MENTAL ILLNESS AWARENESS WEEK

Oaklawn hosts Ross Szabo, author and mental health advocate

Changing the future of addiction treatment

Peer coaches offer unparalleled support, hope
A word from the president

Dear friends,

Oaklawn is fortunate to have loyal supporters who give generously and advocate passionately on behalf of our clients.

Your faithful financial support has touched countless lives through:

- charity care and prescription assistance
- capital improvements
- education assistance grants and
- prevention and early intervention programs for youth

Initiatives like these make the Oaklawn Foundation a key player in the health and wholeness of our community. It allows us to respond with flexibility and innovation to the unique behavioral health needs of St. Joseph and Elkhart counties.

Most recently, those needs have centered on addiction treatment. In 2017, our community faced unprecedented rates of overdose deaths and substance use, leading Oaklawn to quickly expand addiction treatment services, thanks to help from the Foundation as well as state grants targeting the opioid epidemic. Preliminary figures for 2018 indicate these initiatives are working – overdose deaths are down about 20 percent across the two counties. However, we believe that even one death is too many. This year, the Foundation will continue to invest in Oaklawn's addictions department through initiatives including:

- hiring and training certified recovery specialists (see page 2 to learn more about this innovative team),
- employing new evidence-based treatments to assist clients in recovery and
- training community members on the signs of an overdose, as well as distributing the life-saving overdose reversal medication naloxone.

The Foundation is also the primary financial resource for Camp Mariposa, a free weekend camp for youth ages 9 to 12 whose families are impacted by addiction. The camp, held five times per year, aims to break the intergenerational cycle of addiction by educating youth about their risk, providing therapeutic activities and building healthy coping skills and a strong support network.

These are some of the ways your gifts to the Foundation are changing lives. Thank you!

Finally, I’d like to extend my thanks and best wishes to Matt Lentsch, who stepped down as executive director of the Oaklawn Foundation at the beginning of July. Matt was a dedicated voice for Oaklawn in the community and we’re grateful for his service. I look forward to introducing a new director in the next issue of The Advocate. In the meantime, if you have any questions, concerns or would like to make a gift to the Oaklawn Foundation, feel free to contact me at laurie.nafziger@oaklawn.org or 574-533-1234, ext. 2281.

Sincerely,

Laurie N. Nafziger, MSW, ACSW
President and CEO
Spring Spectacular breaks records on 20th anniversary

Spring Spectacular may be 20 years old, but it still managed to celebrate a year of firsts. Breaking from tradition, the event featured a theatrical performance by an all-local cast and raised more than $100,000 in sponsorships – about twice as much as it raised last year and $30,000 more than its previous record.

But this year’s celebration wasn’t just about raising funds – it was about thanking the community for all its support over the years. To date, Spring Spectacular has raised more than $1 million for local services.

As a thank you, organizers chose to treat guests to a special presentation of Disney’s “The Hunchback of Notre Dame,” presented by Premier Arts. About 1,000 people attended the opening night performance, including many Oaklawn employees who received tickets courtesy of Foundation.

Oaklawn will host advocate Ross Szabo

Oaklawn will host its sixth Mental Illness Awareness Week celebration with special guest Ross Szabo, author and mental health advocate.

Szabo’s journey with mental health is deeply personal. He was only 11 years old when he visited his oldest brother in the psychiatric ward of the University of Pennsylvania Hospital.

At age 16, Szabo himself was diagnosed with bipolar disorder with anger control problems and psychotic features. In his senior year of high school, he was hospitalized for attempting to take his own life and later that year he had to take a leave of absence from American University due to a relapse with bipolar disorder.

He returned to American four years later and graduated with a B.A. in psychology. He started speaking about his story with bipolar disorder to help others when he was just 17.

Ross served in the U.S. Peace Corps in Botswana from 2010 to 2012. When he got home from the Peace Corps, he saw that there were a lot of gaps preventing people from getting the vital mental health messages they needed, so he started a company to address those needs. His work in the youth mental health field earned him the Didi Hirsch Removing the Stigma Leadership Award and his advocacy work was entered into the Congressional Record by Congressman Patrick Kennedy.

He is the author of ‘Behind Happy Faces: Taking Charges of our Mental Health’ and travels the world sharing his story of hope and recovery.

Szabo will speak at a luncheon at noon on Tuesday, October 1, at Palais Royale, 105 W. Colfax Ave., South Bend. The annual event raises awareness about mental health as well as funds for local mental health and addiction treatment services. Tickets cost $50 per person and are available to reserve at www.oaklawndonate.org/sponsor.

The deadline to reserve tickets to the event is September 23.

Oaklawn is also now accepting sponsorships, which includes recognition at the event and a meet-and-greet with Szabo before the luncheon.

For more information about sponsorship opportunities, visit www.oaklawndonate.org/sponsor. Or, contact Laurie Nafziger at laurie.nafziger@oaklawn.org or 574-533-1234, ext. 2281.
The team that’s changing addiction treatment

Peer coaches bring lived experience
Like his fellow Oaklawn employees, Robert Perry has a passion for serving our clients. Yet his motivation is unique. Robert is 12 years sober from a heroin and cocaine addiction.

“The day after the Elkhart County Jail opened, November 17, 2007, I was in there as an inmate and I was detoxing off of heroin,” he said. “Many times, I had made that cry, ‘Get me out of this and I’ll never do it again,’ but I knew this time it was real.”

As Robert began to turn his life around, he discovered a deep desire to help others on the road to recovery. He worked at a factory while studying for a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Indiana University South Bend. About two years ago, after he graduated, he started working at Oaklawn – ironically, as a liaison for the Recovery Works program at the Elkhart County Jail.

Robert is a certified recovery specialist, or CRS, someone who is themselves in recovery from a mental illness or addiction and specially trained to help others. He now serves as a supervisor to a rapidly-growing team of CRSes who are being deployed through multiple innovative partnerships to engage people in treatment and help turn the tide of Indiana’s opioid epidemic.

This year, nearly $75,000 of the $100,000 raised from Spring Spectacular will help fund the team’s work among vulnerable populations, such as people experiencing homelessness and those leaving inpatient treatment.

“Certified recovery specialists bring tremendous value to treatment,” said Bonita Schrock, Oaklawn’s Chief Clinical Officer. “They offer credible hope to people in active addiction, and they offer a truly unique perspective to our treatment teams because of their lived experience. I expect we’ll see a great deal of growth in this profession, especially as we look for new and effective ways to meet increased demand.”

According to a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), certified recovery specialists, sometimes called peer recovery coaches, are proven to yield numerous positive outcomes, including:

- Reduced re-hospitalizations
- Decreased involvement with the criminal justice system and emergency services, and
- Reduced substance use and relapse rates, among others.

“Peer recovery is important because we can come alongside the person in recovery on a ground-level, day-to-day basis and we can interact with them in ways a therapist can’t,” said CRS Jack Forbes. “Therapists can’t get them to their doctor for medication-assisted treatment. They can’t take them to a Navigator to sign up for health insurance. They can’t be available 24 hours a day if the person is having some type of crisis. Our therapists play a very vital role, but we’re there to be that extra coach.”

Forbes joined Oaklawn to help run a new outreach using CRSes, Recovery Café. The café is located at First United Methodist Church in downtown South Bend and is a joint outreach of Oaklawn, the Upper Room Recovery Community and the St. Joseph County Health Improvement Alliance. Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., recovery coaches are available to meet with anyone who wants to learn more about recovery and resources available in the community. It also serves as a positive, sober place that someone in recovery can come to. Volunteer Navigators are available to help people enroll in health coverage. When it’s fully operational, the café will have computers where visitors can apply for jobs or other benefits. And it’s reaching people who might not be comfortable engaging treatment in a more formal setting.

Forbes said he met with one person who came in asking lots of hypothetical questions about recovery. The man came back the next week and admitted they weren’t hypothetical questions; he struggled with substance use and was ready to get help. Forbes scheduled him for an assessment with an Oaklawn therapist that day, with a physician prescribing medication-assisted treatment the next day and helped him get admitted to a detox facility. The man has since returned from detox and is attending Oaklawn’s intensive outpatient program.

Oaklawn and Beacon Health, among others, will partner for another new program using CRSes. Thanks to a $1.5 million state grant awarded to Beacon, a mobile response unit serving St. Joseph, Elkhart and Marshall counties will launch this year. The unit will travel to communities to build rapport, offer information and even do pre-assessments for those interested. Perry said. It will assist emergency responders who are called for overdoses, available to offer services for those who are stabilized but refuse transport to the hospital.

Oaklawn also plans to embed CRSes at Oliver Apartments, the housing-first program for chronically homeless individuals in downtown South Bend, as well as with Oaklawn’s PATH team, which does homeless outreach.

“Our ultimate goal is to get somebody into services so we can make their life better,” he said. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. The way we work is not about me coming in and telling you what you need. It’s about building a rapport and then you tell me the things that you desire to change, and together we make a plan for that.”