



*Celebrating 50 Years!*  
**HELPING SERVICES**  
for Youth & Families

*Spring & Summer 2023*

## Helping Services Celebrates 50 Years!

Friends, supporters, former and current staff and board members, and community members came together to celebrate a huge milestone in the life of Helping Services—50 years of service!

Started by a group of students with support from faculty at Luther College as the “Trouble Line” and “Hot Line to Help,” the early focus was on local youth. Teens and young adults could call and talk to someone to get help at a time when help lines were still a new idea in the field of social work.

As the work developed, a drop-in center called the “Hobbit Hole” was opened for a place for youth to congregate. Volunteers and staff would be present to address everything from problems dealing with substance use, domestic violence, teen dating violence, mental health, and more.

The grassroots organization became an official nonprofit in 1973 under the name “Helping Services for Northeast Iowa.” In 2017, that name was updated to “Helping Services for Youth & Families” to reflect their mission of healthier and safer families and communities. Started in Decorah, the organization has grown to expand services to many communities. Staff and volunteers now reside in eight counties of northeast Iowa.

The 50th anniversary celebration event on April 22nd at Impact Coffee in Decorah featured speakers from throughout the history of Helping Services, including Karen Tjossem, a founding member of the “Trouble Line,” and Tom Murray, a past mentor with the Youth Mentoring program.

Carson Eggland, Executive Director, remarked that Helping Services will continue to be a driving force in northeast Iowa by leveraging its pillars of prevention, advocacy, and education while staying true to the mission of supporting healthier and safer families and communities. The evening was filled with appreciation and acknowledgment of past successes while looking forward to a bright future. ■



These 4 image credits:  
*Nick Chill Photography*



*Thank you for helping celebrate 50 years!*



*Thank you to the Decorah Area Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors for hosting a ribbon cutting to celebrate 50 years!*



## Family Education & Support

### *The start of better communities through working with young families*

Family Education has been around the HAWC (Howard, Allamakee, Winneshiek & Clayton) counties for about 25 years. I have been a part of it for 20 years. When I started, each of the four counties had 2-3 educators serving families in almost every community with home visits and play groups. We were able to work with all the local obstetric units, going in and meeting with moms to let them know about weight checks and breastfeeding support once they get home. Often times, we would receive a call from doctors wanting extra weight checks, due to baby not gaining as they should. We partnered with WIC and Keystone AEA to assist the parents with developmentally delayed children, low birth weight babies and children born with various medical diagnosis. We brought out information from the American Academy of Pediatrics, State Extension offices and many other reputable sources to share with the families.

Fifteen years ago, our funding source, Early Childhood Iowa, wanted programs to choose specific evidence-based programs and use their curriculum. We chose Parents as Teachers, an evidence-based, world renowned program that covers every aspect of child development. We knew we were providing good and reliable information prior to the implementation of PAT and now we can see the results of using the evidence-based curriculum; parents are promoting children's language and literacy, they report feeling they have improved their parenting knowledge and skills, parents are more involved in their child's school, children's health and potential developmental delays are detected early, child abuse and neglect are prevented, children enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Present day has us with some things staying the same, but many things have changed. While the budget has progressively shrunk, hence less staff members, we are still using the Parents as Teachers curriculum and still seeing families with children to age three. Unfortunately, we now speak in 'pre- & post' Covid terms. Across the nation, home-visiting programs took a huge hit when Covid took over. We did virtual visits to compensate, but for many families the lack of in-person visits, limited resources for virtual visits or Covid related issues led to many families opting out of the program. Due to safety and health concerns at the time, we were unable to continue visiting new parents in the hospitals or meeting people through WIC.

Now in the post-Covid world, while we still focus on safety for families and staff, we have several play and activity parent-child groups several times a month and are re-establishing relationships with obstetric units and many other family service agencies to reach families for the continued pursuit of providing support and information to all families with young children.

We will continue to partner with community resources to best serve families in Howard, Allamakee, Winneshiek and Clayton counties. ■

—Barb Fjelstul, Director of Family Education & Support

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### Nurturing program teaches parents and kids new skills

1996

Kids don't come with instruction manuals. When adults take on the task of parenting, they usually have to rely on what they know and on what kind of advice they can get from family, friends, and books.

As most parents can attest, parenting is one of the most challenging tasks they have ever taken on, yet it is also one of the most rewarding.

More and more, parents welcome the opportunity to take part in a parenting class. They appreciate the opportunity to ask questions, share concerns, and learn new techniques for dealing with some of the day-to-day problems of family life.

One of these programs is called Nurturing. In Winneshiek County, the program is offered by the Family Support Network under a grant from the Iowa Chapter of the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse.

As the title implies, the Nurturing program is about positive family interaction. Some of the goals of the program include helping family members get to know each other better, building strong lines of communication, and spending quality time together.

"The program is about giving families time together without a television and giving them appropriate activities that they can do as a family," said Trish Hartman, coordinator of Family Support Network.

## Director's Message

### Celebrating 50 Years!



Milestones are important to acknowledge and celebrate, especially those that have resulted in so much positive impact over the years – 50 to be exact! Starting from a grass-roots effort to help solve community issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, our team is honored to continue the legacy of Helping Services into the next 50 years. In this newsletter you will read both stories from the past and a look at how programs operate now. You will notice that leaning on a focus of prevention and advocacy has led the organization since 1973, and both continue to serve as foundational pillars moving forward.

I have to acknowledge those who have come before us to make this milestone happen. Board members, who ensure fiscal and legal oversight while providing vital support for management. Volunteers, who provide invaluable services such as being mentors for youth or comforting voices responding to a crisis call. Staff members, who have chosen to work in a field that can be both incredibly rewarding and unbearably difficult. Donors who continue to give resources to ensure the doors remain open and our team can be flexible in its approach to addressing community issues. And most importantly, families and youth who entrust in our team to provide quality and meaningful programs and services.

*Thank you* for walking by our side over the past 50 years. With your continued help, I am confident Helping Services for Youth & Families will remain a driving force in northeast Iowa for healthier and safer families and community.

*Carlin Eggel*

Executive Director

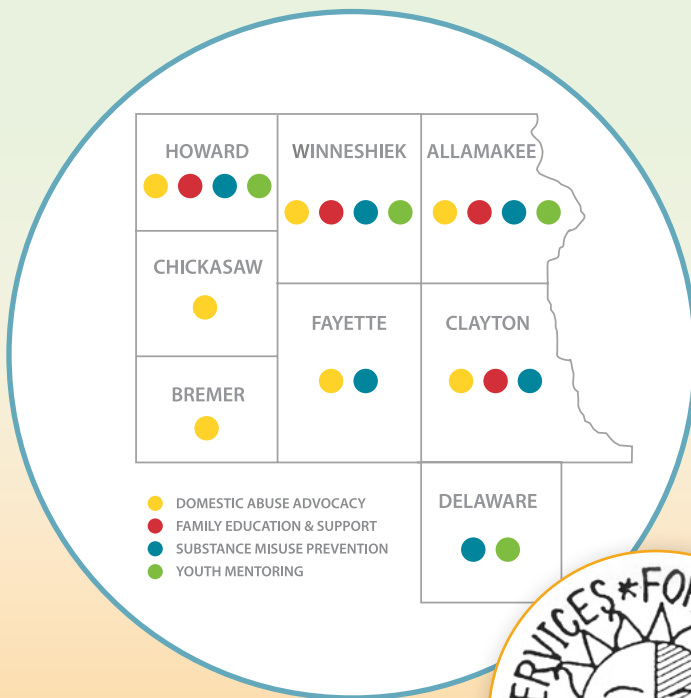
#### Helping Services Board of Directors

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*Board Members at Helping Services can serve up to three consecutive two year terms.*



Learn more at [helpingservices.org](https://helpingservices.org)







## Prevention Services:

### *Then and Now*

Over the past 20 years, substance use prevention has seen positive changes and also new challenges. Dating back to the early 2000s, prevention efforts for substance use utilized strategies that we targeted toward individuals specifically. This included school programming, youth mentoring programs, parent education, and alternative activities for your youth like youth centers. Providing information, education, and supporting youth were the main approaches, and these approaches still remain vital today.

Fast forward 10 years and the gears shifted to changing the environment. Efforts were aimed at modifying or influencing community conditions, standards, institutions, structures, systems, and policies causing challenges because some communities aren't ready to make these big changes. Examples of this include things like passing social host ordinances, increasing beer excise taxes, and passing the Smoke-Free Air Act. These strategies impacted a larger population with the plan to see community-level changes around substance use versus one person at a time. Over the years, the one consistent positive approach has been utilizing grassroots coalitions. Grassroots coalitions are people who come together to work on an issue with the intended outcome of making change.

Another newer challenge for the prevention field is working to reduce the stigma attached to substance use. The words that are used to describe those who use substances are changing to better reflect the science behind substance use, and to shed the negative stigma around those who have a substance use disorder. Examples are junkie or alcoholic to a person with a substance use disorder or a person with an alcohol use disorder. By using person-first language and changing the way our biases are towards those that have a substance use disorder, we can further support and open more doors for treatment and recovery.

Today, prevention looks at a comprehensive approach with interventions that target the individual and ones that target the community as a whole in order to see change around the issue. We have also started a deeper dive into incorporating co-occurring issues like mental health, suicide prevention, and problem gambling prevention and how they relate to substance use which is a very positive movement for the prevention field.

Our team is hopeful that as the prevention field expands its topics and continues to utilize the foundational approaches we have used for years, we will witness a greater impact on the individuals and communities that we serve. ■

—Jen Stolka, Director of Prevention Services

## Helping Services offers workshop on running a support group

1989

Helping Services is offering a new workshop designed to train teachers and school personnel in setting up support groups.

Called "A Group of Our Own," the workshop gives participants the information they need to run and facilitate a support group at their school.

According to Ann Bode, high risk youth specialist with Helping Services, establishing support groups within the school system can be an effective way to alleviate some of the stresses students face today. Some of these stresses include divorce, eating disorders, and alcohol- and drug-related problems.

### DECORAH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS PROMOTE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS WEEK



1987

Substance Abuse Awareness Week for 1987 was October 25-31. The Decorah Substance Abuse Task Force, in their desire to make the community aware of this and the problem of substance abuse in Decorah, asked students in grades 4-6 at East Side Elementary School to enter a poster contest. The posters featured themes of "Keep Your Dreams Alive - Don't Drink and Drive," "Just Say No (to Drugs)," and recognition of such groups as SADD (Students Against Drunk Drivers) and MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers).

## The Domestic Abuse Resource Center Remains Focused on Survivors

As the domestic violence comprehensive program that covers the seven counties in northeast Iowa, we have encountered various changes over the years since beginning the program in 1978. Some of the changes include our program primarily focusing on assisting domestic violence survivors. When our agency first opened, we also assisted sexual assault survivors so that has been a shift in service provision. Another change over the years has been opening up services to all in need, regardless of gender. In this capacity, we continuously strive to provide the most innovative, streamlined and survivor friendly services. In order to provide the most inclusive and seamless services to survivors, we have implemented various strategies which include developing DART (Domestic Abuse Response Teams) in each of the counties we serve. These teams include protocols with local law enforcement agencies and county attorneys to ensure victims of domestic violence receive help from an advocate whenever law enforcement is involved. We also work very hard to collaborate with professionals who intersect with survivors. Some examples of these professionals include, mental health professionals, medical personnel, attorneys, churches, veteran programs and area social service providers, just to name a few.

Over the years we have secured funding from federal grants to provide focused services for children affected by domestic violence, faith based focused services, the formation and implementation of DART teams in each of the counties, dating violence and stalking services and transitional housing programming. Most recently we are the recipients of two federal Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) grants. We secured an OVW rural grant in 2020 which allows us to provide focused services to dating violence and stalking survivors and includes staff to provide presentations to area middle and high school students. The second OVW grant allows us to provide transitional housing to survivors that includes rental assistance for clients for up to two years. We received the first transitional housing grant in 2005 and have secured funding ever since.

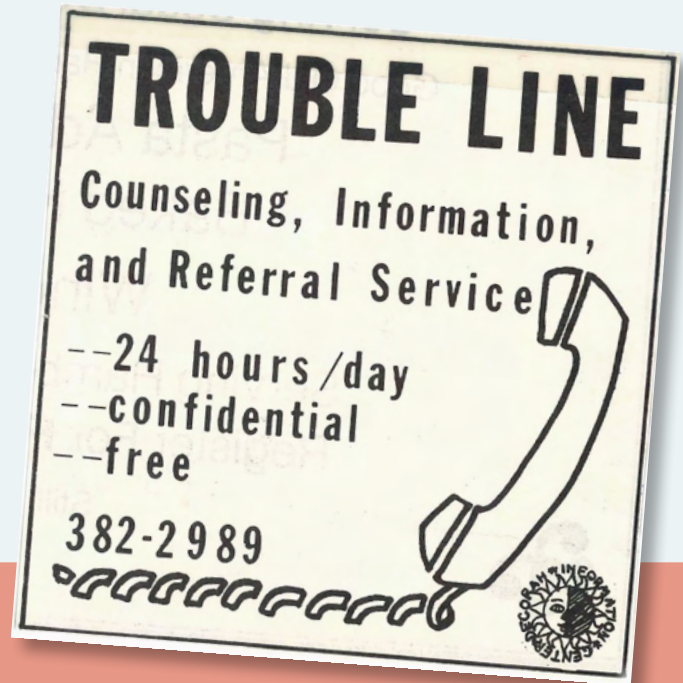
In order to assist immigrant survivors, we employ two bilingual advocates on the team who work tirelessly to provide comprehensive services to this underprivileged population of survivors.

As a result of the COVID pandemic, we added a chat option on our website which has been very successful in reaching more survivors. Our resource line (1-800-383-2988 or 563-382-2989) and chat options ([helpingservices.org/chat](https://helpingservices.org/chat)) are available to survivors 24/7, including holidays.

In closing, what hasn't changed over the years is our continued efforts to provide the safest, most inclusive, free and confidential services to survivors who are affected by domestic violence.

We are beyond honored to provide these services and look forward to continuing our work in the most impactful and innovative ways possible in the seven-county service area. ■

—Kathleen Davis, Domestic Abuse Resource Center Program Director



### Dating violence starts with a need for power and control

Most of us don't stop to consider that the thoughts, experiences, and reactions of others don't necessarily converge with our own perceptions of reality.

Within this gray zone are our dreams of happiness and fulfillment. Within this gray zone also lies the threat of violence and abuse in a place where most of us would least expect it: intimate relationships.

For one out of eight high school students and one out of five college students, intimate relationships involve some form of violence.

1994



# Mentoring Works!

## Ten years together

*Long-term mentoring match shares value of program*

By Jennifer Bissell

For the past 10 years, Decorah's Colleen Wetli and Allison Pavlovec have gathered to bake cookies, read books, play games and hike the trails in Decorah.

Wetli, a former teacher, and Pavlovec, a current Decorah High School student, met 10 years ago when they were paired as mentor/mentee through Helping Services for Youth & Family. That bond continues to grow today.

### A perfect pair

Colleen and her husband Bernie have lived in Decorah for 33 years. After their youngest daughter Maria graduated from high school, Colleen, a former teacher at St. Benedict School, looked into becoming a mentor.

"It filled a void of our activities and sporting events that we had with

### Mentoring match

Continued on page 5

Allison Pavlovec and Colleen Wetli were paired as mentor/mentee 10 years ago. They've found new ways to connect during the pandemic. (Submitted photos)

2021



## BECOME A MENTOR TODAY

- Take the first step to become a mentor by visiting [helpingservices.org/mentoring](https://helpingservices.org/mentoring) and completing a short form. Or call 563-387-1720 to learn more.

Our Youth Mentoring Coordinators are ready to connect with you today!



### Nona and Lois

This Mentoring Mania pair of one year, shown above as they indulge in a bowl of homemade ice cream, has been an active team. And according to Nona, a shared conversation over this frozen treat has actually become a mutual pastime for the two.

"The very first thing we ever did together was visit the park in Postville. Afterwards, we went for ice cream," remembers Nona Sawyer, mentor. "Now we have this ice cream thing going, and if I forget, Lois reminds me."

## Success breeds success through mentoring program

2000

By Elisha Marti

Each of us needs a positive role model in our life - someone to whom we can look to for guidance and by whom we can gauge our lifelong goals. Not necessarily a person whom we wish to be a replicate, but rather someone who can guide us to success by sharing their own positive experiences and lessons learned, achievements and disappointments, and simply time and attention.

It is through the Mentoring Mania program that many children in and around Allamakee County meet this special person.

Similar to programs implemented in both Winneshiek and Howard counties, Mentoring Mania was developed in 1998 through an intensive process of planning - policy, goal and mission development under the direction of Kathy Schwartzhoff of Helping Services of Northeast Iowa. Additional leadership for the program was offered by representatives of the county's school systems, social service agencies, churches, businesses and civil organizations.

Initially, Mentoring Mania's

mission was co-funded through McElroy Trust and Department of Human Services Safe & Stable grants, awarded to Helping Services of Northeast Iowa. Today, it is fully funded via the latter source.

In December 1998, then, upon completion of the year-long coordination process, Diane Engen, also of Helping Services, was hired as Mentoring Mania's "match maker" in a sense, as well as its coordinator in all other respects. In January 1999 the program was officially initiated, with the first match made some four months later.

For those unfamiliar with the Mentoring Mania program, it is an initiative in which youths (mentees) are paired with adults (mentors) for the purpose of fostering healthy relationships in which the mentor can act as a role model and friend to another.

Matches, according to Engen, are for a one-year trial period and may continue, if both parties so choose, beyond that time. Volunteer mentors meet with their partners, one on one, at least once per month for a total of three to five hours. They are also encouraged to maintain

*Lisa Farley, pictured below in 1996 with one of her 4-5 mentees, was the person who started mentoring by asking the question: "We at Iowa Workforce Development are thinking about mentoring. Is anyone else?"*





## A Look Through the Years at Helping Services...



*Thank You*  
— to the —  
Helping Services Team  
over the last 50 years!







# HELPING SERVICES for Youth & Families

PO Box 372 • Decorah, IA 52101

Update your contact info at [info@helpingservices.org](mailto:info@helpingservices.org)



**Thank you to the Decorah Gemini team for its wonderful donation of \$9500 to Helping Services for Youth and Families!**

*Pictured here:* Ben Krouse-Gagne, Helping Services Director of Community Engagement, Lauryn Breitsprecher, Gemini Employee & Contributions Committee Member, & Carson Eggland, Helping Services Executive Director.

# HOLIDAY *Lights*

*Save the Date!*

We look forward to Holiday Lights returning for its 19th season next year!

Save the date for the  
Holiday Lights opening Walk-through Night on  
**Wednesday, November 22, 2023**



Photo Credit: Nick Chill Photography