

HELPING SERVICES for Youth & Families



Fall & Winter 2025

Talented Youth Showcase Skills at Mentoring Talent Show

We're still smiling from ear to ear after our recent Mentoring Talent Show. It was a day filled with laughter, courage, and incredible performances!

The afternoon began with a warm and welcoming picnic, where mentors, mentees and families came together to share food, stories, and sunshine. From there, the stage lights came on, and our youth stepped up to share their talents—singing, dancing, playing instruments, trivia host and more.

The heart behind the event was simple but powerful:

- *Encourage youth to step outside their comfort zones*
- *Give youth the opportunity to learn a new skill with their mentor*
- *Celebrate personal growth as much as performance*

It was inspiring to see how much time and effort each young person put into preparing with their mentor. For some, this was their very first time on stage and they shined with pride knowing they had someone by their side cheering them on.



Talents abound in Youth Mentoring!

A huge thank you to our mentors for guiding, supporting, and believing in their mentees, and to the youth for their bravery and creativity. You've shown us all what can happen when encouragement meets opportunity.

We are so proud of everyone who participated, and we can't wait to see what new challenges and adventures await

this year. Together, we're building confidence, skills, and lasting connections one mentoring moment at a time. ■

To learn more about how to become a mentor and view our waiting list of youth, visit our website at:
www.helpingservices.org/mentoring.



Mentoring is fun for everyone—mentees and mentors!

School-Based Mentoring Strengthens Connections in Local Schools

School-based mentoring is making a meaningful impact in our communities by fostering positive relationships between students—all within the school day and school year. This type of mentoring takes place right in the school system, where high school students or community members volunteer their time to mentor younger students. Sessions may include playing games, working on homework, or simply having a conversation. While simple on the surface, these moments of connection can have a lasting influence, helping students feel valued, supported, and encouraged to reach their potential.

The commitment is small, but the impact is huge. Mentors spend about four hours a month with their mentee, which breaks down to roughly one hour per week. The schedule is flexible, allowing for adjustments when life gets hectic. This makes it possible for busy high school students, parents, or community members to participate without feeling overwhelmed, while still providing younger students with a consistent and caring presence.

The benefits of school-based mentoring are wide-reaching. Younger students gain a trusted friend and role model who is there to listen and provide encouragement. Mentors themselves also experience growth as they build leadership, empathy, and communication skills. Schools benefit as well, as mentoring helps to strengthen the sense of community, belonging, and teamwork within their buildings.

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Family Education & Support

Child Passenger Safety: Key Tips Every Parent and Caregiver Should Know

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of injury and death for children, making proper car seat use essential. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), while most caregivers are confident they've correctly installed their child's car seat, almost half (46%) have been installed incorrectly. Whether you're heading to daycare drop-off or taking the family on vacation, these tips can help keep your child safe every ride.

Choose the Right Seat

What is the "best seat" for your child? The best seat is the one that fits the child, fits the vehicle, and the caregiver can use correctly every time. In Iowa, infants under 1 year of age and under 20 pounds must be in a rear-facing seat, while Minnesota requires children under 2 years old to be rear-facing. Since variations in state laws can be confusing, the best rule-of-thumb to follow is that infants and toddlers should ride in a rear-facing seat as long as possible—at least until they reach the seat's height or weight limit. Why is it safer to ride rear-facing? A rear-facing seat spreads the crash forces across the child's body and back of the car seat, protecting the child's head, neck, and back.

Install It Correctly

Each car seat is different; each vehicle is different; each child is different. That's why it's important to follow both the car seat manual and your vehicle's instructions. The Family Education staff at Helping Services go through extensive training to become certified child passenger safety technicians. They work with WinnMed to conduct free car-seat checks several times per year, but are happy to do a seat check anytime by request.

Buckle Up Properly—Ditch that Puffy Coat!

As the temperature drops in these fall and winter months, parents will often bundle up their children before heading out. Bulky coats can cause harness straps to be too loose to properly protect your child. Instead, dress your child in thin, warm layers, buckle them securely, and then add a blanket or their coat over the harness. Harness straps should lie flat and be snug. Always perform the "pinch test" after buckling by trying to pinch the harness strap at the child's shoulder. If you can pinch any excess webbing, it's too loose.

Transition Carefully—Don't Rush!

Move from rear-facing to forward-facing, then to a booster, only when your child outgrows each stage. How do you know if your child is ready to graduate to the next level? Visit NHTSA's Ultimate Car Seat Guide—a great resource for every age.



Helping Services' Family Educators, **Eva and Val**, are certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians that are available for car seat checks.

Be a Role Model

Always wear your own seat belt. Children learn by example, and your habits set the standard for safe travel.

By choosing the right seat, installing it correctly, and modeling safe behavior, parents can significantly reduce the risk of serious injury and help every trip end safely. ■



Family Educators are there to help you and your family through the joys and challenges of raising a child.

What is Family Education?

Twenty-two years ago, I took a job as a home visitor in Howard County, my children were 18 months, four and six years old. I honestly had no idea how this job would change my life and my views on parenting.

We all know raising children is not easy. As new parents, we are slightly terrified all the time. There are so many questions; why are they waking up all the time, why did they sleep through the night, why is their diaper surprise that color? We battle worries of diaper rashes, ear infections and are they getting enough to eat as an infant, when do I start solid foods and what should I be feeding them when I do?

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Message from the Director



Colder weather means one (big) thing at Helping Services—time for **Holiday Lights!** As preparations continue for the 21st season of Holiday Lights, I wanted to remind you why we continue to host the event each year at Pulpit Rock Campground in Decorah. Yes, it is a wonderful family tradition for many. Yes, it is a fun way to celebrate the season. But most importantly, proceeds from the event provide the foundation to apply for large grants such as the new Transitional Housing grant that we were recently awarded from the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women. This 3-year grant award of \$500,000 will provide transitional housing support for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking in our service area.

Helping Services is in the position to apply for grants such as this thanks to your support at events such as Holiday Lights. Thank you for providing the opportunity to enhance our services through an award such as this Transitional Housing grant. *We are grateful for your support!*

Carin Eggel

Executive Director



Learn **"What to Know Before You Go"** for the opening night **Holiday Lights Walk Through Night** on November 26.

Helping Services Board of Directors

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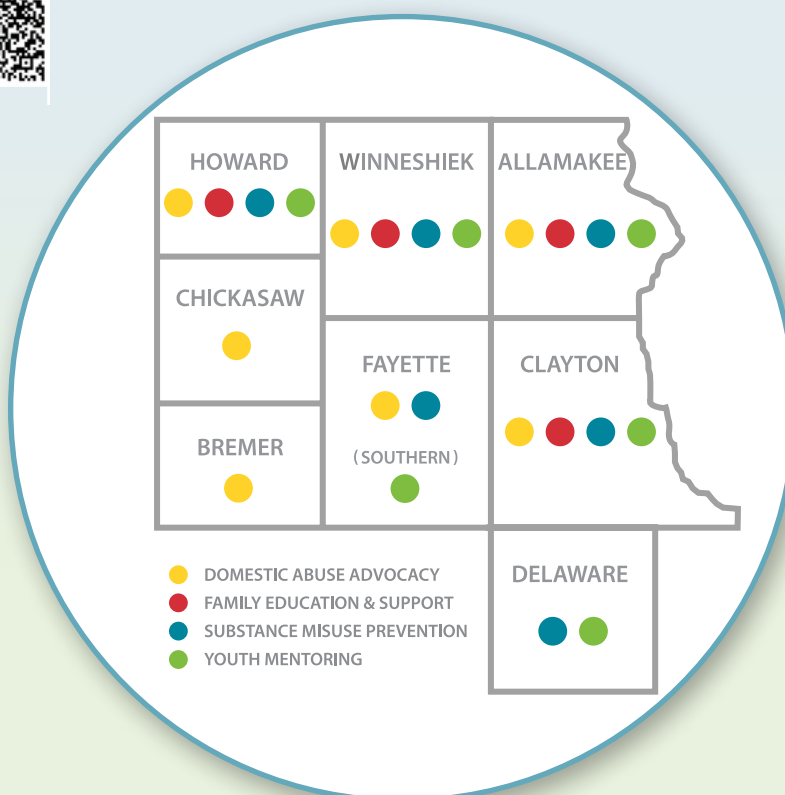
Tiffany Johansen

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Stephanie Newsom

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



Learn more at helpingservices.org

2024–2025 ANNUAL STATISTICS

Allamakee, Bremer, Chickasaw,
Clayton, Delaware, Fayette,
Howard, & Winneshiek
Counties

FY25 ■ 7/1/24–6/30/25

Family Education & Support

(Allamakee, Clayton, Howard, and Winneshiek Counties)

- 43 Families served
- 47 Children served
- 395 Home Visits
- 27 Groups
- 175 Group Participants
- 9 Community events
- 524 Staff training hours

Program Impact

"I'm the mother of three beautiful children. The purpose of this letter is to share with you and tell you that I participated in the Family Education Program. Lillian Quam was the bilingual family educator who visited my children and family. It was a very beautiful experience because she came to my home and through her visits, the program taught me to ensure that my children were learning what they needed to know at their age level. She also shared with me ideas like making homemade toys appropriate to my children's age level.

During the visits Lillian also offered me help to enroll my children in another school program, I also enjoyed the parent groups held in the parks, although sometimes there was not enough time. During that time, I built relationships with other parents, as a parent I highly recommend this program, especially to new parents. This program will help you with all your doubts and questions you might have regarding the early development of the children."

Family Educators regularly travel to area libraries as a guest facilitator for story time, not only reading stories but also providing opportunities for hands-on activities. Pictured below is a group activity focusing on sensory play at the Robey Memorial Library in Waukon.



Substance Misuse Prevention Program

(Allamakee, Clayton, Delaware, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek Counties)

- 78 Youth served in Youth Mentoring
- 1,055 Youth participants at substance use prevention presentations
- 53 Youth participants in Curriculum Based Support Groups
- 816 Adult participants at substance use and problem gambling prevention presentations
- 221 Participants in *Your Life Iowa* presentations
- 65 Servers who attended TIPS training for alcohol retailers
- 200 Quit kits distributed
- 1,456 People reached with coalition/prevention education at community events
- 55 Naloxone kits distributed
- 213 Individuals trained to use Naloxone
- 100 Provider training attendees (*Ask, Advise, Refer*)

Domestic Abuse Resource Center

(Allamakee, Bremer, Chickasaw, Clayton, Fayette, Howard and Winneshiek Counties)

- 1,118 College, high school and middle school students attended presentations focused on dating violence prevention
- 54 School or community based presentations
- 166 New victims served
- 1,198 Total Resource Line calls and chats
- 24 Transportation trips provided for victims
- 1,450 Total client interactions

Volunteers

- 77 High school students who participated in youth leadership groups
- 284 Community members who participated in community coalitions
- 86 Mentors
- 24 Mentors For a Day
- 23 Youth Mentoring Steering Committee Members
- 5 Volunteers with the Domestic Abuse Resource Center
- 9 Board Members
- 300+ Holiday Lights event volunteers

School Based Mentoring continued from page 1

Currently, school-based mentoring programs are thriving in several districts across our service area. In Clayton County, both Central and MFL MarMac schools host programs. In Delaware County, students at West Delaware and Maquoketa Valley are engaged in mentoring relationships. Southern Fayette County schools—Starmont, Oelwein, and West Central—have embraced the program as well. Decorah Community School District and South Winneshiek Elementary in Winneshiek County and Postville Community School in Allamakee County also offer school-based mentoring opportunities for their students.

The success of these programs is possible thanks to the collaboration of school staff, mentors, and community members working together to create safe and supportive environments. By weaving mentoring into the school day, students are able to build relationships that enhance not only their academic experience but their personal development as well.

Looking ahead, our organization is committed to continuing this momentum. We are actively working with additional schools in surrounding areas to bring school-based mentoring to even more students. Each new program helps us reach more young people with the message that they are important, they are capable, and they are not alone.

We are grateful for the partnership of all the schools currently hosting mentoring programs, and we look forward to expanding these opportunities. Together, we are helping to build stronger schools and communities one mentoring match at a time. ■

To learn more about how to become a mentor and view our waiting list of youth, visit our website at:
www.helpingservices.org/mentoring



**Volunteer today to be paired
with a youth in your community!**



The Helping Services' team enjoyed a fun day together this summer. -Photo by Sara Hageman



Prevention

Updates on the Iowa Behavioral Health System: What is a System Navigator?

If you or someone you care about is struggling, it can be hard to find support. As Helping Services for Youth & Families is a partner in the Behavioral Health System focused on Prevention, we wanted to share information about a new term that you might hear more in the upcoming year.

When you reach out to Your Life Iowa (yourlifeiowa.org or call (855) 581-8111 / Text (855) 895-8398) a Behavioral Health System Navigator will help you quickly find the services that can help you.

What does a System Navigator do?

System Navigators are trained to help you find the right behavioral health care and services. They give free, private support to all Iowans.

When you contact Your Life Iowa, a System Navigator can:

- Talk with you on the phone or help you online.
- Listen and learn about your needs.
- Connect you with providers who can get you the right care.
- Find inpatient psychiatric care beds or crisis care services, if needed.
- Find services to help you with money, housing or job problems.

System Navigators do not give treatment, medicine, or counseling. Instead, your System Navigator will help you find the right people who offer the services you need.

Thank you to T-Bocks Bar & Grill staff for becoming TIPS certified



Family Education & Support

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Before we know it, we are in the stage of covering outlets and using cabinet locks and making sure that small little pieces are picked up and can't go in our children's mouths. We are excited about them crawling and suddenly we are cheering as they take their first steps!

Then we blink, and we have a toddler! The small, beautiful child that used to cling to you is now mad because you gave them peaches, when they asked for peaches, and now they don't want them. They are throwing a tantrum in the grocery store because you won't let them play with the detergent box. They now run and hide when it's time to go to the bathroom, because change is scary and it's easier for them to fill their diaper. Oh, the stories I could tell about potty training!

The amount of training for my job at that time was intense. I recall being at a four-day child passenger safety training (car seat training), on the very first day, I called my husband and told him to not take the children anywhere, because all of their car seats were installed incorrectly! My kids didn't come with little instruction booklets tied around their ankles when they were born, or at least if they did, they lost them right away! I had very little information (other than someone else's experience) about when they should be sitting up, when to change from bottle to cup and how to help along their language skills, for example. Anyone that knows my kids today, would tell you they didn't need any help with that last one. The education I received in my job helped me so much and in turn I passed along what I had learned to the families I served. We all only want the very best for our children, but how do we know what that is in today's world? There is so much information, both good and bad. How do I identify an opinion from scientific data? One person's experience should not be the standard of how a child is raised. How does one sort through all the information? How does one know what is reliable and proven information? I recently hired some new staff, they each have taken over 160 hours

Get TIPS Certified

Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS) is a responsible beverage server training that gives continuing education to alcohol retailers. Our staff offer this training to alcohol retailers in Winneshiek, Allamakee, and Clayton counties. Recently, 16 employees from T-Bocks Bar & Grill in Decorah have gone above and beyond to advance their knowledge by becoming TIPS certified!

To learn more about TIPS training, please email Leah at lhemesath@helpingservices.org

of the basic training, everything from certified breastfeeding counselors, to certified child passenger safety technician, to our core curriculum of certified Parents As Teachers educator and so many more.

Our staff are up to date on the most evidence-based information, not the most recent social media trends. They work tirelessly to sort through partial information or mis-information to ensure families are receiving the very best info for their families.

I have worked with amazing families throughout my twenty-two year career. Some just wanted help with breastfeeding, while others wanted to know every piece of information to give their child every opportunity to be at their peak development and would ultimately be ready for pre-school. I have worked with families from all demographics, all levels of education and all income levels, they all had one thing in common; they wanted to ensure a happy & healthy childhood for their child. Isn't that really what we all want?

I very recently had an interaction with a family I once served, both parents highly educated & successful, the dad asked if I was still working with families and said, 'We were so scared & didn't think we knew what we were doing, you helped us realize that we did know and that feeling was normal'. That moment filled my cup for the day, reaffirming that what I do now and all those years ago, has and still does make a difference.

So, if your child lost their instruction booklet at birth like mine did, feel free to reach out and learn more about the Family Education program. We serve families in Howard, Allamakee, Winneshiek and Clayton counties. It would be our honor to chat with you.

Barb Fjelstul

Director of Family Education & Support

Interested in learning more about the Family Education program? Please contact Barb at **563-387-1720** or email bfjelstul@helpingservices.org



2025 Giving Project

The annual 2025 Giving Project is underway! This special project connects businesses, organizations, families, and individual donors with children of domestic violence survivors who have been supported by the Domestic Abuse Resource Center.

The holidays can be a stressful time, especially for those who are experiencing or recovering from domestic violence. Donors can help survivors, and brighten a child's holiday by purchasing gifts from their personalized wish lists. While donors won't receive any identifying information about the families they are matched with, they will know the children's age, interests, and clothing size to make gift-giving easier.

All gifts must be dropped off by December 8th.

If you would like to sponsor a family this year, please contact our **Resource Line** at **(800) 383-2988** or email info@helpingservices.org

Domestic Abuse Advocacy

New Program for Survivors: Safety & Stability Crisis Fund

At Helping Services Domestic Abuse Resource Center we believe everyone deserves a safe place to call home. That's why we're launching the Safety & Stability Crisis Fund—a new resource to help survivors of domestic violence with short-term rental assistance. This fund will help survivors secure or maintain safe housing during crisis situations, preventing homelessness and supporting safety and recovery from abuse.

Survivors of domestic violence who demonstrate an immediate need for housing assistance and do not have sufficient resources available will be eligible to apply for this program.

How it works:

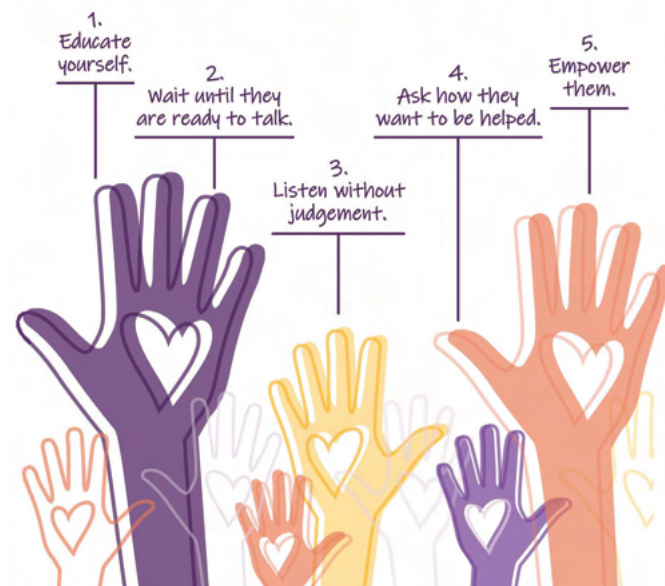
- Survivors connect with an advocate with the Domestic Abuse Resource Center to determine eligibility.
- The advocate and survivor fill out a simple one-page application.
- Once approved, rental assistance is provided directly to the landlord or housing provider.
- Advocates continue to provide support and resources throughout the program, and follow up support after the program ends.

This program is made possible through agency funds and the generosity of community donors. Together, we're building safety, stability, and hope.

If you or someone you know could benefit from this program, please reach out to our advocates at **800-383-2988** or on our chat at www.helpingservices.org/chat

Survivors are courageous beyond measure. While October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we honor the strength and resilience of survivors every month with a pledge to be strong and supportive allies.

How to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors:





HELPING SERVICES for Youth & Families

PO Box 372 • Decorah, IA 52101

Update your contact info at info@helpingservices.org



Over 300 volunteers each year help make Holiday Lights a special event for visitors.

HOLIDAY *Lights*

Holiday Lights Is Back!

Holiday Lights returns for its 21st season with the annual Walk-Through Night scheduled for Wednesday, November 26, from 5:00–7:30 PM. Enjoy the one-time only for the year where visitors can walk through the lights. Complimentary soup, cookies, and hot chocolate will be available while supplies last. Enjoy other activities such as photos with Santa, choirs, and Pokey Pete (weather permitting).

Holiday Lights will then be *open every night* from November 27 through December 25 for drive through traffic from 5:00 to 9:00 PM. Watch for special appearances from Santa every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night from 5:00–7:30 PM.

For up to date information regarding Holiday Lights please visit helpingservices.org/HolidayLights or call our office at 563-387-1720.

New this year! Pulpit Rock Rd will be closed for the duration of the Walk-Through Night on November 26. Please refer to the map for instructions on parking and traffic information.



Learn more at helpingservices.org

