

Family & Youth Initiatives

"Empowering Families, Providing Hope"

Meet FYI's Leadership Team



From the Left: Real Life Choices Director, Jen Kennedy; Parenting Network Director, Rebecca Swearingen; New Roots Mentoring Program Director, Staci Sowders

There are some familiar faces in new roles around the FYI office!

This summer has been filled with change, development, and growth for the FYI family. Over the past three months, FYI's director roles have seen a change in leadership to allow for additional progress.

"Even though each director is new to this role, they are not new to FYI and its mission. They are willing to make bold decisions, yet maintain compassion for those they are serving. Their passion is contagious," excitedly explained FYI Executive Director, Nikki Stefanow.

Longtime RLC director, Rebecca Swearingen has shifted from her previous role to director of the Parenting Network. Staci Sowders initially began her FYI journey as a volunteer while she completed her college career. After becoming a full-time staff member with our New Roots Mentoring program, Staci quickly became instrumental to the team that she now leads as director. Jennifer Kennedy has been a friend of FYI for many years, volunteering as well before joining the Real Life Choices team in their lead educator position. This school year marks Jennifer's transition into holding the title of director for Real Life Choices.

All three of the new directors have put the summer to tremendous use, bonding and strengthening their teams, and brainstorming on how to unify and collaborate even more. "They are all extremely motivated to see growth and that excitement is spreading through their teams. Each one has some very definite ideas on how to move forward. They are great communicators and will be able to effectively lead their teams as we expand," Stefanow added.

We cannot wait to see what the year will hold for these three incredible leaders!

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Looking Ahead:

Page 2

- New Roots Director: Staci Sowders
- Real Life Choices Director: Jennifer Kennedy

Page 3

- Parenting Network Director: Rebecca Swearingen
- From Nikki's Heart

Page 4

- FYI's Team Builds Stronger Foundation



Executive Director, Nikki Stefanow's take on her favorite thing that each new director brings to FYI:

- Rebecca's ability to empathize and listen to others. She is a great communicator for the mission.
- Staci's ability to take the lead, organize and keep great records. We have had a lot of changes over the past year, but she has kept on top of it.
- Jennifer's ability to read people, see what needs doing, and do it. She has a true servant's heart.

Get to Know New Roots Mentoring Director, Staci Sowders



New Roots Mentoring Director,
Staci Sowders

Q: What drew you to FYI originally?

A: I started my journey with FYI by volunteering at Greenon Middle School, while I was getting my Criminal Justice degree. I knew that I wanted to work with youth but was undecided on how. After I started volunteering, I realized that I was making a bigger impact without having outside pressure due to work restrictions. I just fell in love with mentoring

Q: What has been your favorite project so far?

A: I really enjoy instructing Archery. It is not your typical hobby or sport but it is something that everyone can learn. Every time one of my students hits the target or the bullseye for the first time, it is an unforgettable moment.

Q: What aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?

A: This is probably the most meaningful question to me because I know my answer without hesitation. I can be the person that I needed and wanted when I was younger. That can either be physically or emotionally. Every child deserves a compassionate adult.

Q: Do you have a favorite quote?

A: "It's not about how much we lost, but about how much we have left." - Tony Stark

Q: Tell us something that most people don't know about you.

A: My dream job growing up was to be a mail sorter because I liked how organized and aesthetically pleasing it looked. Think of the scene in *How The Grinch Stole Christmas...*

Q: What does true leadership mean to you?

A: I believe true leadership is being able to work together. A great leader works alongside the people they lead to help them understand their role and inspire their team.

Q: What is the most important thing you have learned in the last five years?

A: In order to love who you are, you cannot hate the past experiences that you went through. Every pain and struggle has a purpose, even if we can't make sense of it at the moment.

Q: What is your greatest fear?

A: Praying mantis and grasshoppers.

I'm sure a normal, sane person would say "losing my loved ones" ... nope just terrified of anything that would jump at me for no reason.

Q: What one food do you wish had zero calories?

A: Just one?! Really just about anything sweet! (Cookie dough!)

For more information about how you can become a New Roots volunteer or about the program itself, email Mentor@FYIohio.org

Get to Know Real Life Choices Director, Jennifer Kennedy



Real Life Choices Director,
Jennifer Kennedy

Q: What drew you to FYI originally?

A: I volunteered with FYI in the early 2000's with the Parenting Network. I LOVED the clients, I loved interacting with the clients and their families and helping them through the early years of their child's life. It was fun and meaningful work. I stepped away upon having my fourth child and devoted my time to being a stay-at-home mom, while also volunteering as a youth group leader with LACC's youth group. I quickly realized working with students was where I was meant to be. Encouraging students to make healthy choices for themselves in relationships, life, and school. Rebecca Swearingen had recently been hired at FYI, and was promoted to the Director's position. She knew my heart for students and thought I would be a good fit for the Real Life Choices program, and asked me to follow her to "see what we are about". I love it! Being able to pour into students and help show them they are loved and valued has been such a blessing to me.

Q: Where's your favorite place in the world?

A: My favorite place in the whole wide world is Gulf Shores, Alabama. My sister and I spent every summer of our lives there with our grandparents until their death. I will cherish that beach, and those memories, forever.

Q: What are three words that best describe you?

A: This is a hard one! Determined, fun, and... introverted.

Q: What is the most important thing learned in the last five years?

A: To love others no matter what. The world needs more love and kindness and hope. And the students we see need to know they are loved.

Q: What is your personal mantra?

A: "I am enough!" I have lived my life with self-doubt, and I am looking forward, and working hard, to overcome the negativity that I can bring upon myself.

Q: What does true leadership look like to you?

A: To me, true leadership looks like someone who can support and love their team while also overcoming hardships that the team doesn't know exist. True leadership looks like a team that is happy, comfortable, and confident in their skills and also happy, comfortable, and confident with their leader.



For more information about our Real Life Choices program or curriculum, email RealLife@FYIohio.org

Get to Know Parenting Network Director, Rebecca Swearingen

Q: What drew you to FYI originally?

A: When I first moved here in 2009, I knew that I wanted to volunteer for the Parenting Network. I have always had a strong desire to work with pregnant moms! At that time in my life, things never seemed to line up for it to be the right time. Instead I worked at the school as a sub for a number of years. During my time

in the schools I decided to go back to school to finish my BA. I studied Human Development and Family Studies and took many classes on child development, adolescent development, special education, marriage and families and human sexuality. During my human sexuality class I learned that MANY of my fellow students, who were all adults, had never had any conversations about sex and puberty at home or at school. This created in me a desire to want to teach adolescents about puberty and sexual health. Soon after, I met Jessica Turner at a safety day event and learned about FYI's Real Life Choices program and that they were short-staffed and desperately needed another educator. I could not wait to apply, in fact, I was so excited I submitted the application that evening before I had the opportunity to talk to my husband about it.

Q: What aspect of your role do you enjoy the most?

A: Getting to see the babies when they come in, ordering baby supplies, and seeing our clients thrive and learn.

Q: What do you like to do when you aren't working?

A: I enjoy reading and hanging out with my family. My husband and I have an 11th grader and 9th grader and the time with them is quickly slipping away. Our days are usually filled with sports practices, games, and matches, and we love cheering them on and watching them learn about themselves through hard work and perseverance.

Q: What is the most important thing you have learned in the last five years?

A: Over the last five years I have learned that life is precious and short and you have to live in each moment you are given. Don't wait to have fun or to tell people how you feel about them. Slow down and make time for yourself. If your cup is empty you have nothing to give to someone else. Most importantly, I can only control how I respond to situations. I can not control the world or the people in it.

Q: What is your motto or personal mantra?

A: What can I learn today?

Q: What does true leadership mean to you?

A: True leadership is about leading by example. I can never expect anyone to do something I am unwilling to do.

For more information about how you can become a Parenting Network volunteer or about the program itself, email Parenting@FYIohio.org



(Left) Parenting Network Director, Rebecca Swearingen and her husband, James (right).

From Nikki's

Heart

I've been working through a book called, "Know What You're For", by Jeff Henderson. He talks about the value of being able to convey your message clearly while building up your community, customers, team, and you. He asks the question,

"What do you want to be known for?" And then, "What are you known for?" When those two answers don't coincide, you need to make some changes.



FYI wants to be known for empowering families and children, and providing hope for the future. We are for families - supporting them, equipping them, and keeping them safe from harm. We are for youth - giving them a listening ear, sound counsel, and skills to be able to protect themselves. We are for other agencies, organizations, churches, and individuals that work together to help provide hope. The question comes in, do they know we are for them? If so, how do they know?

Not only do we need to know what we are for at FYI, but we also need to know what we are for personally. I know that my personal mission is to encourage and lead people who have lost hope. My goal is to inspire hope and faith - not just in God, but faith in themselves. I want them to see that they have value, and worth, and can accomplish more than they ever thought. I'm for those who have lost hope.

Our Real Life Teen Choices team is for educating students and helping them set healthy boundaries and long-term goals for their future. Recently, RLTC Director, Rebecca Swearingen, made such an impact on the students at Dayton Christian that they felt compelled to write her "thank you" letters. The students wrote about what a difference she made in how they view themselves, their peers, and their future.

One student said that because of Rebecca they felt comfortable enough to be open about some of their struggles for the very first time. This student wrote: "I was nervous about this unit but you made it a lot better. You helped me step out of my comfort zone and I felt like it was the right time to share things that I have never shared before. I felt comfortable sharing that I have really bad anxiety."

This is what we are for; this is why we feel so passionately about educating and encouraging our youth.

I am asking each of you to do something for me. I would love to know what you are "for." I also want to know your "why" for being part of this amazing group of people who are changing lives every day. (Those may be one and the same, but maybe not.) Will you share your story with me? You are so vitally important to this mission. I want to be for you as much as you are for us.

I can't wait to hear from you!

Counting It All Joy,

Nikki



FYI's 2022 Staff Retreat



FYI's Staff Meet for a Day of Team Building, Growth, and Community

FYI continued their annual tradition of holding an all-staff and board retreat this summer. Held at Restoration Park Church, FYI staff worked together to plan a relaxing day of team building, growth, and community. The event began with a speech from Executive Director, Nikki Stefanow, based on 1 Peter 5:8, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." The emphasis of her story and the scripture was on the importance of communication for strength. "I recently learned that when lions hunt their prey, it is actually the lionesses that do the hunting. The lion stands on some precipice above looking over the valley where the lionesses are waiting to attack a herd of animals," Nikki Stefanow explained.

She added, "When the lion roars, it is so loud and fierce that the sound carries for over a mile, scaring the herd. The herd usually comes closer together to protect each other. In the midst of chaos, some get separated from the herd. Those that are isolated from the pack are attacked by the lionesses and devoured.

The point I was trying to make with the team was how much we need to stay connected to each other. When we wander off in our own direction, isolating ourselves from the encouragement and support we need, we are attacked and devoured. We have to be able to lean into and trust each other, to draw strength from and support each other."

Interested in joining our pride?

Stop by our office or call to learn more about how you can join FYI's mission!

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Community Garden Director, Jim Tipton, Real Life Choices Director, Jennifer Kennedy



FYI Board Member, Della Fell

We Need Your Help

Every day families and children are suffering from traumas caused by generational cycles of abuse and poverty. FYI's solution is to rescue and protect those families and children to prevent future trauma by redirecting their paths through education, training, and support in our multiple programs. Those we serve become empowered with hope for the future.



FYI invites you to tour our facilities, shadow our staff, or attend an event. Executive Director, Nikki Stefanow feels very passionately about involving the community in every aspect of FYI's mission. "There is something incredibly powerful about witnessing the effect of our programs in person," Stefanow said. She added, "It is also about finding people who are just as passionate about making positive changes in the lives of others to walk alongside us. We are always looking for caring individuals who would like to donate their time, their talents, or their treasures to helping FYI make a difference."

Ways You Can Get Involved

Become a prayer partner:

Praying for the organization, staff, clients, donors, and, specific needs as they arise.

Make an impact with New Roots Mentoring:

Every child needs at least one caring adult in their life. Could that be you?

Initiate contacts:

Initiate contacts with those who may need our services (parents, students), who would be good volunteers, who could donate financially.

Volunteer with our Parenting Network

Working with parents gives you the satisfaction of knowing you are helping encourage a solid foundation in a family. You get to celebrate their successes and cry with them when they struggle as you encourage them along the path of hope. When you see hope light up in someone's eyes, it makes all the difference.

For more information on each of these volunteer opportunities, please visit FYIohio.org and join the mission!