



# HOPE ACTION

Spring 2026 Newsletter



## “This Is It. I’m Home”: Vernada’s Story

*How one mother found safety and comfort in new beginnings*

When Vernada, mom of four, left Charlotte, North Carolina, she was focused on one thing—keeping her family safe.

“I needed real support to start over,” she said.

**Read her story on Page 4.**

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## Letter from Kelly

January 4, 2026, marked my 25th work anniversary at Community of Hope. What a journey this has been! 25 years ago, Community of Hope had a small health clinic and housed about 20 families at 1417 Belmont St, NW, with a staff of about 30 people and a budget just over \$1 million. Today, Community of Hope serves about 20,000 people throughout the city, with a wide range of housing, healthcare, and innovative services, a budget of about \$61 million and over 450 staff. I am so proud of all we do at Community of Hope and am so grateful for all those who have contributed their time, talent, and skills over the years. It has truly been the honor of my life to lead this organization. And I’m not done yet!

As you’ll see in this issue, we are continuing to move forward with innovative programs and services that create a stable foundation for families. These pages highlight our impact together.



President and CEO

# 25 Years of Kelly's Leadership

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President and CEO



This spring our President and CEO, Kelly Sweeney McShane, celebrates 25 years of leadership at Community of Hope.

When Kelly stepped into the role in 2001, Community of Hope was a much smaller organization full of possibility. Over the past two and a half decades, Kelly has guided Community of Hope through extraordinary growth and change with leadership grounded in people, purpose, and vision.

Under her leadership, Community of Hope has completed five strategic plans and expanded access to care by opening the Marie Reed Health Center, later renovating and expanding it. The organization also added the Conway Health and Resource Center and The Commons at Stanton Square, and merged with the Family Health and Birth Center, which was later expanded and relocated. She has strengthened pathways to stable housing for families across Washington, DC by expanding the comprehensive approach model through partnerships with DC Department of Human Services to include permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing, and by adding short-term family shelters, including The Triumph and The Aya.

Kelly has spent more than 35 years working to end homelessness in DC through leading two nonprofits and serving on the DC Interagency Council on Homelessness. She came to Community of Hope with everything to learn about healthcare and is now one of the most experienced community health center leaders in DC. She has served on the DC Primary Care Association's Board of Directors, now serving as the chair of the board. She has been recognized for her leadership and vision, including awards from the Eugene and Agnes Meyer Foundation, the DC Primary Care Association, the Washington Women of Excellence by the Mayor's Office on Women's Policy Initiatives in 2015, and awards from the Washington Business Journal in 2017 for Women Who Mean Business and in 2024 for an Innovative Health Care Leader. Under her leadership, Community of Hope has also been named a Top Workplace eight times since 2014 and received the 2012 Washington Post Excellence in Nonprofit Management Award.

***“Kelly, it is because of your strategic leadership of the Community of Hope, your relentless advocacy on the behalf of the voiceless, and your unflinching courage to speak truth to the political elite of the city, that the least of these among us have hope. They believe that their lives will be better one day, despite all present evidence to the contrary. That is the very meaning of hope, and that is why we honor your remarkable leadership and the wonderful mission of your organization.”***

- Wayne Turnage, DC Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services



*“Her legacy isn't just in programs or buildings. It's in people like me. It's in partnerships that she's built and the leader she's lifted up and the community she has helped strengthen.”*

- Ruth Pollard, President and CEO of the DC Primary Care Association (DCPCA)

Beyond building a mission-driven, people-centered culture at Community of Hope, she has also touched the lives of those who witness her commitment to doing better for our community.

She's known around the halls of Community of Hope as an approachable and supportive leader—not to mention—someone who loves to dance.

Join us in congratulating Kelly on this incredible milestone!



## Hope Happenings



### Developing Families Maternal Health Fund

Community of Hope is honored to have been selected as one of 11 nonprofit organizations to receive funding through the Developing Families Maternal Health Fund, led by the Greater Washington Community Foundation and CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield. This funding will support our comprehensive maternal health model, including care coordination throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period. It leaves just \$170,000 more to raise on our special \$7.5 million campaign. Contact [Lgarrett@cohdc.org](mailto:Lgarrett@cohdc.org) if you want to learn more.



### Impact in Action: Community of Hope Video

Community of Hope's mission is to improve health, end homelessness, and partner with communities to make Washington, DC more equitable. Every day, families turn to us for health care, housing support, and community resources that help them move forward. The work that we do is powered by compassionate staff, dedicated partners, and supporters like you. Scan the QR code to watch our new impact video and see how hope comes to life through our programs!

## “This Is It — I’m Home”

She was leaving a relationship that had become violent and knew she needed to create a stable foundation for herself and her children.

That support was in Washington, DC, where her mother lives, and her oldest daughter is attending college. Vernada gathered her three youngest children and boarded the Megabus bound for DC.

“All we had was one suitcase, two small carry-ons with snacks, and my baby’s cans of milk,” she said.

After arriving, Vernada and her children stayed with a family member who welcomed them in. As their family member’s situation began to change, it became difficult to continue supporting Vernada and the children. Vernada found herself experiencing homelessness and was connected with the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center, which referred her to Community of Hope for housing support. Her family stayed at The Triumph, a short-term family shelter, where they planned their next steps.

While staying at The Triumph, Vernada accessed services that helped her rebuild. Her family enrolled in Community of Hope’s dental program, signed up for nutrition support through WIC, and got help applying for Social Security benefits for her son who has epileptic seizures. She also completed an application to a local community college and began exploring an EMT/EMS program.

Vernada was grateful for the support. “They had resources I didn’t even know were available. That support made such a difference,” she said.

In February, after months of waiting, she got the call. Her family had been approved for housing.



*Christmas Family Photo 2025*

She credits her case manager, Lia, for helping make the process manageable.

Her children didn’t know they were moving until the day they walked through the door of their new apartment.

“I told them I had a surprise,” she said.

When they stepped inside, she felt it immediately. “My oldest son just said, ‘Oh yeah... we’re home,’” she said laughing.

“This is it,” she said. “I’m home.”

Now, the biggest change is the freedom that comes with having her own space. She can cook again. Her kids can play freely. She can come and go without restrictions.

For Vernada, hope is trusting yourself, even when the path isn’t clear. “You just have to follow what feels right,” she said. “And keep going.”

You Inspire Hope  
In Action!

Sign up to volunteer at our weekly Fam-Club to give back to families in our family shelters. To learn more, visit [communityofhopedc.org/volunteer](http://communityofhopedc.org/volunteer).



Volunteer!

# Pregnancy + Homelessness + Care Coordination = Improved Health

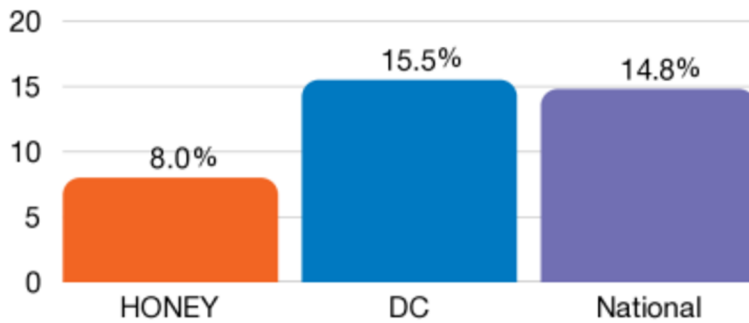
Community of Hope’s Housing our Newborns, Empowering You (HONEY) program just went through an independent evaluation which shows that care coordination during pregnancy can significantly improve birth outcomes for pregnant families experiencing homelessness.

Since late 2023, HONEY has supported more than 200 families in Washington, DC, connecting them to over 1,000 resources and community partners.

The evaluation, conducted by George Washington University, Center for Excellence in Maternal and Child Health found that participants experienced:

- Nearly half the rate of preterm birth compared to similar populations
- Strong engagement in prenatal and mental health care

**Preterm Birth**



These outcomes reflect what consistent, relationship-centered support during pregnancy can make possible, which is especially significant given the high rates of social and medical risks. But the data is only part of the story.




Watch this video to hear directly from a HONEY graduate, LaDonnae, along with program leadership and local partners, about what this support looks like and why it matters.

You’ll have the chance to join a Conversation of Hope webinar to chat with staff and program as we share more from the HONEY evaluation and what we’re learning about supporting healthy pregnancies during homelessness. Join us April 17th!

## Conversations of Hope HONEY

April 17<sup>th</sup>  
Virtual | 12PM



Become a Sustainer of Hope! Monthly donors create consistent support for our programs to innovate and thrive. Sign up online or check the “Donate monthly” box on your enclosed remit envelope.



“The whole mission of COH is the reason why I give. I see what you do as an organization, and I believe in it completely.”

– Rose Alford,  
Sustainer of Hope

Give Monthly!



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*Learn more about our innovative Housing  
Our Newborns, Empowering You (HONEY)  
program and join the conversation April 17!  
Registration QR code on page 5.*

# Save the Date

**Thursday October 1, 2026  
6:30-9:00 p.m.**

**The National Press Club**

529 14th St. NW, 13th Floor  
Washington, DC

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