

## Notes from Dawn

A new story is beginning in Veriditas and it started with the pandemic. We learned that offering workshops and trainings online expanded our reach. We were serving people from more states across the US and more countries around the globe. Some folks were choosing to be online with us in the middle of the night. All of a sudden, we were training more facilitators to carry the labyrinth to settings and countries where it hasn't been before.

Another part of the new story has been the Free Friday Virtual Finger Labyrinth Walks. A lovely caring community has formed in these past four years of weekly gatherings. While staff provide the Zoom support, these sessions are led by volunteers from our faculty, our council, our Advanced Trained Facilitators and accredited presenters. Community has always been an important part of Veriditas, but the weekly gatherings have been strengthening for our overall sense of community.

Another flourishing part of the new story is the strengthening of our partnerships – with The Labyrinth Society for World Labyrinth Day, with the Legacy Labyrinth Project for the Big Connection research, with the Australian Labyrinth Network and the launching of four trainers

offering Veriditas Qualifying Workshops and Facilitator Training in person in Australia, and with the Hong Kong Labyrinth Network where workshops and trainings are offered in Cantonese twice a year. And a new way of working together with Grace Cathedral in San Francisco where Lauren Artress first introduced the labyrinth, is in the works.

New programming is coming. We are reissuing last year's Direct from Chartres with the addition of three live sessions "reimagining pilgrimage" for our times. A storytelling workshop over three mornings will underscore the importance of story in all parts of our lives. And Reenchanted the Imagination will be offered in California, as it has been offered in Chartres.

Our two initiatives are growing. Labyrinths in Higher Education just offered an amazingly rich webinar on creative ways of weaving the labyrinth into college and university life (available on our Higher Ed web page). The Inclusion Initiative is currently exploring starting Affinity Groups for support and a way of collecting feedback from various minority groups. Let us know if you are interested in participating.

And, the focus and activity of our Board through the formation of a number of committees organizing



*Dawn Matheny, Executive Director of Veriditas  
with her beloved Henri*

the work and involving more folks in "rowing the boat" together (using our Board chair's metaphor).

So we see our circles expanding. We see a new story taking hold. And, we are ever so grateful.

***“Our good intentions matter, our daily acts of kindness and compassion matter, love will always be the greater power.”***

—Carrie Newcomer

## Mission and Vision

Veriditas is dedicated to inspiring personal and planetary change and renewal through the labyrinth experience.

Our Vision is that the labyrinth experience guides us in developing the higher level of human awareness we need to thrive in the 21st century.

# What's the Board Up To?

By Twylla Alexander, Board Chair

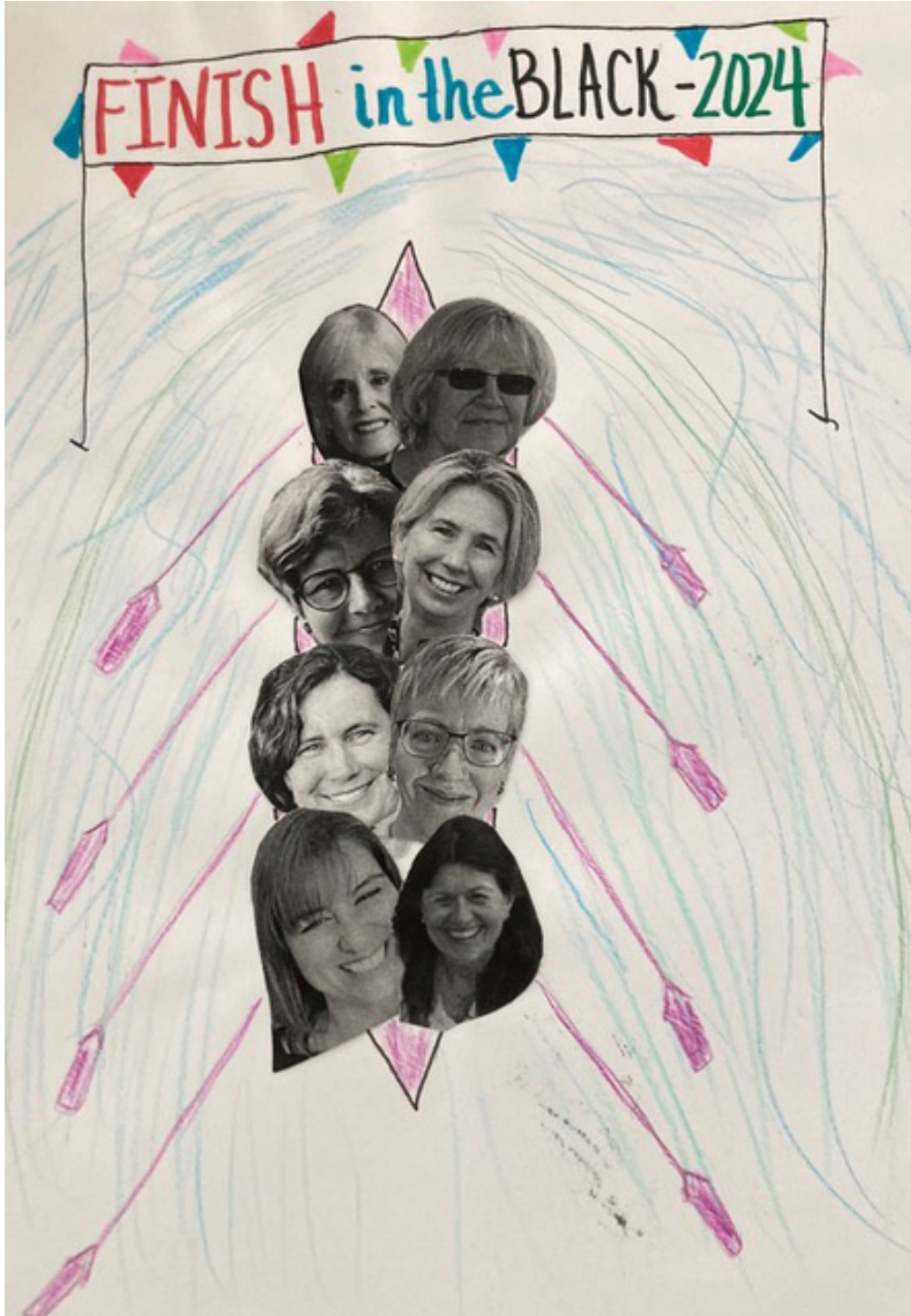
If you've read the book or seen the recent movie, *The Boys in the Boat*, you can visualize an 8-person crew, pulling together as one, as they glide through the water toward the finish line. Change one word in that title, and you'll have the theme of the Board's March retreat... "The Board in the Boat."

With our strong (yet invisible arms), board members Kristi Archuleta, Brigid Fitzgibbon, Stephanie Reib, Nancy Van Fleet, Leslie Wright, Marilyn Zimmerman, and I, along with Executive Director Dawn Matheny, grasp our oars and aim toward our 2024 financial goal of finishing in the black.

One of our primary responsibilities as board members is to make sure that Veriditas is financially sound so the organization can continue to provide the quality programs we have all come to expect. It is particularly important that we focus on budgetary goals this year due to shortfalls in 2023. Overall, non-profits experienced roughly a 20% drop in revenue in the last fiscal year for a variety of reasons... economic concerns, world events, lingering recovery from the pandemic and more. Veriditas is no exception.

While we work toward financial stability, all board members are, also, actively involved in one or more committees (executive, finance, fundraising, membership) or initiatives (inclusion/diversity/equity and higher education). Each committee has delineated its goals for 2024, and highlighted the top three on which to focus first. Some of these goals include: streamline internal systems and procedures, broaden scope of fundraising activities including grants, increase board membership, expand programming opportunities, etc.

The board welcomes questions, comments and suggestions on how to improve our rowing skills. You can contact us at [board@veriditas.org](mailto:board@veriditas.org)



***“Humans are the  
creative energy of the  
universe unfolding.  
We come from stardust.”***

—Brian Thomas Swimme

## Staff News

By Marilyn Zimmerman

### Saying Farewell

Fifteen years ago, a volunteer accountant from Grace Cathedral was helping Veriditas with bookkeeping and Veriditas was ready to hire someone part-time for the position. Meanwhile, Pamela Cole, who was employed by The Institute for Noetic Sciences part-time, mentioned to the director that she was a bookkeeper. Two weeks later, Pam received a phone call from Dawn Matheny. After an initial interview, Pam was offered the job.

With nine years of previous bookkeeping experience and an accounting background, Pam began her work as the bookkeeper for Veriditas. As she worked, she not only continued to grow her skills as a bookkeeper, she also eagerly learned about the programs offered by Veriditas. Looking back, she says, "With Veriditas I always felt I was doing something more than bookkeeping. I was doing something I believed in."

Pam's most memorable experience with Veriditas was her 2022 pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral where she got to know Dawn and Lauren Artress better. Pam also quickly became interested in Catherine Anderson's SoulCollage® offerings. Pam says that during that trip, something ignited in her that helped her more fully understand the idea of the sacred and the value of rituals. She remains very grateful for her entire Chartres experience.

In her retirement, Pam will continue her devotion to the garden she "sculpts". She will continue with her art-making practice. In addition, she and her husband recently purchased a pop-up camper and truck; they plan to travel to see the spring wildflowers near Borrego Springs and then spend time in the nearby high desert areas, and national parks. They will visit Joshua Tree, where, forty-two years ago, surrounded by the unique rocks that



characterize that part of the desert, Pam and her husband were married in the presence of family and friends. Pam's father, the Reverend Kenneth Whitney presided.

Thanks for your service to Veriditas, safe travels, and best wishes, Pam.

### Meet Angelique



Angelique Holten has a wealth of experience as bookkeeper for various companies but this is her first time working for a non-profit corporation. When she learned that Veriditas was looking for a part-time bookkeeper she investigated and immediately knew that she wanted to work for a company that offered something to the world that was consistent with her own values.

Self-taught, Angelique first learned bookkeeping at her father's business, Jacque's Organic Chocolates. She then handled the books at numerous other businesses. When she turned forty, she enrolled in accounting classes at a local college to learn more about the accounting process

and financial reports in depth, while continuing her bookkeeping jobs.

These days, when she's not at Veriditas, Angelique is busy running her own chocolate company, Angelique's Unique Treats. She describes herself as curious and someone who enjoys helping people. And apparently she also enjoys helping dogs as Angelique currently volunteers at Canine Companions, an organization that trains service dogs, and Lily's Senior Dog Sanctuary, where dogs that weigh more than fifty pounds and are at least seven-years-old are cared for and loved.

Welcome Angelique!

# Facilitator Stories: In the Face of Grief

*Sherrine Washington's story*

In the face of grief, traditional funeral rites often follow a well-trodden path. When my beloved brother, Michael Brown, departed in June 2023, however, I sought a unique and heartfelt way to celebrate his life. Embracing the transformative power of labyrinth walking and the creation of SoulCollage® cards, my family and I discovered a profound, healing journey that eased the burden of grief.

This decision to deviate from tradition was born out of a desire to celebrate Michael's life in a unique way. Instead of a somber ceremony, we chose a processional-style labyrinth walk with just the family as a symbolic journey of remembrance and reflection. The labyrinth, a winding path leading to a central point and back out, became a metaphor for life and the cyclical nature of existence.

As we walked the labyrinth together, tears mingled with laughter, creating a shared experience that transcended traditional mourning. The rhythmic footsteps echoed a collective heartbeat. The labyrinth offered a space for introspection, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Notably, my father, who sometimes walks with a cane, was initially hesitant when asked if he wanted to participate in the labyrinth walk. Quietly, he stated, "No, I will just sit and watch." However, moments later, as the walk began, I sobbed with a mix of emotions when I saw my father enter the labyrinth at the end of the line, walking for Michael. This unexpected act of love and solidarity touched the hearts of everyone present.



Later, my father shared his remarkable experience with me. He recounted hearing a gentle whisper from my brother, saying, "Come and walk for me, Bill." It was a significant moment, as Michael had never addressed our father as "Dad." Instead, he always lovingly referred to him by his first name. The labyrinth had become a conduit for a spiritual connection, transcending the earthly bonds of family.

Following the labyrinth walk, we transitioned into a time of SoulCollage® card creation. The act of selecting images and arranging them into a collage became a form of catharsis, a visual narrative of our feelings and memories of Michael.

Creating a SoulCollage® card for Michael was a way to honor his life and legacy. Each card was a unique reflection of the creator's relationship with him. This process allowed us to channel our grief into a tangible form of artistic expression, transforming sorrow into a celebration of life.

Michael's memory lives on not only in our hearts but also in the creative expressions that emerged from that unforgettable day. Our departure from tradition allowed us to cry less and celebrate more. Through the poignant labyrinth walk and SoulCollage® card creations, we discovered a path to healing that emphasized the beauty of life and the enduring connection with those we love.



# Facilitator Stories: The Stone I Do Not Throw

By Marilyn Zimmerman

Recently I was considering how I would facilitate this year's walk on World Labyrinth Day. In the past, between 25 and 40 people have attended this walk, which takes place on a Marty Kermeen labyrinth in a Healing Garden in Northern Michigan. A clarinetist and flautist always open the event with a short series of duets, ending with *Dona Nobis Pacem*. A lap harpist provides the meditative music for the walk.

It occurred to me that as we walk again this year, we will send prayers, energy, and love to those in war-torn areas of the world. As valuable as this is, I wondered whether we, too, in Northern Michigan, and the rest of the planet, had an individual, personal obligation to lean more fully into the cause of peace and world unity. It didn't seem enough to expect others on the other side of the globe to change their behavior, to act and behave in peaceful ways if, for example, on the drive home from the event, I snapped at a driver who cut me off in traffic.

As I pondered this idea, I began to imagine that I carried a stone in my pocket, one I could and had metaphorically flung at times, in haste or anger when I felt wronged or slighted. I thought of an incident that very day where I had, in effect, "thrown a stone" at someone who inconvenienced me. I'd expressed my unhappiness to him when, in reality, the incident was one I could have let go. I hadn't needed to throw a stone. But I had.

I came home that night and composed a poem that will be part of the WLD walk I facilitate. The poem is titled, "The Stone I Do Not Throw". I plan to bring a basket of stones to the walk and place it in the center of the labyrinth. Participants can select a stone to tuck in their pocket or somewhere that will remind them that peace begins within each of us, that our behavior matters, and it is our responsibility, whenever possible, to help contribute to making a more peaceful world.

## The Stone I Do Not Throw:

*There's a stone in my pocket  
Sometimes it's rough, with edges that scratch my fingers  
when I check to make sure it's there.  
Sometimes it's smooth and polished, by waves or worry.  
It's always too big to be a pebble  
and lacks the heft of a rock.  
Still, it's significant, large enough to break glass  
or fracture a relationship should I choose to throw it.*

*The thing is, sometimes I actually think before I throw it.  
I mean to whip it at something or someone,  
to injure, to match pain with pain.  
Other times I don't think about it;  
I just fling, in a flash of anger or frustration.  
Sometimes I even hurl it towards myself.*

*Inexplicably, once it's thrown, another stone always appears  
in my pocket.  
I used to think of these as protection I might need during my day.  
But I'm rethinking that.  
I'm wondering whether I could pause, choose a different way.  
Decide not to throw the stone.  
Pull my empty hand from my pocket.  
Or maybe I could reach for my stone and then find a puddle,  
a lake, or an ocean.  
Maybe I could drop the stone in  
and watch the peaceful circles of water  
that ripple from my heart.*



# Research shows how the labyrinth helps deal with stress

By Stephanie Reib

Mention labyrinths and people may naturally think of a spiritual practice. But as anyone who embraces the labyrinth knows, there's more at work here than spirituality alone. They are a unique respite in an increasingly stressful world.

Every day, we read about students burdened by peer pressure, over-scheduling and an education disrupted by a worldwide pandemic. We learn about victims of natural disasters, war and trauma. Folks battling depression, pain and illness. Teachers, medical professionals and first responders trying to navigate increasingly demanding jobs. The list is endless. And stress is at the heart of it -- at work, home and even at leisure.

It comes at a huge cost. The American Institute of Stress estimates that 75% to 90% of doctor visits have a stress component. In a 2020 TED talk, wellness advocate Rob Cooke said work-related stress costs the US alone almost \$300 billion annually. And that says nothing of the physiological, psychological and emotional costs to our well-being. Stress-related health problems include high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, heart disease and sleep loss. A Mayo Clinic chart of effects of stress on the body, mood and behavior includes headaches, muscle tension, chest pain, lack of focus, memory problems, weaker immune systems and more.

At some time or another we all deal with it. With the labyrinth, we have a unique tool to help us cope. But just how does it help us deal with stress?

It's a question researchers have been asking for decades. In medical settings, for example, studies have measured changes in quantitative stress indicators before and after walking a labyrinth. They've also reviewed qualitative patient experiences with stress, pain, mood, relaxation, coping ability and other parameters as well as medical staff focus and stress to draw

conclusions about the effects of labyrinth walking.

Multiple studies show that labyrinth walking has quantifiable physical implications – slowing one's breathing and heart rate and lowering systolic blood pressure – all signs of relaxation and reduced stress. In one study, *Labyrinths: Ancient Aid for Modern Stresses*, Lorelei King, RN, a past director of surgery at Mercy Hospital in Grayling, MI, described the impact walking the hospital's labyrinth had on patients. Not only did she observe their bodies visibly relaxing, but after the walk, their pulse had often slowed dramatically. Many patients also reported a decrease in pain. Another study, *Short-term autonomic nervous system responses during a labyrinth walk*, authored by Philip James Behman and others, also looked at both quantitative and qualitative aspects and found that, "... the end result of the labyrinth appears to be a physical, mental and emotional state that lends itself to deeper reflection, insight, problem solving, and healing."

***“While walking labyrinths in the middle ages could have significant religious meaning, today, science supports the idea of using labyrinths as walking meditation to improve mental and physical health.”***

Patients and medical staff have also reported on how walking a labyrinth (or using a handheld labyrinth) can help patients heal, regain a sense of control and cope with the stress of disease and treatment, including serious illness such as cancer, surgery and end-of-life care. In fact, the Orlando Health Cancer Institute said in a 2019 post that the labyrinth can

have a “calming and restorative effect on blood pressure and stress levels” and that 98% of the walkers reported feeling more peaceful after walking the Institute's labyrinth. And some therapists working with trauma and PTSD are using labyrinths to engage a patient's physical being as part of a therapeutic program. Their work suggests that the bilateral stimulation of walking a labyrinth, in conjunction with other therapy, encourages deeper processing and integration between the right and left brain hemispheres. Important steps in dealing with trauma. Studies in education have tackled issues such as stress, concentration and classroom disruption. An older study (*Labyrinths: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow – Implications for Education* by Barbara Michels, Debra Maxwell & Ching-Wen Chang at Missouri State University), tested young, at-risk elementary school students before and after a labyrinth walk to see how long they could hold a Standing Tree yoga pose. While the pre-walk mean time was 18.14 seconds, the post-walk time was 27.97 seconds. Balance improved for 77% of the students, indicating an increase in the focus and concentration needed to hold the pose. The authors observed that, “There seems to be a connection to the right brain, clear thinking and test improvement all of which are desired goals in the educational setting.”

In Higher Ed, when Oklahoma State University introduced two labyrinths in 2016, they noted, “While walking labyrinths in the middle ages could have significant religious meaning, today, science supports the idea of using labyrinths as walking meditation to improve mental and physical health.”

While results are mixed and there are always qualifiers, there are consistent trends in these and other studies. By documenting quantitative and qualitative outcomes, research can not only help inform ways to integrate labyrinths into treatment

plans and other programs, it may be pivotal to obtaining funding and support for new labyrinths and programs. And, while labyrinths may be an ancient tool, it seems there is still more we can learn about – and from – them.

If you know of a labyrinth program or someone working with labyrinths and making a difference, let us know. Meanwhile, walk a labyrinth, breathe out any stress ... and let your right brain and imagination take it from there!

*“The gift of life is given to us for ourselves and also to bring peace, courage, and compassion to others.”*

—John O'Donohue

## Featured Labyrinth



Lars Howlett created this labyrinth with facilitator De Acker at UC Merced last year. It's a 65' diameter Baltic Wheel.

*“ The Labyrinth fosters communal activities offering a canvas for group walks, mindfulness sessions and so much more. In the footsteps of one another, we find connection, we forge bonds, and we discover the sense of unity that is the very essence of what our campus was created for.”*

~ Student Regent Josiah Beharry

Do you have a labyrinth you would like to see us feature in our next eNews? Email a photo and a brief note about it to [newsletter@veriditas.org](mailto:newsletter@veriditas.org)

## Did You Know?

- [The Worldwide Labyrinth Locator](#) now lists 6385 labyrinths in 92 countries! And that number doesn't even include all the private and unlisted labyrinths that there are in the world.
- If you did an Internet search for "labyrinths" in 2002, you would have gotten about 9500 results. Today, if you Google "labyrinth walking" you will get about 29,800,000 results...in less than half a second.
- A wonderful VIA benefit is the ability to be listed in our "Find a Labyrinth Facilitator" Directory. You can find a facilitator based on their location, background, whether they work with the labyrinth in any specific fields of experience (creativity, wellness, etc.) and whether they own a labyrinth. To try the directory, [please click here](#).
- When you register for a zoom meeting, you can click on the blue timezone link on the zoom registration page to change your timezone and see when the meeting is for you.
- Thinking about signing up for a Veriditas event? Did you know we recently updated our cancellation policy. Visit: [veriditas.org/cancellation](http://veriditas.org/cancellation) to read the updated terms.

## Walking the World, together

On March 15, 2020 U.S. states, like the rest of the world, began to shut down in the hope of preventing the spread of COVID. In many ways, the world simply stopped. But on April 3, something new started when Lauren Artress led the first of what are now hundreds of Friday Finger Labyrinth Walks. What began as a way to support the labyrinth community and navigate a particularly difficult time,

has become the beautiful weekly ritual of a vibrant, welcoming and growing community. What some Friday walk regulars call their "Friday Family." It's a family that spans the US from Maine to Hawaii and Alaska to Florida ... and at least 20 countries. Every week, one of our presenters offers a free, one-hour program that invites us to consider our lives and situations through the lens of a

different theme, walk our handheld labyrinths with music and share our thoughts or simply listen to others. Everyone is welcome. If you haven't joined a Friday walk yet, what are you waiting for? We switch between two time slots to accommodate all time zones, so be sure to check our schedule on the Veriditas homepage.

## Facilitator Corner

Are you looking for music to use for physical or handheld labyrinth walks? Here are a few suggestions from two of our Board members.

- Album: *Celtic Meditation Music*, Performer: Áine Minogue  
- Lovely, expressive and relaxing music. Harp, some soft clarinet and cello.
- Album: *Harp of the Healing Light*, Performer: Erik Berglund  
- An ethereal, gentle instrumental album. Mostly harp backed with synthesized orchestration.
- Poetry: Carrie Newcomer poems "Because There Is Not Enough Time" and "Showing Up" from her book, *A Permeable Life: Poems and Essays*.

## Little Miracles on the Path

"Little Miracles" is produced by Linda Mikell. Each month she shares an inspirational story from a labyrinth experience that is sent to her by a facilitator. She welcomes YOUR story. I'm sure you're got one, and we all benefit from this sharing. Thank you, Linda!

Please send your story to Linda Mikell at [edlinmik@optonline.net](mailto:edlinmik@optonline.net)



# Staff Directory



**Lauren Artress**  
Founder

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Media interviews, facilitator trainings, Grace and Chartres pilgrimages



**Dawn Matheny**  
Executive Director

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Leading Veriditas, managing staff and budget, liaising with Board, planning event calendar, contracts, fundraising



**Lars Howlett**  
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Social media, VIA Facebook group, resource development, event support, webinar coordinator



**Annika Moore**  
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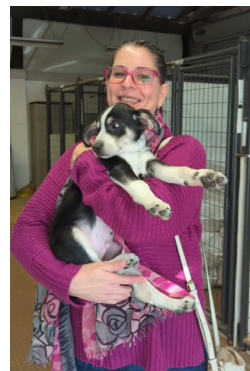
Fundraising campaigns, donor database and donor support



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