



Reality  
ministries

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# Annual Report

*Grateful for*

YOU • FRIENDSHIP • A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING

“

*I marvel every day at the goodness and love and  
creativity amongst you. I am so grateful we found Reality.*

- KATHY, MOM OF REALITY PARTICIPANT SASHA

Reality Ministries fosters friendships amongst people of all abilities marked  
by mutuality, authenticity, and the reality of Christ's love for all.

# Reality Overview

## Fostering Friendships

### *Our Heart*

A COMMUNITY OF BELONGING

### *Our Mission*

TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS WITH AND WITHOUT DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES TO EXPERIENCE BELONGING, KINSHIP, AND LIFE-CHANGING REALITY OF CHRIST'S LOVE.



Camille

*“Once again, during the pandemic, Reality has lifted our souls. A drive to the Reality Center to be met by a smiling Amy (Reality Farm Manager) and a bounty of tomatoes, peppers, flowers, basil, kale, and a kit to make pesto at home! It shouldn't surprise me, but every time Camille is greeted with open arms and a smile, I am thankful for the bounty you give our souls and bodies.*

- LIBBY, MOM OF REALITY PARTICIPANT CAMILLE



### *ALL Abilities*

Reality bridges the divide between people with and without developmental disabilities through friendship. Barriers break down when participants and volunteers share life together.



### *Come As You Are, to Love and be Loved*

In contrast to many goal-oriented services that seek to improve or change people with disabilities, Reality focuses on mutual friendship and growing together. Although Reality is a faith community rooted in the Christian tradition, people of any or no faith are fully welcomed.



### *Shared Experiences*

Relationships flourish through a variety of activities, including communal meals, outings around town, music, fitness, dances, community service, and organic expressions of friendship. Reality friends are there for each other, from celebrating birthdays and weddings to being present with one another through the hard times of life.



### *A Place to Call Home*

Reality owns several houses, opening spaces for people of diverse abilities to live together in intentional communities. These homes are anchored in the practices of eating, praying, and celebrating together.

# Lifting Our Souls

## 2019-2020 Highlights

### PURCHASING THE FRIENDSHIP HOUSES IN FULL

Launched in July 2018, the Welcome Home Capital Campaign raised \$745,000 from 42 donors to purchase in full the Friendship Houses, securing two more homes for friends of all abilities to live together.

### ADDING RESIDENTIAL DIRECTOR POSITION

With three Reality residences and a growing imagination for future iterations of shared life, we were thrilled to create a position uniquely focused on “home.” Greg Little, Reality staff member for six years and Corner House resident, is serving as our first full-time Residential Director.

### SENDING DAVID SITTSER TO LAUNCH SIDE BY SIDE MINISTRIES

The vision expands to the West Coast! Longtime beloved staff member, David Sittser, returned to his home state of Washington to launch Side by Side Ministries, an organization modeled after Reality.

### OLD FRIENDS BECOME NEW STAFF

We joyfully welcomed longtime Reality volunteer and Reality Fellows graduate, Quinn Holmquist, as a new Community Leader. Zach Bond, a Kansas native who discovered Reality as a volunteer while studying at Duke Divinity School and living in the Friendship House, is now serving as our new Volunteer and Fellows Coordinator.

### RESPONDING TO COVID-19

It's been beautiful to see how every single staff member dove in with robust creativity to keep our Reality community connected. A detailed system was put in place to make sure every participant is in touch with a staff person or volunteer regularly. It was a gargantuan task to get everyone with Internet access (which is most, but not all) set up on Zoom, but we did it! Tablets and iPads were donated and delivered to individuals who didn't have them.

Evening groups have gathered over Zoom weekly, and Daytime groups gather daily. There are Zoom birthday parties, dance parties, and farm visits. Although most have access to technology, Zoom is just not for everyone. So we are writing letters, crafting coloring books from designs submitted by Reality friends, and mailing monthly prayer guides to every single participant. Our community is pulling together to learn how to connect with one another in new and different ways.



# The Beauty of Being Yourself

## *Friendships You Helped Make Possible*

*“Reality is where Ricky goes and I can take a deep breath and relax. He can be himself and it’s beautiful.”*

- LINDA, SISTER OF REALITY PARTICIPANT RICKY

At Reality Ministries, we are building community based on mutuality and authenticity. Friends learn each other’s quirks and fears, call each other to laugh or cry together, help each other move houses, get on each other’s nerves, share each other’s wounds and griefs, hopes and dreams. Here are a few of our stories.

### KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN

*by Allison Waters*

I’m on my computer, pouring over coronavirus news once again. I find that as I keep reading, my heart is tempted toward despair. But at just the right moment, my phone rings, and it is one of my favorite people in the world: Adam.

“Hello Allison Waters,” he says.

Just the sound of his voice reminds me that love and friendship have no quarantine. We talk for a minute and, when I bring up coronavirus, he quickly says “Yes, but I’m going to save the day.” And he certainly did for me.

Every day at about 2:30pm, I get a call from Weston Doll.

“How’s my honey bunny!?” he says, in his trademark sweet voice.

We talk about a lot of things. He describes his breakfast with delight, and then he grieves the Talent Show being canceled. Sometimes I’m not sure what TV show or movie he is referencing or re-enacting, but it doesn’t really matter. **We’re together while apart.** Each day, he ends the phone call by reminiscing about all the things we’d be doing at Reality.

“I miss coming to your office for a big hug, and calling you honey bunny, and eating lunch next to you, and taking selfies.” Each call is full of joy and sadness, and it re-affirms **authentic friendship and relationships are still happening in the Reality community.**





## -- LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER

by Greg Little

Last fall, on a house retreat in the North Carolina mountains, our curious little two-year-old, JoyAna, asked: "Dada, what is beauty?"

Apparently, she was hearing a lot about it that weekend. I offered something that included a "whoa" and a deep breath and then we went into the kitchen for breakfast. As we passed food around the table, JoyAna and I prompted everyone to respond to the same question. What followed was a profound little picture of the beauty of our shared life at the Corner House.

Bonnie went first and, with all the depth of her eyes locked on JoyAna, **defined beauty as that quality of being yourself.** Tony jumped in with an elegant hand motion and said something along the lines of 'like a flower' in an unidentifiable, utterly delightful accent. The circle continued and other words emerged, like "wonder," "love," "thanksgiving..."

That morning, through word and experience, JoyAna learned beauty in its many expressions.

## NOTHING LIKE IT

*A letter from Cookie, Mom of Reality participant John Mark*

Please express our thanks and appreciation for all the work that goes towards making this ministry so special. John and I have toyed with the idea of moving on several occasions, and one thing that keeps us in Durham is John Mark's participation in Reality. **You can't find anything like it anywhere.** I know during these trying times it has been hard, but know we are so grateful for all you do. I cannot tell you how excited JM gets when it is time to Zoom and, if you ever are able to get back together, ask him to recite the memory verses from the prayer guide. Know we love you and can't wait to get back together again.



# Friendship By The Numbers

*Your Impact*



**949**

TOTAL  
DONORS



**187**

MONTHLY  
DONORS



**15**

CHURCH  
PARTNERS



**221**

PARTICIPANTS



**202**

VOLUNTEERS



**18,600**

VOLUNTEER  
HOURS



**27**

COMMUNITY  
PARTNERS



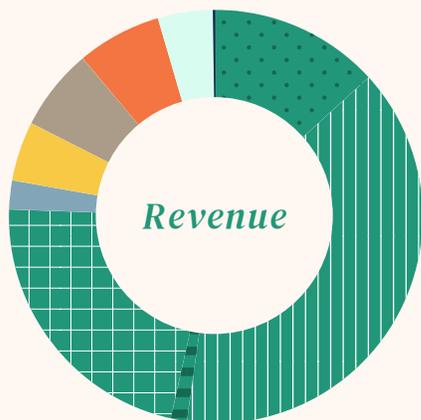
**1,900**

POUNDS OF PRODUCE  
HARVESTED AT  
THE FARM



**11,400**

SHARED  
MEALS

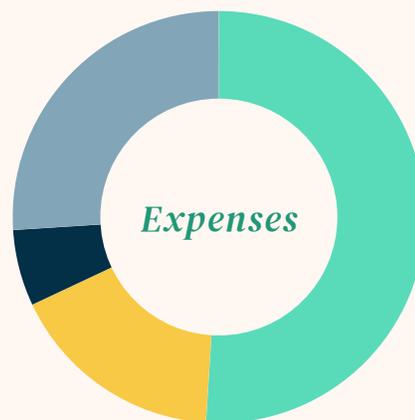


- INDIVIDUAL DONORS**
- Monthly Donors: \$209,772 | 13%
  - Unrestricted: \$618,400 | 39%
  - Camp Scholarship: \$19,817 | 1%
  - Friendship House Purchase (Welcome Home Campaign): \$349,804 | 22%

- Church Partnerships: \$35,697 | 2%
- Grants: \$73,687 | 5%
- Payroll Protection Plan Loan: \$101,737 | 7%
- Rental Income: \$104,556 | 7%
- Program Fees: \$67,825 | 4%
- Other Income: \$3,719 | <1%

**TOTAL REVENUE: \$1,585,014**

- Programs: 51%
- Management and Administration: 17%
- Development and Marketing: 6%
- Friendship House Loan Paid Off (Welcome Home Campaign): 26%



**TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,321,781**

***We're overwhelmed with gratitude at the generosity of our community this year.***

We created a spring campaign "Seeds of Hope" in an effort to replace the revenue from our cancelled talent show. Our goal was \$70k. You gave \$218,880. Wow! We are in awe of the commitment of our donor base. This, combined with cutting costs at the beginning of COVID-19 to be conservative financially and receiving a forgivable PPP loan, has enabled us to add \$254,000 to our cash reserves at the end of FY 2019, a bigger surplus that we've had in previous years.

The spring COVID crisis taught us that we didn't have the financial cushion that we need for an upheaval of this magnitude. Our incredible Reality community responded with an outpouring of funds, which enabled us to move into the next fiscal year committed to the goal of keeping 3-6 months of expenses as a cushion. We still need to raise the money for our operating budget; while we may dip into our surplus to move through the ebb and flow of fundraising, our goal is to keep these reserves strong.

# A Vision for the Future *FY20 Hopes*

## MISSION-CONSISTENT GROWTH

Our growth has been steady and consistent in recent years, with about 40 new participants joining Reality annually, and this trend shows no sign of stopping! Dozens of people with I/DD graduate from our local high schools each Spring, entering the dreaded “black hole” of nothing-to-do and nowhere-to-go. So many adults with I/DD in our community are sitting at home, longing for friends and meaningful ways to offer their gifts. Our vision is for Reality to continue to be a place of welcome and belonging!

Our future plans include adding two more Community Leaders in the next two years. These are the staff folks who shepherd our participants and volunteers with energy, creativity, and love. In order to remain committed to our core value of knowing and being known, we must continue to go small even as our numbers grow. This means looking to offer a greater variety of small group activities for friends to engage in, more personalization, so that each individual is seen and celebrated.



We are moving in this direction virtually right now, as we have rolled out 33 different Zoom groups which are meeting weekly. Participants choose up to three daytime interest groups per week (in addition to a weekly evening group) from options such as Virtual Travel, Current Events, Sign Language, Yoga, Animal Lovers, Sports Fans, Cooking, and more!

We hope in the coming year to expand our church partnerships, increase diversity amongst our volunteers, and to start a new Community Group meeting one night/week in Chapel Hill in the Fall of 2021. Growing deep as we continue to grow wide, we are excited to continue to build beloved community as the Spirit leads!



*FY20 Fellows*



*Susan McSwain,  
Executive Director*

## Our Leadership and Staff

### *Board of Directors*

Amanda Diekman  
PRESIDENT  
AND TREASURER  
Margaret Frothingham  
SECRETARY

Needham Bryan  
Cari Carson  
Jeff Connolly  
Cate McLeane

Louise Morris  
Katy Phillips  
Michelle Pickett  
Erica Ryder

### *Current Staff*

Susan McSwain  
EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR  
Zach Bond  
VOLUNTEER  
AND FELLOWS  
COORDINATOR  
Leah Broadwell  
ADMINISTRATIVE  
ASSISTANT AND  
KITCHEN COORDINATOR  
Wallace Cameron  
FELLOW (2020-2021)

Amy Curran  
FARM PROGRAM AND  
CAFE DIRECTOR  
Madison Daniel  
FELLOW (2020-2021)  
Julie DeConto  
OPERATIONS MANAGER  
Shirley Garrett  
FELLOW (2020-2021)  
Alisa Ginyard  
OUTREACH COORDINATOR  
Quinn Holmquist  
COMMUNITY LEADER

Elizabeth Houston  
COMMUNITY LEADER  
Anna Hood  
COMMUNITY LEADER  
Greg Little  
RESIDENTIAL DIRECTOR  
Jonathan Mullins  
FELLOW (2020-2021)  
Allison Waters  
CLINICAL DIRECTOR  
Angel Whitehead  
FELLOW (2020-2021)



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