

PARENT

NEWSLETTER



PHOTO: A family enjoys hot cocoa and snacks with local law enforcement at the Cocoa with the Popo event.

01

ONE YEAR LATER

Melody Cook's presence continues to shape TMI and the community she loved so deeply.

02

TMI & THE COMMUNITY CUP

Our shared mission to support Martinsburg's most vulnerable residents.

03

STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE

Through collaboration and compassion.

04

MEET MOLLY CONRAD

School Support Specialist, Boys & Girls Club of the Eastern Panhandle.

05

MEET SUSAN CORUN

School Support Specialist at Burke St. and Winchester Ave. Elementary Schools





ABOVE: Melody Cook holds two boxes with dolls at a past Toys & Joys event.

ONE YEAR LATER

Honoring the Legacy of Melody Cook

One year has passed since we lost Melody Cook, yet her presence continues to shape The Martinsburg Initiative and the community she loved so deeply. As her name implies, Melody herself was a breathtaking blend of grace, compassion, empathy, calm, sacrifice, and love.

Despite being early in her career, Melody quickly became a lighthouse for her colleagues. She served as a School Support Specialist, approaching every situation with wisdom, ethics, and practicality. Her radiant smile and gentle humor could ease tension in the hardest moments, while her dependability made the impossible feel achievable. She made people feel seen, heard, and safe. Her kindness had no conditions, no boundaries, and no expectations.

In the days following her passing, our grief was tied to the small, joyful things that reflected her spirit: the color pink, sparkly shoes, ornate headbands, rainbows, Care Bears, and games of Candyland. We grieved for her family, especially her daughter who carries her light forward, and for the space she left in our organization and community. Yet even in grief, we committed to honoring her by continuing the work she believed in so fiercely.

Melody's
HOME

One year later, Melody's HOME, TMI's community cupboard renamed in her honor, stands as a living reflection of her generosity.



ABOVE: Volunteers at Melody's HOME host a back-to-school supply and backpack giveaway event.

During last year's government shutdown, when food security was uncertain for many families, Melody's HOME helped provide groceries to households in crisis.

Throughout the holiday season, donations from local schools and community groups made it possible to distribute clothing, hygiene items, and essential supplies to families facing increased hardship.

During the winter months, Melody's HOME worked alongside the newly-founded Martinsburg Cold Weather Shelter to ensure unhoused neighbors received coats, hats, gloves, and warm clothing. In the summer, emergency communications teams from Berkeley and Washington Counties organized a school supply drive in Melody's honor, allowing TMI to distribute 272 filled backpacks at the start of the 2025–2026 school year.



a year later

Melody's kindness and spirit continues to guide us in acts of service and hope. We carry her forward in every family helped, every barrier reduced, and every life touched. Melody, we do this work in your honor.



ABOVE: Non-perishable foods available in the pantry at Melody's HOME.

"It has been one year since we lost Melody, yet the ache of her absence remains deeply felt by everyone who knew and loved her. She was a true light in our community—a person whose kindness, laughter, and presence strengthened TMI, her friends, her family, and everyone she encountered. Her impact did not fade with her passing; instead, it lives through the people she lifted up, the memories she created, and the love she shared so freely. Today, we honor her memory, we miss her dearly, and we hold close the incredible legacy she left in all of us."

TMI's Community Outreach
Coordinator, Nannette Redmon



BY TMI STAFF

TMI & THE *Community Cup*

Our shared mission to support Martinsburg's most vulnerable residents

LEFT PHOTO: Student volunteers serve members of the Martinsburg population at the Community Cup Midweek Manna Meal events.

The Martinsburg Initiative is proud to partner with Community Cup in our shared mission to support Martinsburg's most vulnerable residents. As TMI has expanded its outreach efforts, Community Cup has served as a trusted and welcoming hub, making it an ideal place to connect with individuals in a space where they already feel safe and supported.

Over the years, our partnership has grown into a dynamic collaboration. Together, we host Midweek Manna Meals at Community Cup, providing consistent access to food alongside meaningful human connection. TMI has also offered Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) training for Community Cup's board members, helping strengthen trauma-informed leadership and organizational practices. We have worked side by side on community events, including a candlelight vigil honoring lives lost to overdose, and TMI regularly provides basic needs items to Community Cup customers.

One of the most meaningful aspects of this collaboration is our Senior Support sessions, held every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. In this trusted setting, TMI staff offer one-on-one assistance that can be difficult to access elsewhere. Seniors receive guidance navigating resources such as health insurance and disability benefits, and are able to ask questions they may not feel comfortable raising in other settings. In addition, TMI facilitates monthly educational sessions at Community Cup, sharing practical information that supports health, safety, and independence for older adults and the broader community. Upcoming sessions include Advanced Care Planning in March and Fall Risk Prevention in April, designed to be accessible, informative, and responsive to real community needs.



LEFT PHOTO: Student volunteers pose for a group photo at the Community Cup Midweek Manna Meal event.

REFLECTING ON THIS PARTNERSHIP, THE IMPACT IS CLEAR:

“Our collaboration with Community Cup allows us to reach people in a setting they already trust. By combining education, resource navigation, and community connection, we can meet real needs in practical and meaningful ways”

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NOEL CANELLAS



STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE

Through Collaboration and Compassion

ABOVE PHOTO: Noel Cannellas, Assistant Director, crouches down to speak at eye level with someone in crisis.

BY TMI STAFF

At The Martinsburg Initiative, supporting both first responders and community members experiencing behavioral health crises is at the heart of our mission. Noel Cannellas, Assistant Director, emphasizes the importance of building systems that prioritize safety, consistency, and access to care:



NOEL SHARES...

"As part of my role with The Martinsburg Initiative, I focus on strengthening the systems that support both first responders and community members experiencing behavioral health crises. My background in social work, crisis intervention, and program development has shaped my approach to building partnerships that prioritize safety, consistency, and access to appropriate care."



A major success this year has been the expansion of Crisis Intervention Team training across the region. With support from the West Virginia First Foundation, TMI coordinated CIT trainings for law enforcement officers, EMTs, Police Support Specialists, and behavioral health professionals. For the first time, trainings will be hosted in Morgan and Jefferson Counties, with new sessions scheduled for March and April.

NOEL EXPLAINS...

"This expansion strengthens cross-disciplinary understanding and ensures that more responders have the tools to de-escalate crises and connect individuals to care rather than defaulting to arrest."

NOEL SHARES...

Equally critical is TMI's growing collaboration across systems. Noel shares,

"Recently, staff from a local hospital reached out to discuss how we could work together more effectively to support a repeat client. These conversations reflect a shift toward shared responsibility — recognizing that sustainable outcomes require coordination between healthcare, behavioral health, law enforcement, and community partners."



ALEX EXPLAINS...

Embedded within the Martinsburg Police Department, Police Support Specialist Alex Gonzales works directly alongside officers to respond to crises and connect community members to resources. He explains,

"My role bridges the gap between law enforcement and community resources, ensuring individuals receive appropriate care, support, and referrals rather than solely a law-enforcement response."





PHOTO: Alex Gonzales has a discussion with others at the Martinsburg Police Department.

ALEX EXPLAINS...

Alex's experience as a paramedic and child protection investigator allows him to approach each situation with both immediate and long-term support in mind.



"By focusing on compassion, collaboration, and problem-solving, I strive to support both the Martinsburg community and the officers I work alongside, helping create safer and more effective outcomes for everyone involved."

Together, Noel and Alex illustrate TMI's commitment to improving responses to mental health and substance use crises, supporting first responders, and building pathways toward treatment, stability, and long-term support – ensuring that care, not crisis, becomes the default response.



ABOVE PHOTO: Noel Cannellas and Alex Gonzales.



MEET MOLLY

School Support Specialist,
Boys & Girls Club of the
Eastern Panhandle

Molly Conrad brings a strong academic foundation and a clear passion for helping others to her work with The Martinsburg Initiative.

ABOVE: Molly Conrad poses with a golden retriever puppy.

A December 2024 graduate of Shepherd University, she earned her degree in psychology after holding several positions that confirmed her calling to service, including work at a local store in her hometown and with West Virginia Children's Home Society.

Across every role, Molly found the same thread: she was happiest when interacting with people and supporting them through difficult situations. Her academic background, combined with hands-on social service experience, shaped her belief that meaningful change begins with connection and understanding.

BY TMI STAFF

Molly's decision to join TMI was deeply influenced by her internship at Martinsburg High School, where she worked under Jessica Michael supporting students on an active caseload. Together they provided guidance that helped students pursue both academic and personal goals. The experience was transformative.

Molly saw firsthand how consistent support and mentorship could impact young people facing adversity, and she left feeling energized by the work.

She was also drawn to TMI's use of the ACEs framework, an area she explored extensively during a year-long undergraduate thesis examining how adverse childhood experiences correlate with mental, emotional, and physical health in adulthood. That research sparked a lasting passion for understanding how trauma shapes individuals and communities – and how informed, compassionate interventions can promote healing.

Today, Molly serves as the support specialist at the Boys and Girls Club in Martinsburg, where she focuses on building resilience and preventing substance use among youth. She teaches practical skills for emotional regulation and decision-making while striving to be a trusted, safe adult in her students' lives. Molly believes that having even one dependable listener can make a critical difference for young people navigating hardship. She is especially proud of the relationships she built during her internship, watching hesitant students gradually open up and engage. When several students gave her handwritten notes at the end of her placement, she felt deeply honored to have earned their trust.

With her psychology background and social work experience, Molly brings a unique perspective to her role: one that blends insight into individual behavior with an understanding of how those experiences ripple outward into families and communities.





BY TMI STAFF

These schools serve students from Pre-K through 2nd grade. I meet with students who have been referred to me for social-emotional learning lessons and other support. Currently enrolled are 144 students at Burke St. and 180 students at Winchester Ave. I am currently serving 26 students from 21 families.

I have incorporated a corn theme by wearing various earrings and t-shirts with corn references, such as "Corn in the USA," "Say No To Drugs," "Say Yes to Unicorns," and the "Candy Corn Queen."

MEET SUSAN

School Support Specialist

My name is Susan Corun, which is pronounced C-O-R-N. I am a School Support Specialist at Burke St. and Winchester Ave. Elementary Schools.

ABOVE PHOTO: Susan poses in a candy corn costume next to the "Say No To Drugs" message on a decorated door.

This has made it fun for everyone. The kids and staff get a real kick out of it. I keep them guessing which T-shirt I will wear each day.

I also teach "Too Good for Drugs" (TGFD) lessons to 11 classrooms. In the TGFD lessons, we teach strategies to promote a healthy lifestyle, such as exercising and eating fruits and veggies, peer-pressure refusal strategies, and preparing for situations they may encounter.

This month, my students are talking about superhero characters and names to help them battle emotions such as anxiety. I also work with Project Learn, a Boys and Girls Club afterschool program. My position with The Martinsburg Initiative is fun and rewarding, not just for my students but for me as well. It's a blessing to be a part of such an amazing journey with an organization that is making such a difference in our community. Needs are identified, and TMI finds a solution. Kind of like a community superhero.



TOP PHOTO: Susan poses with two puppets wearing one of her signature tee shirts.

BOTTOM PHOTO: Susan poses with a coworker in front of a school supply-themed background.

THOUSANDS OF US ARE IN RECOVERY.

YOU CAN BE TOO.



WHEN IT'S TIME, WE'RE HERE.

CALL 1-844-HELP4WV



FUNDED IN PART BY



EVERY CHILD DESERVES A GOOD START

If you have an Infant or toddler at home and have concerns about their development with moving, talking, hearing, vision, playing, learning, or growing, we are here to help.

West Virginia's Infant and Toddler Early Intervention Program. Telehealth and In Person appointments are available at NO COST TO YOU.

(304) 267-3595 ext 132





Get the facts about electronic cigarettes, their health effects and the risks of using e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes (also called “vapes”) have been the most commonly used tobacco product among U.S. youth since 2014. Educators can make a real difference by engaging in meaningful conversations with their students about the dangers of vaping for young people and ways to quit.

CDC launched the Empower Vape-Free Youth™ campaign in 2023 to encourage middle and high school educators to speak with students about the risks of e-cigarettes and nicotine addiction. The campaign also provides resources for educators to help students avoid or quit vaping.

EMPOWER
Vape-Free
YOUTH™



Info Provided by the Center for
Disease Control and Prevention



i talk
they hear you®



START TALKING BEFORE SHE HEADS OFF TO SCHOOL.

It's never too early to have a conversation about alcohol and other drugs.

The sooner you talk about the dangers of underage drinking and substance use, the greater chance you have of influencing your child's decisions about using alcohol and other drugs. For tips on how—and when—to begin the conversation, visit

www.underagedrinking.samhsa.gov

#TalkTheyHearYou

PEP20-03-01-041



SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



A MODEL SOLUTION

TO A NATIONAL PROBLEM

Our mission is to prevent substance use disorders, build strong families, and empower the Martinsburg community through police, school, community, health, and education partnerships.

1

Increase awareness

of how to prevent substance use disorder through community empowerment.

2

Mitigate negative consequences

Resulting from substance misuse or trauma through community interventions, medication overdose.

3

Identify, risk stratify and offer appropriate interventions

for individuals experiencing risk factors of trauma or substance misuse.

4

Evaluate and report performance.



THE
MARTINSBURG
INITIATIVE

A POLICE, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP