

# Beacon Center provides haven for victims of violence

By **Julianne Endres**

Watertown Area Community Foundation

There are many problems that no one likes to discuss with domestic violence being. While no community nor family wants that problem, the bad news is it's a reality. Day in and day out, domestic abuse rears its ugly head, endangering the wellbeing of many families, including children of all ages.

The good news is that there is great support in our community which offers hope and healing for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. One of the largest vehicles of that support here is the Beacon Center which serves victims in Clark, Codington, Deuel, Grant and Hamlin counties.

Many clients' journeys begin with making that first call.

"We received a call from a woman who said that her child and herself were in need of help," said Oriel Ching, Beacon Center direct services coordinator. "She told us that her abuser had found them and physically assaulted them. We listened to her story with compassion and encouraged



her to come to the office for further assistance. After checking into our emergency shelter, she let us know that they were living in unsanitary conditions."

Located at 801 S. Jenson Avenue in Watertown for the past five years, the Beacon Center utilizes nearly 12,000 square feet to serve its clients in a safe and comfortable atmosphere. Some services, such as assisting with protection orders, family visitations and counseling, are ongoing full-time.

In 2018, the center implemented 24/7 staffing at the facility.

"We always wanted to do that to provide an added layer of safety," said Dawn Sikkink, Beacon Center executive director.

The Beacon Center provides many services including shelter, legal and medical advocacy, family visitation and coun-

seling, food and shelter.. all as a means of support to those in crisis. In 2018, that meant 13,160 services to 738 individuals of all ages. Some victims stay a couple nights while others stay for a full month.

One particular client also went through losing her mother while she was staying at the center, said Ching, who added that her staff was able to support the client after the loss of her mother along with working through the effects of domestic violence.

Sometimes it takes partners to help provide that support and the Watertown Area Community Foundation has been an integral part of the shelter's support throughout much of the Center's 42 years. Grants totaling nearly \$100,000 over the years have gone toward computers, furniture, refrigerators and more. That support has included grants from the foundation's Youth Council, Women & Giving, and Giving Back 365 programs.

While in shelter, Ching said the woman who lost her mother participated in support group and the sewing program, which was established by the help of a Women &



Giving grant.

The most recent foundation grants to Beacon Center include Youth Council grants for a camera and computers in the Family Visitation Room; a Giving Back 365 grant for an Automated External Defibrillator; a Women & Giving grant for a commercial size refrigerator and freezer; and a foundation grant at the end of last year for equipment and furniture to improve the conference/training area.

“The foundation has helped us to continue to offer our support in a variety of ways,” said Sikkink. “Many move on, but come in for support. Tuesday nights are our peer support

group. It helps them continue to heal and move through their trauma.”

Whatever a client’s needs, from a crisis situation to support services long after, the staff is ready to serve and help a victim become a thriving survivor.

“The client was able to find a job and we were able to help her with clothing and grooming products so she could look and feel her best,” Ching said. “We also assisted the client in finding housing. We were able to help her pay her deposits and rent.



“The client was so excited to move into her new home. When the day came to move out of the shelter she cried tears of joy because she was so appreciative of the assistance we were able to provide. The client hugged each staff member and told us how we changed their lives. She and her child now live in a clean, safe apartment free from the grasp of her abuser.”



Beacon Center will host a Survivor Tribute open house Thursday, Oct. 17, from 4 to 6 p.m. During that time, attendees will get a feeling for the process a victim goes through once they arrive. It’s another effort in bringing education and awareness to the public during Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

“We also want to thank the community for its ongoing generous support, Sikkink said.

