

Fluvanna County

# A CHANCE TO CARE

## First compassionate care program in state offers inmates chance to care

By RUTH SERVEN SMITH

Jul 6, 2019



TROY — In the middle of a May night, Kelley Tibbs walked through the halls of the Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women to sit in the infirmary next to a dying woman.

Throughout the course of a four-hour shift in the cinderblock cell, Tibbs held the woman's hand and sang the hymn "Amazing Grace" and the praise song "In His Presence." The woman occasionally woke up, looked at Tibbs and smiled.

Tibbs herself has asked for a hospice program for a long time. She is serving a life sentence plus 20 years for her role in a brutal 1997 murder, in which she and three others beat and stabbed a Chesterfield County teenager. Tibbs knows she will eventually die in prison and, in caring for the dying, said she overcame some of her fear of death.

"People think nothing good can happen here," Tibbs said. "But we're still human, and we can help."



Throughout several days in May, Tibbs and seven other inmates were the first in a Virginia state prison to offer compassionate care to an inmate in hospice.

“I know that it’s going to be here — death, for me,” Tibbs said. “I want to make this program a success, because, whether it’s sooner or whether it’s later, it will be me dying here. And I don’t want to die alone.”

Virginia’s Department of Corrections runs state prison facilities. Each prison has its own medical staff, tasked with taking care of an older and older population. [According to a 2018 report](#) by the General Assembly’s Joint Commission on Healthcare, the population of people in prison ages 50 and older increased by 37% from 2010 to 2016.

“The facilities operated by the Department of Corrections are not suited for an elderly and often more sick population,” the report stated, citing close physical quarters, the difficulty of transporting people offsite for medical care and the cost and staffing necessary to adequately care for complex medical conditions.

Correctional and outside hospice staff are weighing the potential of training offenders to offer limited forms of compassionate care.

“I am looking at anything we can legally do,” said Eric Aldridge, the Troy prison’s warden. “It’s not if — but when — we get somebody again who needs hospice, we will continue doing this.”



In April, Melanie Mason, a social worker for the Hospice of the Piedmont, received a call from the Fluvanna prison, notifying her that a new inmate had previously received hospice care at a different facility and had requested hospice care at Fluvanna. The Hospice of the Piedmont provides end-of-life care and services to people within a geographic region, services that are often reimbursed by Medicare, Medicaid and insurance plans.

Mason’s coverage area includes Fluvanna County, so she began coordinating care efforts. The prison didn’t have trained medical staff who were available to sit by the woman’s bed 24/7, so Mason, hospice nurse Ruth Hurley and prison nurse manager Mikayla Osborne suggested asking other inmates to volunteer.

“This was a patient who didn’t have a strong family background and unfortunately had to do this process [of dying] by herself,” Osborne said in a phone interview. “When Melanie brought up giving compassionate care to the patient, it was an epiphany, and we rolled with it.”

With Aldridge’s approval, they asked the prison’s honor wing — a set of women who have a history of good behavior — if they wanted to participate, and inmates started “coming out of the woodwork,” Mason said.

Mason and Osborne interviewed the women, who said they had nursed friends and family through illness. They said they had missed loved ones’ last moments while they were in prison.

“I know it takes a special person to sit with someone in that type of experience,” said Dina Miller, recalling taking care of a brother who had hepatitis C and a father who had colon cancer. Miller is serving a 10-year, 12-month sentence for a 2015 drunk driving incident that left a man paralyzed.

“I felt it was an honor and a privilege to be trusted with someone like that,” said Wanda Turner, who is seven years into a 17-year, 18-month sentence for second-degree murder and credit card-related charges. “They have been pushing for this for a long time and it’s just by the grace of God that this administration volunteered to do it.”

It was then Mason realized, she said, that the program could work — with a little bit of training.

“That was the first time we realized that this was bigger than any of us had thought; because I came in nervous and anxious, and I came out a completely different person,” Mason said of the training. “I was finally able to start thinking of them as people, not inmates.”



The women began their shifts over Memorial Day weekend.

Turner went first. She sang, prayed, talked about her own family and changed linens. Before her shift ended, she noted the dying woman’s condition in a log, adding to a list of other observations from hospice volunteers at the Fluvanna Correctional Center.

The woman didn’t know any of the volunteers and couldn’t communicate anymore with them or with staff. They said they noticed her calm when someone was near, they said. She liked to be sung to, and she liked having her hair stroked.

“The nurses noticed that change, of having someone there to be a comfort,” Osbourne said.

After several days, Mason said, she could tell the program was helping reduce the woman’s pain. The additional care gave hospice staff time to order a hospital bed and get it through security.

“There’s always one last thing that someone needs before they can go,” Mason said. “They sang to her, they stroked her hair, they held her hand. And even though she couldn’t talk back, she knew everyone was there. And then she got her bed. Sometimes that’s all you need to do — set it up so they can go.”

Miller remembered holding the woman’s hand and telling her about her own children. She was there when the woman died, early in the morning. It was peaceful, Miller said.

“I felt like I was being there for her mother and her grandmother, and was able to give her the comfort they would want her to have,” Miller said. “I didn’t know who she was, but she was somebody’s child. She deserved that care and attention.”



Compassionate care and hospice programs are being implemented in prisons across the country.

Compassionate care, according to Tim Cunningham, an assistant professor of nursing at the University of Virginia, can be effective in any environment, but particularly in places that can be stressful and isolating, such as prison.

"You don't have to be a licensed care provider to offer compassionate care," Cunningham said. "And there is research that suggests that when a family member or colleague or someone who is known to the patient sits and just holds their hand, that has better results and leads to decreased stress, decreased anxiety and other improvements."

A specific program can also have far-reaching effects, Cunningham noted, on the well-being and empathy of people directly and indirectly connected to a project, whether it is prison guards or doctors or politicians.

In an interview also attended by prison and department staff, the inmates said the effort made them more trusting of prison officials, guards and medical staff.

“I just had another perspective of the nurses after doing this, I had way more respect for them,” Turner said. “I thought they were all lazy, but when we were in there they were always on their feet and checking on us. They just gave this lady so much care and concern.”

The project comes in the midst of ongoing legal complaints by other inmates, alleging poor medical care at the prison.

After a lawsuit, a 2016 settlement agreement required the prison to increase staffing, add equipment, change procedures and provide more timely chronic, emergency and preventative care. It also required palliative care and voluntary hospice care for terminal patients, an effort that Shannon Ellis, an attorney with Legal Aid Justice Center who has worked on the case, said “has not been speedy.”

In January, Judge Norman K. Moon ruled the Department of Corrections [had not lived up to parts of the agreement](#). The failures had led to several more preventable deaths at Fluvanna, Moon wrote, and he ordered the prison to increase staffing and add medical supplies.

The center filed an emergency motion in April, alleging repeated and life-threatening mismanagement of an inmate’s medication. In a response, the defendants argued the inmate had not been in danger of immediate harm and had received adequate treatment.

Officials stated categorically that the recent compassionate care effort was not in response to the lawsuit.

“No lawsuit tells me how I should treat another human being,” Aldridge said.

The project came amid a suite of other efforts to improve inmates’ overall well-being, Aldridge said, including an effort to allow women to send breast milk to their babies after they give birth in prison.

“Since I’ve been here, I’ve been trying to bring in a culture of responsiveness and to make sure every person feels valued and knows who they are,” he said.

Aldridge said he, hospice staff and other correctional staff have drafted a policy to implement a compassionate care program permanently, and they have formed a working group to look at ways to expand the project further.



The inmate volunteers helped plan the woman’s memorial service.

“Nobody wants to not have a memorial service or a funeral,” Tibbs said. “I feel like it gave us closure, and I hope it gave her family closure.”

A hand-painted cloth covered a table. Inmates turned colored paper into flowers. As they approached a podium to read a poem or sing, they dropped their flowers into a memorial pile.

“Society has such a stigmatized view of death,” Mason said. “But even death should be viewed as a birth. Every funeral service is like a wedding. Death should be celebrated and honored. It’s sad, but it’s special. And these women maybe have a better view of that than people on the outside.”

Normally, the inmates said, only a few people attend a service when an inmate dies, but this time, the room was full of people who knew about and had helped with the effort.

“It’s important to let people know she was of value, not just another person in the system or a number,” Miller said.

Tibbs said she hoped the program would become a standing effort at the prison and across the state, offering a chance to give back and a promise of a peaceful death.

“Some of us here, we try to change our life around,” she said. “There are people that have changed their lives and are trying to give back to their community, whether in here or out there.”

# Finding segregated UVa Hospital's 'hidden nurses'

- BY RUTH SERVEN SMITH Mar 9, 2019



LouElla Jackson (center), now LouElla Walker, graduated from the University of Virginia and Jackson P. Burley High School's nurse diploma program in 1958. The program was one of a few ways in the state for black women to become credentialed nurses before four-year degree programs were desegregated.  
Submitted photo

When LouElla Walker was in 11th grade, the head of the University of Virginia nursing school visited Burley High School and asked the African-American students present to consider becoming nurses.

Walker, who had thought her options after high school were limited to nannying, cooking or cleaning, was interested. She went home to rural Albemarle County and asked her mother to help her fill out an application to begin the program in the fall of 1957.

"I told her that I did not want to spend the rest of my life in someone's kitchen," Walker, now 81, said of deciding to embark on what would end up being a 50-year career in nursing. "I knew my family couldn't send me to college, and I thought this was a good way to have a job and a profession."

At the time, the UVa School of Nursing, like most educational outlets in Virginia, was segregated, and there were few avenues for African-Americans to become nurses. One way, though, was the joint program between Burley and UVa that allowed about 100 African-American women — and a few men — to become credentialed in the days before schools and hospitals were fully integrated.

The nurses were never allowed inside UVa's nursing school and were never acknowledged as UVa alumni. Now, a UVa research project is trying to find "hidden nurses," like Walker, and give them proper recognition.

“There is a reason, a time and a season for everything,” said Walker, who has helped to contact fellow graduates and invite them to an April celebration at UVa. “It’s about time.”

\* \* \*

The history of black female nurses and nursing students does not start with credentialing; it stretches back to slavery and beyond, according to UVa historians and students working on the project.

“Black women and black female nurses were central figures in establishing the American health care infrastructure,” said Tori Tucker, a doctoral student at UVa who has studied nursing history since interviewing Mavis Claytor in 2015. Claytor, who graduated from UVa in 1970, was the first black student to attend UVa’s nursing school.

Tucker has since interviewed pioneering African-American nurses across the state, some of whom attended segregated or racially quota-restricted diploma programs and some of whom received four-year and graduate degrees during desegregation.

Some of the nurses, mainly women, were drawn to the profession to escape life on tobacco farms, while others thought it was a natural fit after helping a sick relative, Tucker said. Some thought nursing was a stable, respected profession. Others thought it was a rebellious choice for a single woman to make.

When they began studying and working, many entered classrooms, wards and clinics as the only black nurse or one of few black nurses present. They were often given the hardest and most challenging work in the hospital.

“These nurses are at the intersection of what it meant to be black and to be a woman in Virginia,” Tucker said.

Burley’s program was developed to fight a shortage of qualified nurses after World War II, according to Barbra Mann Wall, a professor of nursing at UVa and director of the Eleanor Crowder Bjoring Center for Nursing Historical Inquiry. In the 1950s, UVa only accepted and trained white nurses, but the UVa Hospital needed both black and white nurses to staff its segregated wards.

Roy Carpenter Beazley, director of what was then known as the Department of Nursing, proposed the Burley program, modeled after successful programs in Richmond, Roanoke and Norfolk.

Burley’s 13-month program, which ran roughly from 1952 to 1966, quickly taught recent high school graduates the basics of nursing. Students took classes during their senior year of high school and then completed practical training at UVa Hospital. The graduates were some of the first black nurses at the hospital, working first in segregated wards in the dank basement, and eventually caring for white patients, as well.

“This was a great opportunity; they knew they were not going to be able to go to college, and they used their work as nurses as a source of pride and a means of identity,” Wall said. “But they sensed the exclusion, too.”

In 1960, after a lawsuit from African-American employees demanded desegregation and better working conditions, the hospital slowly began to integrate. Walker and other nurses helped to slowly mix the black and white patients, often enduring abuse from people who did not want to be in an integrated ward or room.

“So we would say, OK, not today, and move someone else,” Walker said. “It was a process.”

\* \* \*

The Burley program eventually closed because it was no longer needed in a desegregated environment, Wall suggested. By then, black students could enroll in UVa's four-year degree program.

"By [1966], they should have been eligible to get into the School of Nursing, but it was still problematic," she said. "And an LPN from Roanoke, Mavis Claytor, did enroll. Thereafter, there were clusters of African-American students in the [registered nurse] program."

As UVa gradually became integrated and coeducational, the photos and stories of the first licensed practical nursing students faded. Archivists simply hadn't documented their presence extensively, or they had filed the relevant documents away instead of placing them in display boxes or books.

Wall said she started looking at the archives and realized the nursing school's official history and nearly all displayed artifacts featured white women. Stories and photos of the black nursing students sometimes cropped up, Wall said, but researchers knew there were many more students who were not visible.

"They're invisible, but they're not gone. They were there, just not written about," she said. "We started looking at our own archives and they're all white, except for these LPNs."

Wall and Tucker decided to embark on a project, supported by The Jefferson Trust, to diversify the archives and celebrate Burley's LPN graduates.

"If we really want to improve health and our practice, history needs to be a part of our profession," said Tucker, whose dissertation work focuses on the history of black nurses and nursing students in Virginia from the 1950s to 1980s. "We want to ensure these nurses are not forgotten. These are our mentors, our heroes, our community members, and we have a duty to ensure that we remember them and honor them."

The school will hold a graduation ceremony for the LPN students who were never allowed to walk through the doors of the nursing school at 1:30 p.m. April 6 at UVa's McLeod Hall auditorium. Researchers will conduct interviews to gather oral histories of former students and preserve their memories. Wall said she hopes to eventually display their photos and documents prominently around the school.

"It's not just about a black face on the wall; it's about diversifying faces around where our students walk and see, and it's about adding in black, Hispanic, LGBT and men in nursing," she said. "We've only had a partial history. It's incomplete. There are stories we still need to get."

\* \* \*

Walker worked as an LPN at UVa for 50 years, meeting her husband and many of her friends while working there, she said. She depended on a love of people and her faith to carry her through tough days. She retired in 2010 from a position at the Emily Couric Cancer Center.

In the past few months, Walker has called many of her fellow graduates — she estimates roughly 30 of them — and told them about UVa's project and upcoming ceremony. She said she hopes those who are elderly or ill will be able to make it to the event. There's a lot to talk about. There's a lot UVa needs to hear about, she said.

"With all this mess in Charlottesville, there couldn't be a better time to do it," she said. "There have always been good things here, but we miss them when we just focus on the bad. Blacks have played a beautiful role at UVa, going on back more than 50 years. This is the time to recognize it."



---

*UVa archives are incomplete and researchers are still working to identify, find and contact graduates of Burley's program. Do you know a graduate of Burley's program or a family member of a graduate that researchers should contact? Names of graduates and/or family members of the deceased can be emailed to Tori Tucker at [vnt2r@virginia.edu](mailto:vnt2r@virginia.edu). Please include your name in the message with the graduates' name, address and phone number if applicable.*

*All are welcome to a community program on Saturday April 6 at 1:30 p.m. for a community program honoring the graduates of Burley's Licensed Practical Nursing Program in the UVa School of Nursing's McLeod Auditorium. The program is open to the public. Graduates and family members of graduates may also RSVP for a luncheon by contacting Tori Tucker or UVa's Nursing History Center at (434) 924-0083.*

*Interested in sharing your narrative? Researchers will begin gathering oral histories from Black Nurses that studied, applied, and/or worked in Virginia between 1950 and the 1980s on April 5. Email Tori Tucker or call UVa's Nursing History Center at (434) 924-0083 to learn more details.*

# UVa begins project to identify, contact descendants of slaves

• By RUTH SERVEN SMITH

Jul 18, 2019



ZACK WAJSGRAS/THE DAILY PROGRESS

A student walks past the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers construction site at the University of Virginia on Thursday. The university is beginning a search for relatives of slaves who constructed and worked at the school.

ZACK WAJSGRAS/THE DAILY PROGRESS

Handprints are visible in some of the University of Virginia's oldest bricks. Underneath attic stairs, chalk letters are found, faint traces of an illicit education. Bones in small cemeteries have been found in several locations.

For six years, the University of Virginia [has made a sustained effort to learn more](#) about the enslaved people who lived and worked at the university during its building and founding. But until this month, it had not made a large-scale attempt to identify living relatives of those people.

“Especially the people that only had a little bit of oral history about their ancestors, they might know their ancestors were enslaved but nothing else,” said Shelley Murphy, a genealogist hired by UVa to identify and contact descendants. “But it’s important to know your ancestors and be able to tell their stories, especially now. This country has still not reckoned with its history of slavery.”

In 2013, UVa began a comprehensive research project that examined letters, documents and records of the early university. Eventually, researchers determined that an estimated 4,000 enslaved people lived and worked at the university from 1817 through 1865.

The slaves were not owned by the university itself, but were rented out from other plantations, or owned by professors. They lived in building basements and in shacks in the yards that are now university gardens. They ran student housing, cooked meals, tended pastures and laid bricks. They also were beaten, raped, force-marched and chained, [according to a 2018 report](#).

Those activities, Murphy said, often left a trace. Even if she just has a person's name, such as "Sam the Carpenter," she can find that person's owner and then look for the person and hope they make an appearance in letters, census records and, after Emancipation, Freedman's Bureau and marriage and land records.

UVa gave her a list of people to search for; she hasn't counted the number. Instead, she took a series of names, some from one bookend of university records in 1818, and some from 1865, and began working inward. She also began posting names on a Facebook page, "Finding the Enslaved Laborers at UVa," in hopes that descendants and researchers will see a name they recognize.

She already has had some success in connecting distant family members; three members of one family worked at UVa, and she has now been able to connect distant cousins from different branches, she said.

"It's good work and it's really fulfilling," she said.

Twenty-five years ago, the two institutions most connected with Thomas Jefferson — Monticello and UVa — rarely acknowledged their ties to slavery, including that Jefferson, as [widely acknowledged by historians](#), fathered children with his slave Sally Hemings.

In 1993, Monticello's [Getting Word](#) oral history project changed all that and reshaped the public understanding of Jefferson, his family and his plantation.

As Monticello has become more forceful about discussing slavery, so, too, has UVa, largely prompted by students.

The school has introduced more education about the practice of slavery and about the African Americans enslaved on Grounds. Officials expect the descendants project will further shift how the public perceives Jefferson's university.

"How could it not?" said Louis Nelson, a professor of architectural history and UVa's vice president of academic outreach. "It would force a public conversation about the reality of the University of Virginia as a landscape of slavery."

UVa often has relied on Getting Word's work, and has asked descendants of people enslaved by Jefferson to speak at events. But while some Monticello slaves were hired out to work at UVa or were bought by professors after Jefferson's death, there were a vast number of other people involved in building UVa. Many moved on, but researchers believe many remained in Central Virginia, at least for a time.

UVa's program won't try to replicate existing work, but will share archives and information and rely on the expertise of historians and scholars such as Niya Bates, Monticello's director of African American history and the Getting Word project.

"It can be really easy to think of slavery as a monolith," Bates said. "But the benefit of engaging descendants, especially in an oral history project, is so that you can add back the human component."

More than a dozen universities — led by UVa, Brown University and Georgetown University — have recognized their ties to the slave trade and have formed a consortium to study and discuss its still-echoing effects. But moving from an apology to reconciliation with living people has proved much slower.

UVa and the College of William & Mary have decided to build monuments to enslaved people, and UVa's Alumni Association offers the Sonja Hoel Perkins Scholarship, which benefits the descendants of slaves. Georgetown students backed a referendum in April to help descendants of enslaved people sold in 1838 to pay off the school's debts. Other schools have tried to strengthen ties to historically black universities.

But as UVa solidified plans to build and dedicate the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers, Nelson said, it became clear that the university also should start a descendants project.

UVa officials said Thursday that they weren't sure whether UVa's project would lead to monetary benefits for descendants or continue more intangible efforts at repair. The 4th Circuit federal courts, for one, bar universities from offering publicly funded scholarships based on race.

UVa, said Kirt von Daacke, assistant dean of history and co-chair of the university's commissions on slavery and segregation, will have to decide how to shape its efforts around a working research university and make them effective in a city that is asking for more engagement.

"UVa is a historic site like Monticello and Montpelier, but we're also a living, breathing university with 25,000 people," von Daacke said. "A university is able to commit resources to the local and regional community, but what exactly that will look like I don't know."

For now, Murphy is deep into records and genealogy databases. She says she will continue working her way through until UVa tells her to stop, though she has a goal of contacting descendants in time for them to attend a private ceremony at the UVa memorial in November.

"African American research has its challenges, but it doesn't mean people aren't finding their ancestors. There are successes every day," Murphy said. "We're still here and we're standing on their shoulders."

For more information about the project, email Murphy at [shelleyviola@gmail.com](mailto:shelleyviola@gmail.com).