

Testimony for the Montgomery County Council

FY22 Operating Budget

April 7th, 2021

My name is Lindsay Koosed and I am in my 3rd year working for EveryMind as a hotline specialist. I am a social work grad student at UMD-Shady Grove and live in Potomac with my husband Brian and our two children age 3 and 6. I previously worked for The Samaritan's Suicide Prevention Hotline in NYC. Before I share with you my experience on the Montgomery County Hotline, I want to state that EveryMind is a proud and engaged member of Nonprofit Montgomery and we respectfully request a 3% increase to all nonprofit county contracts. As many of you know, Montgomery County's nonprofits have provided essential services during the pandemic and amidst a host of challenges. This 3% increase is critical to the success of our community and to the ability of nonprofits to continue to serve the residents of Montgomery County.

Many of you know we provide supportive listening for individuals and crisis prevention. One of our main roles—one that has only become more important during the pandemic—has been lightening the load on County emergency services. By talking with people in crisis, we are able to keep them safe at home after just a few minutes of conversation.

For example, during the height of quarantine in April 2020, I reminded a 23 year old female with developmental disabilities that it was imperative she stay home to keep herself and others safe. Then, in July, I answered a call from a local police officer who was asked to complete a wellness check. He knew he would not be able to get to the individual quickly enough due to a particularly overwhelming Saturday. I sat on the phone with the person at risk for an hour until paramedics arrived.

Our hotline helps everyone in our community, from those with minimal financial means and family support, to those with ample resources. In October, I spoke to a young man who grew up in a loving family with access to every form of mental health support available. But he had lived with severe depression his entire life, and had been released from the hospital just a few days earlier after a suicide attempt, one of many in his life so far. He had a clear plan to kill himself that week-- a jump he would surely not survive. I thought seriously about sending the police, but he had just been in the hospital and was adamant he had no intention of returning. Further, he was in quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19. This young man had grown up with every resource and form of support imaginable. It had helped him, but that night it wasn't enough. Using the skills we are taught as crisis call specialists, I was able to deescalate the situation and keep him safe without involving the police. In the first half of this fiscal year, alone, we conducted over 5,000 suicide screenings, a 67% increase over the same time period last year.

Our work on the hotline is constantly impacted by current events. This summer I spoke to a local woman in her 30's experiencing a severe schizophrenic episode. She needed to go to the hospital. She was desperate for the police to come, but also extremely frightened as she was black and we were in some of the most intense moments of the Black Lives Matter protests nationwide. I sat with her on the phone until police arrived, guided her on how to answer the door, and spoke to the empathetic officer myself to help facilitate a positive interaction.

Call specialists on the hotline help keep people out of the hospital, out of police cars, and alleviate the burden on family members and others in the community. The county approved an appropriation of \$300,000 of CARES funding that has been integral to our ability to do this. This funding, in combination with additional philanthropy engaged by EveryMind and existing county contracts, has allowed us to answer 40% more calls with at least one paid staff member for every shift and double staff some shifts, leading to far fewer missed calls, and far more County residents helped, all of which has allowed us to ease the burden on our County's first responders.

That funding has also allowed hotline staffers to have the technology to work from home during the pandemic. In my case, it has allowed me to care for my children stuck at home during the day, and head to my basement to answer calls while they sleep at night. Over the past year, the demand for our services has maintained a sustained volume increase of 12%. With this increase, we are still missing 27% of incoming volume. Our FY22 goal is to meet current community demand by funding the hotline at approximately \$1.8 million which translates to a **current funding gap of approximately \$1.2 million.**

We ask for the Council's support in closing this gap with confidence that the cost we save the community exceeds the money we require to operate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for allocating the funding that has allowed me to do my part keeping people safe and at home over the last year.

Sincerely, Lindsay Koosed

EveryMind Hotline Data and FY22 Funding Projection

In FY21, the County Council appropriated \$300,000.00 in CARES funding to expand capacity of the EveryMind hotline and text/chat services in response to increased demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, EveryMind received \$95,000 in County funding to expand text/chat hours to include 8am-noon expanding coverage to 8am-midnight 7 days per week. The supplemental funding has been critical and allowed us to provide additional staffing to answer calls, texts and chat from members of our community seeking mental health support and crisis response services during incredibly challenging and exhausting times.

The following highlights demonstrate the positive impact of this additional support and the continued need for additional staffing to meet community demand:

- EveryMind's **hotline answered 40% more calls** to the hotline from July – December 2020 (11202 calls) compared to 8083 calls answered during the same timeframe in 2019.
- EveryMind also **answered 38% more texts/chats** from July – December 2020 (3264) compared to 2363 texts/chats answered during the same timeframe in 2019.
- EveryMind **conducted nearly 5,000 suicide screenings** between July and December 2020, compared to nearly 3,000 suicide screenings during the same timeframe in 2019, reflecting a **67% increase in screenings conducted**. In addition, the **rates for suicide screenings increased by 5% for calls, texts and chats** in 2020 compared to 2019.
- This data reflects the critical need to be able to answer **EVERY** call, text and chat as our community continues to **experience increased levels of stress, anxiety, isolation, loneliness, trauma, grief and loss as well as suicidal thoughts and ideation**.
- EveryMind's **call answer rate increased to 74%** between July and December 2020. This represents a significant increase compared with a 60% call answer rate during the same timeframe in 2019.
- The **text/chat answer rate also increased by 14%** during March 2020 – June 2020 (1990 total answered) when compared to November 2019 – February 2020 (1751 total answered). This timeframe comparison is reflective of 16 hours of operation per day for text/chat services.
- Overall, EveryMind experienced a sustained increase in demand for calls, texts and chats to our hotline throughout calendar year 2020.
 - Calls to EveryMind's hotline experienced a **12% increase in call demand** from July – December 2020 (15106 total calls received) as compared with the same timeframe in 2019 (13504 total calls received).
 - The **demand in texts/chats also experienced a 14% increase** from March 2020 – June 2020 (2095 total texts/chats received) when compared to November 2019 – February 2020 (1834 total texts/chats received).

As the demand for our services remain at an unprecedented high, we recognize more than ever the need to sustain increased staffing levels to maintain our current staffing capacity, however, this is not possible without additional funding in FY22. Without additional funding, EveryMind will have to reduce our staffing levels to pre-COVID-19 levels beginning July 1, 2021, drastically reducing our ability to meet the needs of our community.

We value the increased support the County Council has provided during FY21 and ask the Council to not only continue but increase support as the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice and threats to our democracy continue to take a negative toll on the mental health and wellness of every member of our community. Our FY22 goal is to meet current community demand by funding the hotline at approximately \$1.8 million which translates to a **current funding gap of approximately \$1.2 million**. We look forward to working with the Council to determine how local, state and federal funding opportunities can be leveraged to achieve this goal for FY22.