



# MAC

MUSLIM AMERICANS FOR COMPASSION

## Enjoy Our Latest Interview with UP for Women & Children's Amy Meredith

It was around 2016 when Uniting Partners (UP) for Women & Children co-founders Amy Meredith and Andrea Scott began to envision a safe space for Louisville's homeless women and their children. What would it take to make that location empowering and provide resources for anyone who walks through the doors?



Six years later, UP for Women & Children is thriving in downtown Louisville. Located at 425 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, UP is now a hub of essential services for the city's homeless population.

Muslim Americans for Compassion (MAC) recently spoke with Co-Founder and Executive Director Amy Meredith to discuss how the organization overcame COVID and evolved to meet the needs of the women they serve. Read the full interview below, and visit <https://www.uplouisville.org> to learn how you can get involved.



**MAC: I'd like to start at the beginning. Could you describe what you were seeing in 2016 that prompted the development of UP for Women and Children? What set you on this path?**

Amy Meredith (AM): As our other co-founder Andrea Scott was finishing her master's in social work, she was working with family health centers that served formerly homeless women. Andrea learned that women didn't have

anywhere to go during the day to access basic needs like showers, laundry, or mail.

We started talking about what a service like that would look like in Louisville, and soon we were getting connected with like-minded organizations. In 2017, we met with the director of the St. John Center for Homeless Men. They shared funders, an operational budget, and helped us make connections. It was reassuring to hear that 'Yes, there is a need. It's awesome you want to help. Here's who you need to talk to.'

There wasn't a whole lot of data on the homeless women of Louisville, because they're especially vulnerable. They often stay hidden for their safety or the safety of their children. It was up to Uniting Partners to fill in gaps and expand that knowledge.

**MAC: What do you know now about the population you're serving?**

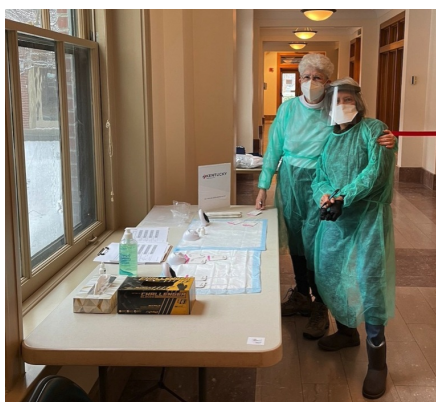
AM: We know there is a substantial number who need assistance. These are women who may be sleeping unsheltered, staying in emergency shelters, staying in their car or couch surfing.



Our first day open, we saw six or seven women. Then it evolved and grew. One day we served 81 individuals in a 4-hour time period. We saw 439 women the first year. Then it sloped in 2020 with the onset of Covid.

In Covid, safety looks different. Overnight, our team of eight became a team of three. Many of us are moms with kids. We were trying to home school and navigate those changes. Many of the women we serve are very fragile. Our staff quickly faced additional challenges when they had to start focusing on making sure our guests were staying masked for everyone's safety. This has continued to be a struggle for us throughout the pandemic. Making sure our guests remain masked requires a lot of time and energy from our team.

Last year, we saw 718 women. This was a significant jump for us, but we've restructured to operate more efficiently as Covid changed everything.



**MAC: As UP has grown, you've made changes to better serve the community. What are you most proud of?**

AM: The most amazing people find their way to this organization. We have a great team. Everyone really wants to be here. They really care about the work we're doing, the women we're serving. They put their best foot forward as they show up for work, especially in a pandemic.

At the beginning of Covid, UofL pulled their students from the site for safety. UP received money as support to operate during Covid. We used that to hire

one of those UofL students as a case manager. If people hadn't stepped up, we may not have been able to stay open.

UP has now been operating longer during a pandemic than we had pre-pandemic. When Covid struck, we dropped down to only being open two days a week, Monday and Friday. We’ve now returned to Wednesday hours. Our goal is to keep evolving and pressing forward.

**MAC: Could you talk about your facility as it is today? When a new client arrives at your door, what does the onboarding process look like?**

AM: First, we have a health screening. During our check-in process, we ask basic questions. ‘What’s your name? Where did you sleep last night? What brings you in? What can we assist you with today? Do you have an emergency contact you can share with us? Do you have children with you? Do you have a chronic illness we should be aware of?’



We like to let visitors know what we offer because a lot of times they aren't aware of the full scope of our services. We then determine how best to serve each person. For example, some are here to get documentation to become housing ready. One of the biggest services we provide is procuring IDs and birth certificates. You really need an ID for so many things like employment and accessing government assistance programs IDs used to cost \$4, now they cost \$10. Obviously, every increase affects these women. And it's a more complicated process for those who are homeless.

Other people come by weekly to get supplies, food and hygiene items. Some are here to connect with case management and talk about their specific space and goals. We work to meet each woman where they are. Not everyone is on the same path.

Some of our clients just really like the community piece of UP. They enjoy the safe space, a place to do laundry, take a shower and see some friendly faces.

Every Monday, we have a nurse practitioner visit. Twice each month, we have legal aid. Once a month, we have confidential HIV screening. Every Friday, we provide COVID testing and vaccine clinics on site. Transportation is a major barrier for a lot of these women, so the more that we can provide under one roof the better.



**MAC: Let’s talk about your partnerships in the community. What are some organizations you work with?**

AM: Christ Church Cathedral, which has allowed us to use their space since our opening, has been a really great partner. They’re celebrating 200 years of service this year. We’ve also worked with Northeast Christian Church and First Unitarian Church. They each independently take one day a week to serve coffee and hot food.

We also have a great relationship with other non-profits like St. Johns and Muslim Americans for Compassion. MAC has delivered supplies like blankets and backpacks numerous times. We even asked if they could provide a cabinet to store the blankets in, and they brought one for us! MAC also contributed to our annual fundraiser, UPLift. We really appreciate their partnership.

I also must mention the Coalition of the Homeless. They guide a lot of organizations in the city. They wrote our first grant and provide access to half price bus passes for the women who visit us.

**MAC: What goals do you have for 2022? How can others provide assistance?**

AM: We learned in our first year that UP outgrew this space. Women need our services more than a few days a week. We’re working to develop relationships with local foundations, because we have to grow. We’re working towards a new space, and we need additional volunteers.

Our annual fundraiser, UPLift, takes place each August. It’s really important to us, not only because those contributions help make our operations successful, but because we have the opportunity to educate our peers about the state of homeless women in our community. We want to talk about the barriers that so many of these women face. There’s a lot that people don’t know about this world.

For example, 29% of the women we serve are age 50 or older. People think we’re only seeing younger moms. We see those too, but we serve more elderly women then you expect. We really want to get back out in the community. There is still a lot of people who don’t know who we are or what we do. So, we must keep telling our story.

Thank you to Amy Meredith for talking with MAC and for being an advocate for homeless women and children throughout Louisville. For those who want to donate or volunteer, don’t forget to visit <https://www.uplouisville.org>.

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