



# Greater Promise

the Campaign for CATHOLIC CHARITIES

## A CASE FOR GALLAGHER SERVICES

*Stella Maris*  
A Tradition of Mercy. A Heart of Care.



## BACKGROUND:

# Believing in the God-Given Dignity of Every Journey

In 1977, Catholic Charities welcomed 13 children who had been living in a state institution to a residential facility on Pot Spring Road that would become the home of Gallagher Services. Our mission was clear – upholding every person’s dignity and opening doors to a fuller life for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And our program grew quickly, more than tripling in size in its first year in response to local need.

Over the following decades, our mission never changed, but our approaches evolved to meet the needs of the individuals we served. We offer vocational training, supported employment, day habitation, community integration and independent living in nearly 50 homes throughout the Baltimore region. The goal is a better system of support for people with varying needs and abilities, and the result is each person having what they need to explore their vision for a fulfilling life and build the pathways needed to get there.

Encouragingly, in recent years, state and federal funding is shifting in ways that allow us to be more creative and flexible in how we serve individuals, supporting our efforts to elevate the focus on people’s abilities, rather than their disabilities, and on their integration into the community. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic required all service providers to re-imagine existing models and think in new ways about potential opportunities. Together, these factors have underscored and accelerated our commitment to new kinds of person-centered, community-based programs.

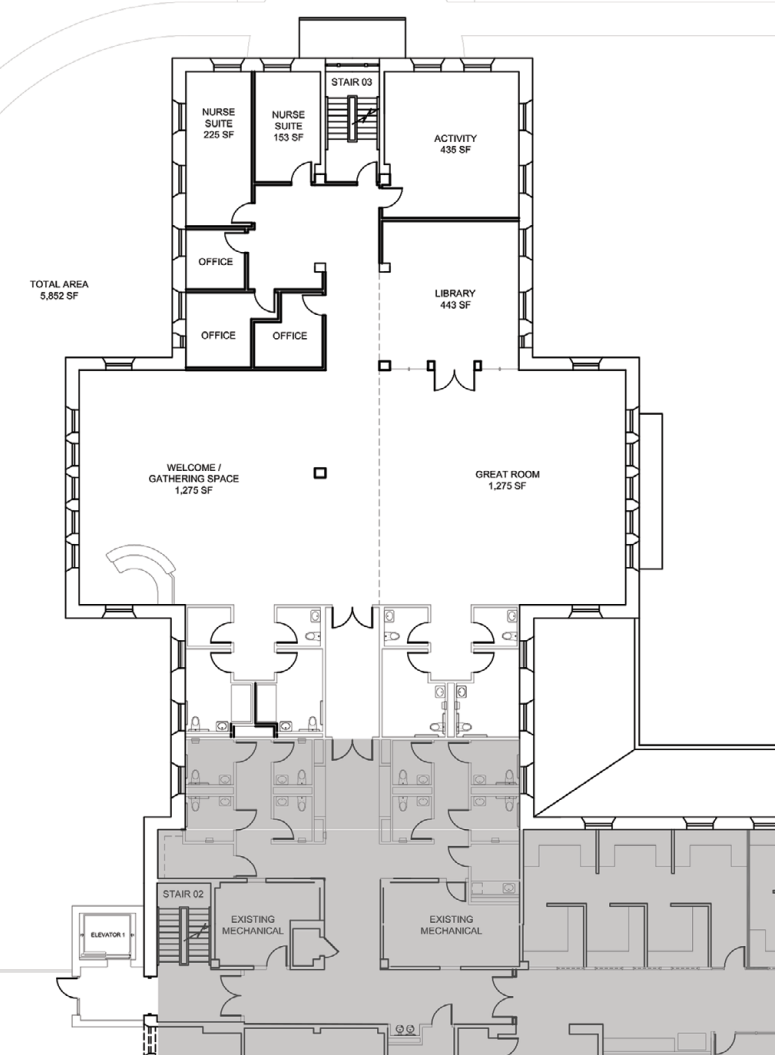
## WHERE WE ARE:

# Seeing the Greater Promise of Gallagher Services Facilities

After 45 years of day services at Gallagher’s Pot Spring Road location, we are envisioning a move to a new space for our Community Center. This decision is not only about aging real estate – a cracking roof, small rooms and more accessible bathrooms; we also find ourselves hemmed in by a building in which a school-like footprint cannot accommodate the warm, innovative and fully accessible programs we have envisioned for the people we support. In early 2021, we started a process of redesigning vacant space at Catholic Charities’ Villa Maria building about a mile away.

Today, specifically, we are designing an empty wing of the building that will reimagine the experience of a traditional day program and serve as a vibrant hub of activity. Preliminary drawings show amenities such as a warm, welcoming entrance; a large community gathering spot; a smaller space for retail such as a coffee shop; a full nursing suite; a medium-sized room that can host team meetings; an area for technology-based communications, including Zoom calls or classes; a library or space for quiet reflection; and fundamentals such as a kitchen, fully accessible bathrooms, a washer and dryer, and accessible parking.

This thoughtful design unleashes opportunities for us to create a buzzing hub and a launchpad for other activities. Those with significant medical challenges will get the services they need and



a chance to see their friends, while others may come and go individually or in small groups, based on their plans for the day. The advantages of this \$1.5M, re-imagined space include:

- **Expanded capacity.** Before the pandemic, the Community Center day program on Pot Spring Road provided services to 61 adults with intellectual disabilities, many of whom were older and required intensive nursing care. But as impactful as our programming was, we were turning away about 250 referrals per year, either because there was not enough space or it was not the right space for the people being referred. The renovated facility will allow more people with extensive needs to receive high-quality services.
- **Integration with other services.** In 2018, Catholic Charities renovated one wing of the building for administrative and central services employees, and other sections have yet to be developed. By proximity alone, the Gallagher participants will come in regular contact with agency employees and their guests, even before we fill the rest of the building.
- **Breaking down silos between residential and day programs.** The concept of person-centered care blurs the separations between different kinds of programs – an

individual's interests and needs drive their experience. This dynamic day center will draw interest from participants across Gallagher programs, whether for a particular event, class or activity, or just the chance to see friends.

- **Flexible future.** For nearly 45 years, Gallagher Services has evolved in response to the community we serve. The beauty of a vacant space is the ability to dream about what it might house in the future. This could include: exercise equipment for people with physical limitations, serving residents of Mercy Ridge and Stella Maris, too; a coffee shop, staffed by Gallagher participants and drawing people from across the community; a polling station; a day care; and classes or performances of broad interest, bringing together people from around the area. This building has the capacity – and promise – to house each of these possibilities.

Over time, we envision this center as the start of something bigger – a place for intergenerational programming that upends the legacy approach to programs serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and that brings together our participants, volunteers and community to give every journey the support it needs.

## WHERE WE ARE GOING:

# Delivering on the Greater Promise of Gallagher Services Programming

The reimagined space described here is a physical manifestation of the broader transformation happening across Gallagher Services. Our commitment to person-centered planning and community integration will require a host of changes, including more staff and vehicles, more training, a greater reliance on technology and a powerful advocacy effort. To bring these ideas to life, we'll need:



- **More staff** to work with small groups of participants as they spend more time in the community, whether for work, education, volunteering or other activities.
- **Training for staff** who will face new challenges as people spend more time in the community, developing advocacy skills to help nurture natural supports for the person, explore new opportunities and cope with challenges that could arise. Our success depends on their ability to respond, educate and advocate.
- **Different vehicles** to take participants to their destinations. These are no longer special bus outings, but daily trips that require accessible minivans and other types of transportation that can support a range of needs.
- **Technology** that allows us to connect with staff in more meaningful and instantaneous ways, and that allows participants to participate more independently in a range of activities. We have also seen first-hand how technology can connect families and connect us to families in ways that provide information and comfort.

## WHY IT MATTERS:

# Understanding the Importance of this New Opportunity for People Across Maryland

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Susie Diffenderfer was a very busy woman. She worked in a daycare, volunteered at Our Daily Bread Employment Center, worked out at The Y, took a music class, visited seniors at a local retirement community and nurtured a range of hobbies and interests, such as crocheting, cooking and writing poetry.

That's exactly the kind of activity Susie's mother, Chrissy Diffenderfer, was looking for when the family came to Gallagher Services. Susie has developmental disabilities, but Chrissy wanted to make sure they did not slow her down and that she was able to explore her varied interests and passions.

"It's about being out in the public and doing things, not being in a building all day," Chrissy said.

Susie is part of the first cohort of Gallagher Services' Community Development Services (CDS) program, which matches one staff member with a group of three or four participants. Together, the group decides what they want to do each week, accounting for the abilities and disabilities of each person, and the staff member facilitates the activities.

"It's very person-centered," said Brian Trees, Gallagher Services' associate administrator. "It's a very full day oriented around what people want to do and helping them expand

their world. It's based around their interests. And it's not just showing up in the community, but participating."

CDS is not the right approach for everyone, including those who need more intensive supports, but it is part of the evolution away from traditional day programs and toward greater community involvement. The shifts in approach are also steering how Gallagher Services is thinking through its facilities and the programs that will fill them.

CDS, for example, requires staff with a particular set of skills – people who are engaged and motivated to support the group members' interests.

"A very important thing to the success of [the program] is ... an instructor who has the incentive, the initiative, the love, the care," said Chrissy. "We're giving these most vulnerable people to be with them, and it's enriching them, but you have to trust that they're safe."

The program activities have helped Susie reach her own goals, including becoming a certified lifeguard. Her group would go to The Y, where they could use the pool, and that's where Susie, a Special Olympics swimmer, took her lifeguard test – passing on her first try.

"I'm also certified in CPR, first aid and water lifesaving, too," Susie added.

Since COVID-19, the group has not been meeting in person and Chrissy, who is a nurse, said she has been particularly cautious because Susie has a compromised immune system. Families of the participants have started talking about getting the group back together for outdoor activities once or twice a week. They miss the group and the relationships they have forged through it.

"These guys feel important, and they have friends," Chrissy said. "I hear all the time, 'Oh, I saw Susie the other day,' or we'll go places and someone will say 'Hi, Susie,' and I'll ask, 'Who's that?'"



*This matters because Catholic Charities has embraced a transformation from more traditional supports to a robust person-centered, community-based model. This already is underway. The transformation will help people with Intellectual Disabilities have fuller, more meaningful lives connected to the larger community (rather than just staff who are paid to be with them). For example, people can be attending college classes, volunteering, working at competitive jobs and developing friendships. This is in alignment with Federal and State mandates, though Catholic Charities, on its own, intends to be a leader in more innovative approaches that more effectively support people in living the life of their choice.*



# CATHOLIC CHARITIES

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