



'There is a lot of hope'

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Comments (No comments posted.)

GURNEE – Patience, compassion, and the ability to inspire trust are just some of the characteristics that the counselors and volunteers at Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center possess.

These are qualities that help them do the heroic mission of healing the wounded and giving voice to their pain.

But when the workday is over, what is it that gets these people through the night? What helps them cope after repeatedly being exposed to the many stories of sexual abuse that they encounter in their job?

"I love my work," said Lori Viera, bilingual counselor at the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center.

Viera said that social work has always been her passion and that she found her true calling when she was hired last year.

"When I walked in for the first time I knew that this is where I wanted to be," Viera said. "You find yourself slowing down your breath and thinking that there is healing in this place."

What Viera says helps her cope with all the sad things that she hears from her clients is her faith.

"I have a one hour commute to and from work; that is my downtime to pray," Viera said.

Children's counselor Adam Robinson uses other methods to keep doing the work that he does at the center.

He says that he sees disgusting and sad things every day, but what he focuses on is what keeps him going.

"I see that there is a lot of hope. With children, we have more time to help them heal," Robinson said. "It is really helpful to know of the incredible resiliency of the children."

Robinson said that in order to not take it home with him, he does activities that help him feel good such as going on runs and spending time with friends.

Another counselor who focuses on the healing and not the pain is Tammy Hicks.

She is the crisis intervention advocate-medical for the center.

She says that one thing she has learned is that rape crosses all boundaries.

"Every day is a different scenario, but I see what our services do," Hicks said. "To see people overcome that experience and see a transformation in them is what keeps me going."

Everyone at the center is aware that the doors are always open to each other and that this is an invaluable aid at the center.

"I never worked at a job where it felt like a privilege to be here," said Wendy Ivy, director of advocacy and volunteer services. "They [board of directors] take seriously the work that we do."



Pictured are members of the Zacharias Center in Gurnee. From left: Tammy Hicks, medical crisis intervention advocate, Jennifer Madeley, volunteer, Wendy Ivy, director of advocacy and volunteer services, Andrea Bercos, counselor, Michelle Minarcik, legal crisis intervention advocate, Lori Viera, bilingual counselor, and Adam Robinson, a children's counselor. (Photo provided)

That's why ideas such as regular staff meetings to help process the information and short work days every Friday have been implemented.

Also implemented are perks such as a volunteers coming in to give chair massages to the staff once a month and flexible hours for moms.

These are part of the support the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center provides for their staff of professionals.

Executive Director Torrie Flink says that she is adamant about the self care of her staff and for a good reason.

"If they don't take care of themselves, they can't take care of others," Flink said

Series overview

For five weeks, the Lake County Journals examined the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center and the services it provides. Below is a look at the series in its entirety.

Feb. 28: Name change and background of the center.

March 6: How the center works with the community – The center's links with schools, hospitals and police.

March 13: A look at survivors of sexual abuse – When the system works and when it fails.

March 20: The center's children's program – Youth Allies C.A.R.E.

March 27: The people who are a part of the healing – The staff, volunteers and financial supporters of the center.

The Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center is at 4275 Old Grand Ave., Gurnee, IL 6003. Their 24-Hour hotline is 847-872-7799.

For information call 847-244-1187 or visit their Web site at www.ZachariasCenter.org.

Learn more

If you would like to learn more about the center and their work. You can visit with the staff on Saturday, April 5. The Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center is having an open house from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. organized by the Youth Allies C.A.R.E. group. They will show off the sign with their new name and giving tours of the center. T

The theme for the open house is "From Here to Healing."

COMMENTS

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