

The Women & Girls Fund honors

Debbie Jackson

with the 2019 Sheryl V. Kerr Award



“VISIONARY” - “Exceptional Leader” - “Enormously Compassionate” - “Empowering women who work for her” – “A great listener in a way that invites growth in others” – Debbie Jackson is well known throughout the Mid-Shore community as a dedicated leader and public servant who looks beyond the immediate needs in front of her, and strategizes for the future.

Debbie was born and raised in Easton and went to work at Channel Marker 34 years ago, to assist with the provision of mental health services to youth and adults in Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties. A series of promotions led her to become the agency’s Executive Director in 2002.

Debbie is an outstanding contributor to improving the lives of women and girls in two ways: leading the growth and expansion of life-changing, mental health support services and; promoting

a culture of mutual support, personal job satisfaction and professional career growth for her primarily female staff of 61 people.

Debbie has led the delivery of high-quality, compassionate mental health services for decades. The adult women that Channel Marker serves have severe and persistent mental illnesses. Their diseases usually leave them impoverished, marginalized and on the fringes of our society. Under Debbie’s leadership, these same women are treated with dignity, given help with therapy, medication management, goal-setting, job training, social skill building, nursing, psychiatric services, hope and respect and sometimes, a roof overhead.

Noticing that the population of people with serious and persistent mental illnesses die younger, and have more serious physical problems than other people, Debbie led an effort to address wellness (as opposed to illness) in 2013. Her clients were able to get routine physical screenings that they never got before, and receive dental services and other general health care that most of us take for granted, and that many people in her client population never get. Her program was among the first to co-locate psychiatric services and wellness in one setting. She made certain a medical clinic would be included in Channel Marker’s new Regional Wellness Center in Easton.

Debbie’s leadership style has empowered the women who work at Channel Marker. Forty-nine of her 61 employees are women, and a surprising number of them have been employees for 20-25 years. Debbie encourages staff to seek advanced credentials and degrees. Two of them recently attained PhD degrees. Staff are quick to mention how encouraging Debbie is when management level positions are available, and the impact that has on their own self-confidence.

It hasn’t always been easy. In 2003-2004, Channel Marker had to lay off half of their workforce due to funding changes in the State of Maryland’s reimbursement system. Slowly, she and her leadership team re-built the agency to where it is today. Senator Addie Eckardt said “I watched Debbie go through the process of reducing staff and programs with strategic thinking calm and kindness.

Then, as resources improved, I watched her rebuild to become the strong organization it is today. I have witnessed how Debbye's vision and tireless efforts have improved the lives of some of the most vulnerable women and girls in the Mid-Shore."

Debbye also has a history of community service. Her father, Bill Perry, co-founded the Waterfowl Festival. Debbye began volunteering at the event when she was in middle school, and hasn't stopped since. Her family continues to chair the carving exhibition, and Waterfowl Chesapeake has created a scholarship in her father's honor. Debbye is honored to watch her father's legacy live on in youth who receive scholarships.

The Women & Girls Fund is honored to celebrate Debbye Jackson as an exceptional Mid-Shore leader and to present her with the 2019 Sheryl V. Kerr Award.



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About the Sheryl V. Kerr Award

Given in memory of Sheryl V. Kerr by the Grayce B. Kerr Fund, the Sheryl V. Kerr Award pays tribute to the impact Mrs. Kerr made across the country, and especially in Talbot County. A grant given to the Women & Girls Fund provides for an annual award recognizing individuals or programs of significance to women. The word that best sums up the Award's intention is "empowerment".



As an individual, Mrs. Kerr spoke up for women and believed in encouraging them to make a difference to their families and communities through work and community volunteerism. As Chair of the Grayce B. Kerr Fund, she focused on larger scale programs and projects that provided women with the skills and capabilities to improve their lives and the lives of those around them. And, it is that same mission that the Women & Girls Fund strives to accomplish through our grants and activities.

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Sheryl V. Kerr Award

2016 Maria D'Arcy
Estela Ramirez

2017 Cheryl Hughes
2018 Robbin Hill