

Full Circle of Care

A Journey from Helping Others to Embracing Help



Melissa Earley has dedicated her life to helping people, earning her National Registry Certification as a Paramedic at The Medical College of Virginia in 1988 and later achieving her CCEMT-P. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Virginia Commonwealth University. Combining her experience in emergency response and nursing, she attained the National Healthcare Disaster Professional – Board Certification from the ANCC. **By choosing to devote much of her nursing career to behavioral health, she registered with the Virginia Board of Counseling as a Qualified Mental Health Professional.**

She values her commitment to the Nursing Code of Ethics and advocates for her chosen profession at the local, state, and national levels to support legislation important to nurses and nursing practice. **Drawing on her personal experience allows her to offer the unique perspective of a survivor through the lens of a healthcare professional.** This powerful tool has been instrumental in her ability to provide testimony to pass legislation, offer input to guide policymakers, and provide expertise to inform stakeholders on crucial issues such as behavioral healthcare system improvements, equitably funded services and resources statewide, disability rights, access to evidence-based brain injury services, workplace violence

prevention, and eliminating the stigma and barriers to helpers asking for and receiving help.

She finds that there are few things more beautiful than witnessing change happen before her eyes. It might be a client who has been struggling and whom she sees have their “ah-ha” moment. Perhaps her testimony in front of a Senate Committee made the difference for a bill that wasn’t expected to pass but was signed into law. Or someone who approaches her after a lecture, embraces her, sobs, and whispers through the tears, **“Thank you for sharing your story. You helped me find hope and the courage to ask for help.”**



In October 2023, Melissa received a diagnosis of breast cancer, a challenging and overwhelming turn in her life. During this difficult time, Melissa received information about CancerLINC from Massey and a family member suggested she reach out to them for support with estate planning and community resource referrals for financial aid.

Melissa's journey with CancerLINC began with a referral to their services, and she soon found herself working closely with volunteer attorney Sarah Gonzalez (Lane and Hammer, PC). **Melissa needed assistance with estate planning, an understandably daunting task under her current circumstances.**

Sarah's compassionate approach and professional expertise made what could have been a stressful process feel both manageable and even enjoyable. Melissa was grateful for the care and sensitivity Sarah provided, which helped her navigate the preparation of her final will and testament with a sense of reassurance.

In addition to estate planning, **Melissa sought help from CancerLINC's Client Services, where she collaborated with Julia Allen, a Masters of Social Work Intern. Julia assisted Melissa in applying for a grant from the Commonwealth Community Trust, aimed at strengthening the safety and accessibility of her home.** The grant was intended to fund improvements such as better lighting and sidewalk enhancements to make Melissa's home environment safer and more navigable.

The grant application was successful, and within a month, the planned improvements were completed by Gray Rock Land Solutions, who

“While there are few things more beautiful than witnessing change, experiencing the realization that you were an agent of that change by taking the risk to act is a feeling like no other,” says Melissa. “To see the beauty, one must first show up. To be part of the change, one must stand up, speak up, and not give up.”

generously donated additional time and resources to address issues not covered by the grant. Melissa was profoundly relieved and satisfied with the results, significantly improving her ability to move around her home safely, offering a greater sense of security and comfort during a challenging time. **Since that first referral, CancerLINC has been a steadfast partner for Melissa, offering comprehensive support to help manage and ease her treatment journey.**

Melissa's experiences with CancerLINC's services underscored the invaluable impact of community resources and professional assistance. Through the help she received, she was able to address crucial aspects of her life and home, bringing ease and peace of mind amidst her ongoing health challenges.