



Winter 2024

# Linkage



## *ECH Master Plan is Completed*

Continuing to offer excellent care and services  
to those we serve.



# ERS

Episcopal Retirement Services



# Table of Contents

## Making a Difference

ECH Is Tops in Louisville..... 3

Center for Memory Support and Inclusion Helps With Alzheimer's Association Research..... 4-5

## Cover Story

ECH Master Plan Complete ..... 6

## Walking the Walk

More Fun Programs from Center for Memory Support and Inclusion ..... 10-11

ERS Launches 'Well Being' Study With Xavier ..... 12-13

Martindell Award Winner ..... 14

Keeping Score on Progress..... 16

Gatherings for Good ..... 18

Christ Church Cathedral Supports Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund..... 19

## ON THE COVER

*Dan McCubbin, Joe and Peggy Robben, Laura Lamb, Nancy Troy, and Douglas Phendler. Photograph by Gary Kessler*

## ERS Communities & Services

### Premier Retirement Communities

*Deupree House, Marjorie P. Lee, and Episcopal Church Home*

### Affordable Living Communities

*31 locations in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. For more information on these communities visit [AffordableLivingbyERS.com](http://AffordableLivingbyERS.com).*

### Community Services

*Deupree Meals On Wheels, Living Well Senior Solutions, Parish Health Ministry, The ERS Center for Memory Support & Inclusion*



## ERS Board of Directors

Albert Smitherman, Chair

Dora Anim, Gay Bain, W. Thomas Cooper, The Rev. Darren Elin, The Rev. John Fritschner, JoAnn Hagopian, Alan Hartman, Gregory Hopkins, Eric Kearney, The Rev. John F. Koepke, III, Gerron McKnight, Jennifer Payne, Apryl Pope, Thomas Regan, Tom Retford, William Woods, Chip Workman, Elizabeth A. Zwilling

## ERS Foundation Board of Directors

JoAnn Hagopian, Chair

Jon B. Boss, Anthony Bruns, W. Thomas Cooper, Laura R.P. Lamb, Apryl Pop, Thomas Regan, Chip Workman

## We Welcome Your Comments

The Linkage Editor

Episcopal Retirement Services

3870 Virginia Avenue • Cincinnati, Ohio 45227

(513) 271-9610 • [info@erslife.org](mailto:info@erslife.org)

Editor: Jonathan Fissel; Editing Supervisor: Laura Lamb

Writer: Mike Rutledge

## Linkage is Available Online

To better serve you, Linkage magazine is available via e-mail and on the Episcopal Retirement Services website at [EpiscopalRetirement.com](http://EpiscopalRetirement.com). If you would like to be removed from the Linkage mailing list, please call (513) 271-9610 or email us at [info@erslife.org](mailto:info@erslife.org).

## Make A Donation Online

For your convenience, donations are accepted online at [ersfoundation.org](http://ersfoundation.org)

Linkage is a resource to address issues and interests of older adults, providing a link between ERS programs and the community. Since 1951, Episcopal Retirement Services (ERS) has dedicated itself to improving the lives of older adults from all faiths through innovative, quality living environments and in-home and community-based services delivered by experienced and compassionate professionals.



Like us on



Follow our Online Linkage Blog at [blog.episcopalretirement.com](http://blog.episcopalretirement.com)

© Copyright 2024 by Episcopal Retirement Services, Inc. Nothing shown or written may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the editors.

From the Publishers of

**Cincinnati** MAGAZINE

Linkage is published by Cincinnati Magazine on behalf of Episcopal Retirement Services.

# ECH Is Tops in Louisville

ECH wins the Community Choice Award for Top Nursing Home due to a commitment to person-centered care. *By Sarah McCosham*

An inspiration to many and a person who had the utmost faith in the good of people, Mr. Rogers advised folks to “look for the helpers” because there would always be people willing and wanting to help. This mantra of helpfulness and, most simply, kindness, is at the heart of Episcopal Retirement Services (ERS), a group of continuing care communities in Ohio and Kentucky. With a focused, person-centered approach to continuing care and a holistic array of community-based services for residents and their families, ERS sets the kinds of standards to which all similar campuses should aspire.

In 2023, Episcopal Church Home (ECH) was awarded a Community Choice Award for Top Nursing Home in Louisville, KY. ECH earned the top spot for its commitment to person-centered care. Laura Lamb, ERS President & CEO, says in addition to a \$20 million renovation that transformed the Louisville campus, ECH is “a really well-run community that’s ‘person-centered’—meaning staff cater to each patient’s preferences and needs, rather than institutional frameworks.”

In addition to getting to know every patient and their family personally, Lamb says ECH prides itself on training “versatile workers”—highly skilled employees able to perform multiple tasks, which adds a dimension of familiarity, comfort, and ease of communication between staff, residents, and their families.

Beverly Edwards, Vice President of Residential Healthcare, echoes this sentiment. “Upon joining ERS seven years ago, one thing that stuck out to me was long-tenured staff members. I have worked in aging services for 20 years, and before joining ERS, long-tenured staff were less common. At ERS, you are more than just an employee number; leadership team members know your name, preferences, and even inquire about your family or other things that are important to you. ERS core values of integrity,



Director of Nursing Donna Watson and Administrator Jomiya Coleman hold up the 2023 Choice Award for best nursing home in Louisville.

person-centeredness, relationships, transparency, engagement, inclusion, and progressive thinking are carried out daily within our organization and align with my core values.”

This ethos applies to all ERS personnel, including new hires. Jomiya Coleman, ECH Administrator, says ERS’ “community of mentors” fosters a workspace of compassion and encouragement where everyone’s role is valued and important. ■

# Marjorie P. Lee Helps With Alzheimer's Association Memory Care Research

By Mike Rutledge



Alix Scruggs, Resident Assistant on AL Memory Support; Anthony Williams, Administrator; Hannah McCaren, Household Coordinator; and Katrina Traylor, Social Service Coordinator celebrate completion of research project with Alzheimer's Association staff.

**E**piscopal Retirement Services' Marjorie P. Lee retirement community in Cincinnati's Hyde Park neighborhood recently completed a nine-month research project to elevate best practices for dementia care nationwide.

In the coming months, researchers from the Alzheimer's Association and the University of Washington will recommend methods to improve dementia care. From among 1,700 retirement communities in Ohio, researchers hope to involve 80 campuses—40 nursing homes and 40 assisted-living communities—that care for people with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

## Further tweaking memory care

During the nine months of work, a multi-disciplinary team from Marjorie P. Lee developed new ways to increase meaningful engagement among memory-care residents—and their families, staff, and residents from other parts of campus.

Information about the techniques Marjorie P. Lee uses to care for residents will be used to help other retirement campuses nationwide. In the meantime, Marjorie P. Lee's staff has already found ways to further improve its person-centered care of residents across the dementia spectrum.

Team members worked during the project with Shawn Johnson, a care-community coach with the Alzheimer's Association. Johnson and Marjorie P. Lee Health Services Administrator Anthony Williams both cite two of the more significant tweaks Marjorie P. Lee staff made:

- They had residents of the Kirby and Luther memory-care households make wreaths—some with help from their families—for their apartments' front doors. The wreaths show interesting things about residents' personalities or pasts, such as things they enjoy or pictures of their younger years, their families, and their favorite pets.

- Staff 'shout-out' boards were created to give





team members, residents, and family members opportunities to the celebrate the staff for jobs they did well.

Williams says the residents love the wreaths, “because they really showed their personality. And other residents would often go by and comment on the wreaths. It really helped the residents get to know one another.”

Just by themselves, the conversations the wreaths started among residents, or between them and team members, are a form of memory therapy because such discussions are a form of mental exercise that can combat dementia.

The wreaths “create conversation, which then can lead to meaningful engagement, which is a purpose of this project,” Johnson says. A key focus is finding ways to help memory-care staff interact with residents for two reasons—to give the employees more meaning in their work life and to ensure residents have meaningful engagement with others.

In the discussions that led to the shout-out boards, “We really looked at staff recognition, and how we could recognize staff—and how they could recognize each other, and better appreciate each other,” Williams says.

Johnson offers examples.

“They can write notes, or kudos to each other, such as ‘Thank you for taking such good care of so-and-so,’ or, ‘Thank you for staying late’—whatever that may be,” he says.

In addition, “family members can write notes to staff also, which I think is very important,” Williams adds. “Because staff doesn’t hear often from families, and so when a family member writes something about you, I think you take great pride in that.”

Another benefit to Marjorie P. Lee’s staff participating in the research was that Williams says it allowed them to “really take the time and step back and look at best practices.” ■

# ECH Master Plan is Completed

By Mike Rutledge

**E**piscopal Church Home (ECH) finished implementing its Master Plan in 2023, a significant step that made care for residents of the retirement campus even more person-centered.

The Master Plan positioned the Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), which includes patio homes for older adults who live independently, for success well into the future.

As a CCRC, it also offers all levels of care, including skilled nursing, long-term care, personal care, and memory-support personal care.

**Campus includes all levels of care, plus completely independent living**

The 22-acre campus in Louisville's suburban Graymoor-Devondale area underwent a significant transformation after carefully evaluating the needs and desires of the latest generations of older adults and their families.

The \$20 million in Master Plan upgrades included 25 completely modern Dudley Square III patio homes, which joined 62 existing patio homes on the 143-year-old campus. The last of the 25 new patio



Episcopal Church Home's popular Dudley Square neighborhood expanded, adding 25 new patio homes for seniors living independently in a retirement community setting.





Episcopal Church Home's two memory care neighborhoods offer common living rooms, family style kitchens, and dining rooms.

homes was occupied in July.

Beverly Edwards, Episcopal Retirement Services' Vice President of Residential Healthcare, says the upgrades' most significant outcome is the increased holistic care to nursing home residents.

"In addition to the absolutely beautiful aesthetics of our community, the most meaningful change is how we care for our residents," Edwards says.

### **Very person-centered care**

Accompanying the creation of attractive apartments for nursing home residents was the change in how ECH team members care for residents. The addition of 'versatile workers'—individuals who provide not only nursing for their residents, but also housekeeping, daily enrichment activities, and serving of meals—has increased the quality and depth of relationships between team members and residents,





Grille 75 serves the entire Episcopal Church Home campus, providing tasty yet nutritious food.

Edwards says.

“Having staff provide care for a smaller number of residents while meeting their care needs allows them to spend time with one another and develop meaningful relationships,” she adds.

“For over 140 years, our residents have received outstanding care and services,” Edwards says. “The Master Plan has allowed us to continue our tradition of offering excellent care and services to those we

currently serve and those we will serve in the future.”

#### **Hospitable adjustments**

ERS President and CEO Laura Lamb says the Master Plan analysis was challenging work that allowed significant steps forward for the ECH campus as it is affiliated with the rest of the ERS organization. “It is magnificent because Episcopal Church Home had not master-planned like our other communities



have, so it's really their first Master Plan, which makes it momentous in the history of ECH and ERS, for that matter."

She listed three advances under the plan:

- A certain number of independent-living residents is needed to support a CCRC campus, and adding patio homes brought ECH to that level.

- The campus now has a state-of-the-art neighborhood for those needing assistance with daily activities, with comfortable, apartment-style living for Personal Care services in Lyndon House.

- ECH now has an appropriate amount of skilled nursing care for cognitively impaired residents, as well as those who aren't.

Lamb thanked ECH team members and other professionals who made the transformation happen.

"It wasn't easy work, but thanks to the board of Episcopal Church Home, and thanks to our [ERS] board, and the committees that worked on it, they created a bold vision that will allow ECH to be sustainable long into the future," Lamb says.

Meanwhile, Edwards thanked the Greater Louisville community for voting ECH the Best Nursing Home in The Courier-Journal's 'Official Community's Choice Awards.'

"We are honored to receive such a prestigious distinction. ECH has been providing outstanding care and services to our community for over 140 years," Edwards says. "We look forward to continuing to offer excellent care and services to community members well into the future." ■



Photograph by Gary Kessler

Lyndon House, the Personal Care household at Episcopal Church Home, offers beautiful living spaces at the premier retirement community.

# ERS' Center for Memory Support and Inclusion Created More Fun Dementia Programs in 2023



Participants enjoy nurturing the mind activities with Director of Center for Memory Support and Inclusion, Shannon Braun at the Civic and Garden Center.

**E**piscopal Retirement Services' Center for Memory Support and Inclusion had another year of significant expansion during 2023.

The center built upon prior successes of its **With Art in Mind** program at the **Contemporary Arts Center** and **Cincinnati Art Museum**, by adding the **Taft Museum of Art** and the **American Sign Museum** in 2023.

Another fun program, **Dancing to Remember** at **A-Marika Dance Company** in Sharonville, continued in 2023 as well.

With each offering, people who are living with dementia and their care partners attend fun programs that are free. Both those who are living with dementia

and their care partners learn about new things at each event, such as art or dance steps.

Also added in 2023 were:

- **The Wild About Minds** program at the **Cincinnati Zoo**, where participants saw animals up close, and enjoyed a tour of the zoo, led by volunteer guides and zoo staff.

- **Nurturing the Mind**, at the **Civic Garden Center of Greater Cincinnati**, a six-week program where participants learn about plants and trees from six areas of the planet and partake in activities, such as planting. Each of six sessions covers plants from a different part of the world—North America, Central and South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific.



**A big dementia-inclusion benefit: Training of staff**

Before each program launches, Shannon Braun, Center for Memory Support and Inclusion's Director, trains staff and docents at each location. They learn successful techniques that help them communicate with people who are living with dementia. One approach is to join in with their reality, rather than contradicting what they say.

"Everyone seemed to really enjoy themselves," Braun says about the Civic Garden Center program. "We learned a lot about different parts of the world, and what plants naturally grow there. And then we had an opportunity to get our hands dirty and plant seeds from the region we learned about."

Braun says the garden center visits offered opportunities to learn new things.

"And there was a lot of interaction—a lot of questions, a lot of interest in the plants—and we cover a different part of the world every time we go," Braun says.

As for Wild About Minds, "I think everyone feels the energy of the zoo," she says. "It's a positive, uplifting, and fun experience. Even being around the young children who are there is fun. And the staff and volunteers at the zoo are so welcoming, so caring, and really able to meet the needs of our people who join."

Sara Birkofer, the Cincinnati Art Museum's Assistant Director of Gallery and Accessibility Programs, says that the docents at the Cincinnati Art Museum enjoy working with individuals with dementia because they're "able to have really open-ended conversations" with them.

"Any training we can provide to our staff to welcome people with different abilities is going to help us be able to welcome them better," Birkofer says. "What's really important about that is that it is developing that empathy and highlighting that everybody deserves to be at the museum, but some people just need different accommodations."

**Support Groups and other help**

Braun also continued to train Cincinnati police officers about people with Alzheimer's and dementia because sometimes they can act in unpredictable ways that can create safety concerns. In situations where the person's mental state hinders their ability

to follow instructions, officers might perceive it as intentional disobedience.

Braun trains staff at ERS' three premier retirement communities, Marjorie P. Lee and Deupree House in Cincinnati's Hyde Park neighborhood, and the Episcopal Church Home in Louisville, KY.

She also works with staff in ERS' 30+ affordable living communities in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.

The CMSI's newly updated website, which provides information about the various free programs, support groups, and other resources, can be found at [TheERScenter.org](http://TheERScenter.org). It also has blogs, videos, tip sheets, and more about Alzheimer's disease and dementia for care partners and loved ones. Please tell a friend or family member who can be helped by it. ■



There are many hands-on activities to enjoy during programs for those living with Dementia and their care partners.

# ERS Launches ‘Well Being’ Program and Study with Xavier



Residents, staff, and partners come together to kick-off the ERS Well Being program at St. Paul Village.

**A**ffordable Living by Episcopal Retirement Services has launched a five-year study with Xavier University to determine the best ways to encourage older adults to adopt healthy habits.

The program aims to help older adults live healthier and more joyful lives. Ultimately, organizers hope it will help residents not only on ERS campuses, but also in affordable living communities across the United States.

“I want residents who live with us to live longer, healthier, and live happier,” says Jimmy Wilson, ERS’ Vice President for Affordable Living.

While ERS for years has focused on providing quality programs, activities, and exercise opportunities for residents in more than 30 Affordable Living communities in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana for years, the ‘Well Being’ program will take that to another level.

Well Being was launched Nov. 17 at ERS’ St. Paul Village community in Cincinnati’s Madisonville neighborhood.

## Inspiring better health

Affordable Living by ERS used to have a program in which ‘Bee Bucks’ were paid to residents as encouragement to do things such as exercise classes, or have their blood pressure checked, says Wilson.

Residents could use their Bee Bucks to buy things like dish soap, hand soap, air fresheners, and other things they could use in their apartments.

“We’re bringing the Bee Bucks back,” said Wilson.

But under the expanded program, the Bee Bucks will be awarded for various things—even for simpler things, such as leaving their apartments, which is healthy for them. Bee Bucks will be provided if they attend activities, if they perform volunteer work, attend a Bible study, or do other things that stimulate their minds and help keep them engaged with neighbors—yet another healthy thing for older adults.

“We want to support both residents and team members in their journey to be in well—physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, all facets,” Wilson says.



### Xavier's research project

Victor Ronis-Tobin, Ph.D., director of Xavier's Center for Population Health, is leading a team that will study the success of the new program at St. Paul Village and compare that with another Affordable Living by ERS community where Bee Bucks are not used to see differences in participation levels.

That will be the program's first year. In the following four years, Ronis-Tobin and his team will measure the impact of increased engagement on St. Paul Village residents' health.

Based on residents' input, the team has been buying Bee Bucks products that will be good incentives for them, even things they can use to decorate their apartment doors, as well as wellness items, sponges, scrub brushes, and gift bags that they can choose from a three-level cart.

The residents are really excited about it, and they like being able to purchase things. Even in some Affordable Living communities that aren't part of the study, residents can use Bee Bucks.

The \$1.1 million program was launched with a \$500,000 gift from Linda and David Stetson, who are strong proponents of health and wellness.

ERS continues to seek additional funding for the

program. To contribute, people interested in helping transform the lives older adults in our Affordable Living communities can contact ERS Executive Director of Philanthropy Joy Blang at 513-979-2313.

### Bigger than ERS alone

"We believe this is an under-studied, under-examined area," and that Xavier's research "will benefit the entire industry," Wilson says. "We hope some research papers will come out of this that will impact the field, not just across the ERS portfolio, but across the entire affordable housing landscape across the country."

Wilson says he believes two major factors will create success—the addition of a new Affordable Living Wellness Manager, who will be leading the project for ERS; and Ronis-Tobin's team of faculty and students, because of "their interest, their passion, and their skills to help us."

Ronis-Tobin, meanwhile, called the research and wellness program "testimony to ERS, that they are partnering with somebody like us to innovate, and do it in a data-driven way. And it's a credit to the donors who are supporting that." ■





# ERS Recognizes the 2023 Martindell Award Winner

By Sarah McCosham



JoAnne Lacey, Activities Coordinator at St. Paul Village, is awarded the Martindell Award.

Oftentimes, those who work the hardest do so without praise or recognition. When her father was living at Deupree Health Center (a previously owned nursing home) in Hyde Park, Trish Martindell was blown away by the staff's level of care and commitment, and saw how small actions could affect lasting change.

Joan Wetzel, ERS' Vice President of Human Resources, explains that the Martindell Award was born out of a family's positive experiences in an ERS community where their loved one lived. "It was our team member's expertise and compassionate care that stood out and inspired them to create this award," says Wetzel. "[The family's] goal was to recognize

and provide a financial award to exceptional staff—unsung heroes who provide direct care to older adults served by ERS."

The Martindell Award is a special award granted each year to a deserving ERS team member who exemplifies excellence in caregiving and strives to care for our residents in special and meaningful ways, allowing them to live life on their own terms. Staff are nominated by coworkers and family members, with hundreds of nominations pouring in each year. To be nominated is an achievement, and the number of nominations for this award speaks volumes about the kind of people who work at ERS. This year, the response was amazing. Therefore, it was a



challenging process to pick a winner from so many deserving nominees. The Martindell family studied each nomination carefully and chose our winner for 2023. It was with great honor that JoAnne Lacey, Affordable Living Activities Coordinator at St. Paul Village in Cincinnati, was chosen as the recipient of the 2023 Martindell Award. JoAnne has been with ERS for 11 years. Some of the sentiments shared in JoAnne's nominations include:

"JoAnne is the nicest person. Treats everyone with respect. She is kind to everyone and cares for everyone with sincerity."

"JoAnne works tirelessly, and so very dedicated in providing various activities for those who reside here

at St. Paul Village. She is genuine in her concern for the seniors here, and I believe that she displays her love for us every day that she's with us."

"JoAnne considers her work a ministry of God's love to our residents."

"JoAnne consistently goes above and beyond expectations. Our residents look forward to working with JoAnne and enjoy spending time at activities with her. She genuinely loves the residents and her job."

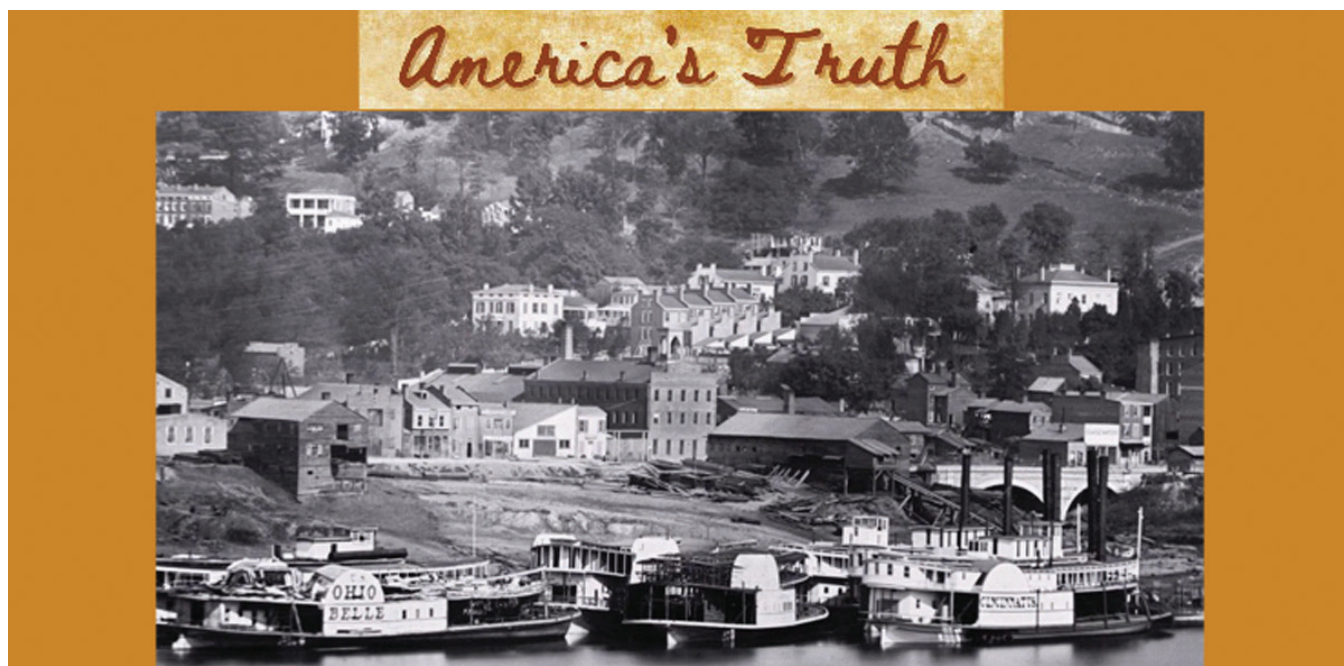
Kim Martindell personally presented the award and a monetary gift to JoAnne. "Congratulations to JoAnne. We thank her for exemplary person-centered values and dedication to our mission." ■





# Keeping Score on Progress

The We Can Do Better Scorecard allows ERS to track progress supporting our Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC) team members. *By Sarah McCosham*



As 2020 wore on, the tragic and senseless murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor left people feeling unbelievably sad and powerless, and wanting to do something—*anything*—to help.

Episcopal Retirement Services actually *did* something—something big, bold, and brave.

The ‘We Can Do Better’ initiative was created, and all ERS employees were invited to share their experiences with racism (systemic and otherwise) and other forms of bias, both professionally and personally.

ERS also created the We Can Do Better Scorecard, which measures everything from hiring and professional opportunities for staff to how the organization awards promotions, scholarships, and even appoints board members.

The most recent scorecard found turnover of BIPOC employees was lower than the overall rate—

8.8 percent turnover, compared to a higher company-wide of 16 percent.

ERS also recruited staff from 32 under-represented sources, an increase from 6 a year earlier.

“We Can Do Better looks at numbers, at data,” says President & CEO Laura Lamb, adding that concrete numbers provide objective benchmarks of how ERS is supporting its team members and fostering an environment of trust and respect.

Vice President of Residential Healthcare Beverly Edwards adds that ERS has been “intentional” in advancing the conversation about disparities experienced by BIPOC people. “[ERS] has created a safe space for BIPOC individuals to share their experiences to educate and enlighten others.”

“Working for a company that is conscientious and cares to educate and support team members of all ethnicities, races, cultural backgrounds, and creeds is comforting,” Edwards says.



As part of We Can Do Better, ERS screened “America’s Truth,” a documentary produced by George Washington University that highlights racial inequalities in America, with Cincinnati specifics. That brought residents, staff, and community members to the table to watch, listen, and discuss.

ERS also created the Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund, honoring the late team member it’s named for, by providing financial support to BIPOC employees beyond what traditional scholarships and grants cover, to help honorees improve their lives. “It’s beyond a traditional ‘scholarship’ in that the fund can be used to cover repairs if, say, a staff member’s car breaks down and they can’t drive to work,” says Lamb.

ERS BIPOC staff can apply annually for funding and other support to help address personal,

professional, and educational barriers to success and empower them to fulfill their potential. Two winners of the scholarship have been announced so far to help individuals advance their careers. Over \$400,000 has been raised so far.

Other efforts include increasing the number of affinity groups from 1 to 3. ERS now has a Young Professionals Group, a Women in Leadership group, and a BIPOC Affinity Group. The company also offered the opportunity add pronouns and pronunciation software to its email signatures.

“I’m constantly reminded that you can only manage what you measure,” says Lamb, who in 2021 started the scorecard that charts the program’s progress. While ERS continues to make strides, there is always, Lamb says, room to do better. The latest scorecard is at <https://erslife.info/3RrAN2v>. ■



**WE  
CAN  
DO  
BETTER**

**ERS**  
Episcopal Retirement Services

Lauren Brown  
Empowerment Fund

# A Good Time and a Good Cause

Gatherings for Good offers a fun night out—and underscores the ERS mission of caring for the whole person. *By Sarah McCosham*

As a not-for-profit, ERS relies on grants, fundraising campaigns, and the generosity of donors. Prior to 2020, that meant the annual gala was a major fundraiser and sort of black-tie affair folks marked on their calendars. The pandemic put a wrench in this kind of fundraiser, and ERS pivoted in kind. Instead of one big gala, there are now three “Gathering for Good” events throughout the year. “Across all three events, we raise \$300,000—about a third of annual fund gifts—making these fundraisers incredibly important,” explains Joy Blang, Executive Director of Philanthropy. Having three events keeps the guest lists small, between 100 and 125 people each, which allows for an intimacy that’s part of ERS’ core values. “ERS is a person-centered organization—that’s in our mission—and these [smaller] events allow us to be more personal and intentional with our guests and planning,” explains Blang. “We pick a venue and develop a theme to showcase part of the mission. ‘A Night at the Improv’ was held at the Carnegie Center—this place was originally a library, a space that encourages continued learning and growth.”

A Night at the Improv did more than entertain. It also celebrated the innovative, person-centered, “yes, and” approach ERS takes to train staff and educate families with a loved one with dementia. The event was hosted by Rodger Pille, Executive Director with Cincinnati Landmark Production, whom ERS CEO Laura Lamb met in a Leadership Cincinnati program many years ago. “The class was about how to take the principles of improv and bring them into the real world, and Laura got this idea to bring improv training to our staff, focusing on innovative work and growing,” explains Blang.

“Then there came a point—an ah-ha moment—that improv might be a great way to interact with people with dementia,” says Blang. “You will never win an argument with a person with dementia. Their



ERS' Elise Hyder performs for guests at the Music Through the Ages program this past September.

reality is fundamentally different from yours.” Blang adds that, if you can “get into the reality of the person with dementia and reassure them that they’re right and you understand them, they have a feeling of being heard and understood. This opens up a way to redirect/work through challenges.”

A Night at the Improv not only put on a fun show, but highlighted the kind of person-centered, innovative, out-of-the-box culture at ERS. “Creating more positive experiences with family members is at the heart of what we’re doing,” says Blang. ■



# Christ Church Cathedral Empowers Change with Generous Support for Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund

In a remarkable display of commitment to community and justice, Christ Church Cathedral has taken center stage in supporting Episcopal Retirement Services' (ERS) vital campaign—the Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund. As a lead sponsor, the Cathedral has not only contributed \$20,000 as the Supporting Sponsor of the Gatherings for Good Gala Series but has also pledged an additional \$100,000 toward the Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund.

This noteworthy donation brings ERS within \$100,000 of its immediate fundraising goal of \$500,000. The long-term objective is even more ambitious—to build an endowed fund of at least \$1 million. The Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund aims to empower historically underrepresented BIPOC staff and their families within ERS to realize their full potential by providing financial support beyond what traditional scholarships and grants cover for educational opportunities.

On a recent visit to the Cathedral's website, the phrase “We... Show... Up” captured the essence of their commitment. The Cathedral's dedication is eloquently outlined, emphasizing their support for All People, Doing Justice, Spiritual Vitality, The Diocese, Our City, and The Arts. Notably, they also “show up” for Episcopal Retirement Services.

This signifies not only a partnership in financial support, but a shared commitment to the values that drive positive change. The Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund and ERS's overall mission to enrich the lives of older adults in a person-centered, innovative, and spiritually based way, aligns seamlessly with the Cathedral's mission to support causes that matter deeply to their community.

As we express our gratitude to Christ Church

Cathedral for their benevolence, it's evident that their support is more than financial—it's a manifestation of a shared vision for a community where everyone, regardless of background, can thrive. We eagerly anticipate the impact of the Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund and commend Christ Church Cathedral for championing empowerment and justice as well as supporting the older adults in the communities we both serve.

To learn more about the Lauren Brown Empowerment Fund, contact Executive Director of Philanthropy, Joy Blang, at [jblang@erslife.org](mailto:jblang@erslife.org). ■



The Very Reverend Owen C. Thompson of Christ Church Cathedral.

3870 Virginia Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45227-3427  
[www.EpiscopalRetirement.com](http://www.EpiscopalRetirement.com)



Episcopal Retirement Services Foundation  
3870 Virginia Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45227 [www.ersfoundation.org](http://www.ersfoundation.org)