touched their skin as I gently wrap the blood pressure cuff around their wrists. However, not every interaction has been positive. One experience that comes to mind was more obviously charged with racial tension than any other. I was helping a middle-aged, black gentleman with the blood pressure cuff but when I moved to take his hand and place it near his heart, he drew back with this objection: he did not want to be touched by a white woman. This encounter taught me how necessary it is to empty myself in order to walk in the shoes of my neighbors here in Southwest Baltimore.

Through the physical contact that comes with every blood pressure reading I take, I am acknowledging the shared human flesh, the common human struggles and limitations that connect us all, and I am saying, “We are equal in the eyes of God, no matter what society or culture may tell us.” These are the moments that have given flesh and form to the call I felt to practice God's Justice. Pope Francis said, “This is our poverty: the poverty of the flesh of Christ, the poverty that brought the Son of God to us through his incarnation.” By growing in this practice of God's Justice of taking on the “flesh” of the poor, I have found that my humanity is increasingly dependent upon the humanity of others. When I encounter Christ in service and through my humble actions demonstrate the dignity and value that my neighbors deserve, I believe God's Justice is truly at work. The Kingdom of God will be built with the bricks of these seemingly inconsequential interactions, such as a light touch on the wrist that makes someone feel valued.

The 2017 - 2018 Service Year Closed With Joy



Eve DeVaro Fowler from BSBH and Steve DeLaney, the B SVM Site Leader in Richmond chat at the Site Supervisor Luncheon.



Claire loves to craft! Here she is shown assembling the 17-18 Volunteer scrapbook.



BSVM is tremendously grateful to our Site Supervisors from the Bon Secours Baltimore Health System.



BSVM loves our friend Elvis Marks from BSBH, known for great conversation and gifts of chocolate.



Ruby Miller reflects during the closing retreat.



Alumnus Jonathan Bettle, spouse Courtney, and adorable sons join B SVM for the closing ceremony.



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Cover Photo

The 2017-2018 volunteers embrace at the Closing Ceremony.

Photo by Liz O'Neill

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Our Mission

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry, sponsored by the Sisters of Bon Secours, provides the opportunity for women and men to participate in the Sisters' commitment to justice in radical solidarity with the poor, the suffering, and those most in need. By sharing the Bon Secours charism of compassion, healing, and liberation, the ministry nurtures and sustains full-time volunteers in their personal and communal journeys towards transformation through service with others.

Support Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry

Share your time and enthusiasm. Your personal presence is one of the best ways to support the program. Please consider sending a letter of support and interest, an invitation for site-seeing in Baltimore, or an invitation to dinner with your family.

Support the program financially. It costs about \$16,000 to support one volunteer for the year, including rent, health insurance, stipend and funds for community support. In addition, we are trying to make some improvements to the volunteer residence. Monetary donations or gently used furnishings for the volunteer house are greatly appreciated.

Donations are tax-deductible and can be sent directly to:

Bon Secours Volunteer Ministry
1525 Marriottsville Road, Marriottsville, MD 21104

BSVM Staff:

Shannon Curran, Director; Olivia Steback, Program Manager;
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