Member Agency Spotlight

HARBOR HOUSE

As mentioned in the opening letter of this edition of *For Better Times*, we are focusing on the expansion of accessibility of services for anyone in Illinois that is experiencing domestic violence. This article will focus on just one member program, Harbor House, which provides 24-hour emergency services in Kankakee and Iroquois counties.

Harbor House was founded in the 1970s by a group of volunteers. At first, they were just available in Kankakee but expanded to Iroquois County in 1987. They opened the first 24-hour emergency shelter in 1986.

The current Executive Director, Jenny Schoenwetter, joined Harbor House in August of 2018. She was working in higher education fundraising and seeking employment internationally when a mentor told her about the opening for the Executive Director at Harbor House. At first, she dismissed the idea, but the mentor strongly encouraged her, saying Jenny would be great at it, so she started looking into it more and agreed. She knew of Harbor House having been on the local United Way Board for several years but didn't fully understand what they provided. In researching the organization as she considered the Executive Director position, Jenny realized it aligned with her personal mission. With adult hindsight, she now understands that her childhood and the things her parents did really prepared her for this work of ending gender based violence.

Since Jenny became Executive Director, she has focused on building and maintaining an adequate workforce. She has instilled in the Board and staff a mindset of abundance; in order to provide appropriate sustainable services, the agency had to respect and honor their workforce with thriving pay and benefits. She has also built into the budget staff development funds so the staff can stay on top of trends and best practices in order to be trauma informed and victim centered. This means staff focus on helping survivors find the services and tools they believe will be most helpful to create a pathway to long term safety and stability. Jenny feels strongly that with a happy, supported staff, great services will be provided to those in need and community advocacy will improve.

Jenny's other goal to improve and grow Harbor House is to inform the communities they serve about what they do and what domestic violence really is. Harbor House has sought many opportunities to engage the citizens of Kankakee and Iroquois counties. This not only builds support for Harbor House but sends the message that domestic violence must come out of the dark and be recognized for the epidemic it is. Jenny has created two groups to help spread the message and as she says, "a community problem needs community solutions". One group that Jenny has organized is Community Commission to End Domestic Violence. This group is comprised of a cross section of local citizens and is focused on community education. The other group is comprised of law enforcement, prosecutors and others who have more of a focus on systems response and training. One example of how this second group is making a difference with their own peers was a newer officer recently joined the group and was expressing the thoughts of responding in a non-trauma-informed manner and the others in the group were saying responses don't occur that way anymore, they are ineffective. This highlights that once people become more informed about the complexities of domestic violence and the need for multi-faceted responses, the more likely both professionals and private citizens are to recognize everyone has a role to play in ending domestic violence.

In January 2023 Harbor House fully expanded their services to Iroquois County by opening a second shelter site. There was some community push back, but the mayor was very supportive. Harbor House is also utilizing social media accounts to provide a platform for survivors to share their stories to encourage more to seek help.

Finally, Jenny is sharing with her communities the importance of seeing Harbor House from an economic perspective. They have a $2.8 million dollar budget with 38 employees across their services. Harbor House is a thriving member of the business community as well as a significant social services provider. Jenny and Harbor House are looking to the future with a mindset of abundance that together we can end domestic violence.



Some of the Harbor House Team with Harbor House's celebrity, Mark Wynn

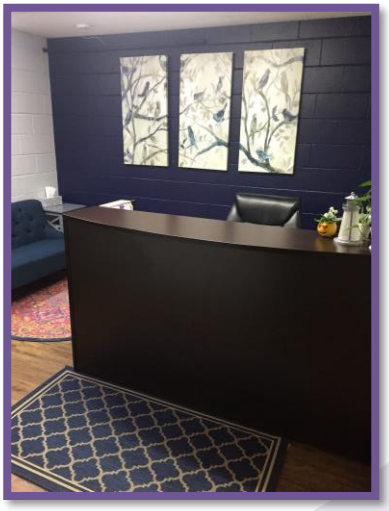
(217) 789-2830
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Harbor House's Iroquois County Emergency Shelter







Harbor House's Kankakee County Emergency Shelter
(after Adopt an Area)