

Listening Ear is pleased to welcome new personnel and congratulate those who have made advancements —

- Welcome to Jackie Johnston, new Mental Health Technician/2-1-1 Call Specialist in the Crisis Center; who is completing her Master's degree in Counseling at Central Michigan University.
- Welcome to Danielle Burke B.S. a new foster care worker In the Child Foster Care program.
- Congratulations to Amy Van Orden LPN and to April Orser who have been promoted to Director of Residential Services.
- Congratulations to Melissa Schalk has been promoted to Senior Program Director at the Briarwood home for Residential Services.
- Congratulations to Jamie Dagenais has been promoted to Assistant Program Director at the Mt. Pleasant home for Residential Services and is in training to become the Program Director
- Congratulations to Residential Services staff Michele Chapman, Ellen Powell, April Orser, Vanessa Sargent, Melissa Schalk, Michelle McCarty, and Sherida Brown who all attended Gentle Teaching training and received certification in Working with People, The Gentle Teaching practicum and Mentor training.
- Congratulations to Residential Services Program Directors Michelle McCarty, Mark Ellis and Jenny Jacobs who attended Mental Health First Aid training to help further their knowledge in working with individuals with Mental Illness.
- Congratulations to Anne E. Garcia, B.S., C.I.R.S. Mental Health Technician/2-1-1 Call Specialist in the Crisis Center, who having passed the Alliance of Information & Referral Systems CIRS Examination, s now fully certified as a Certified Information and Referral Specialist.

If you wish to have your name removed from the newsletter mailing list, please write: **Executive Director, Listening Ear**

P.O. Box 800
Mt Pleasant, MI 48804-0800

or, email dschuster@listeningear.com.

If you want more information about us, please visit our website at www.listeningear.com or see www.guidestar.org.

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Listening Ear Crisis Center
107 E Illinois, P.O. Box 800
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan
48804-0800
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The mission of Listening Ear is to provide citizens of Michigan with human services and affordable housing that satisfy, support, and promote the dignity and well-being of those in need.

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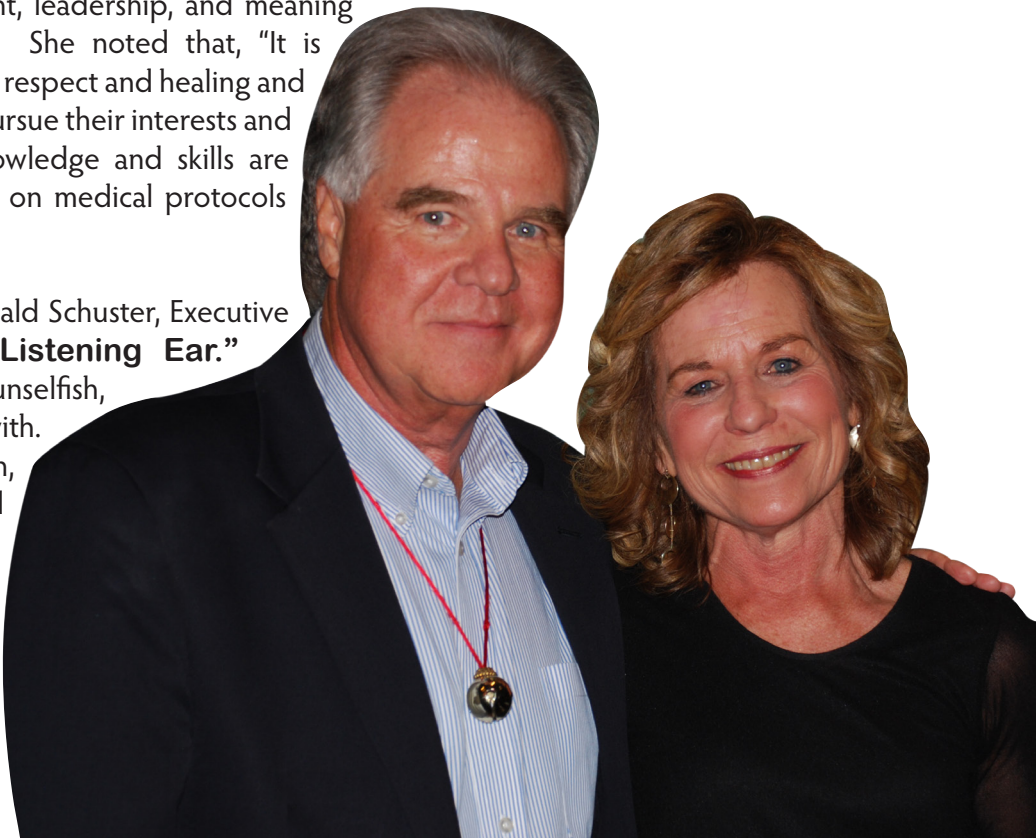
A CARING CULTURE BEGINS WITH GOOD PEOPLE

Karen Elkin is one of those good people. She has worked at Listening Ear over the last 14 years as Director of Residential Services - North ensuring quality support services for consumers in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties. Prior to joining the agency she was a Registered Nurse for 13 years at Antrim Kalkaska Community Mental Health.

Karen has brought gentleness, commitment, leadership, and meaning to the lives of Listening Ear consumers. She noted that, "It is important to create a culture that promotes respect and healing and offers the support an individual needs to pursue their interests and meet their dreams." Karen's medical knowledge and skills are tapped frequently as guidance is needed on medical protocols and policies.

At the annual Board Awards Banquet, Donald Schuster, Executive Director named Karen an **"Angel of Listening Ear."** He said, "Karen is hardworking, kind, unselfish, smart, and a joy and pleasure to work with. Because of her skill, caring and dedication, Karen helps consumers under her care and supervision live long and happy lives. As Mother Teresa said, "Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier."

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Dear Readers,

At Listening Ear we strive to create a Caring Culture. As noted by Angel of Listening Ear award winner Karen Elkins on page 1, “It is important to create a culture that promotes respect and healing and offers the support an individual needs to pursue their interests and meet their dreams.”

We maintain a Caring Culture by treating every one with dignity without judging. We do that by remembering that each consumer is in charge of their own lives and choices. We also recruit capable and kind staff and welcome staff and consumers alike into the Listening Ear family.

In the Gentle Teaching approach discussed on this page, we learned that words, eyes, hands and presence are the tools of each caregiver. How we speak to others, look at others and approach others sets the stage as to whether the consumer feels safe and can trust that they will be heard.

Sometimes all it takes is a smile to let someone know they are welcome, that they belong, and that their lives matter. A simple smile can help to dim past injuries, isolation or indifference. When I presented Lorrie Williams with an Angel of Listening Ear award, her ever present smile reminded me of Mother Teresa’s quote “We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do.”

As mentioned in the article on this page, April Orser was recognized because she is a master in bringing joy and meaning to consumer’s lives by building relationships and helping them feel safe, loved and loving, and engaged.

Together we are building a community that is “Always There”.

Sincerely,

Donald Schuster, LMSW
Executive Director

BUILDING A COMMUNITY THAT’S Always There
A CARING CULTURE BEGINS WITH GOOD PEOPLE

continued from page 1.

At the annual Board Awards Banquet, two other staff were also named “Angels of Listening Ear.”

With her warm smile, positive attitude, and respectful treatment of consumers and staff, **Lorrie Williams** epitomizes the agency’s caring culture. She has been with Listening Ear for 26 years, starting as a Direct Care Worker providing support to adults with developmental disabilities. Later she began working as a secretary and then transitioned to become the agency’s main Payroll person - a position she has maintained for over a decade.

Lorrie often comes in very early and stays late to make sure over 370 employee time sheets are completed accurately and on time, so each of our employees can be paid. In presenting her award, Lorrie has shown dedication, commitment, and a love of the consumer. She is loyal, hard-working, accurate and always willing to help out.

April Orser has worked for Listening Ear for the last 27 years. She started as a direct care worker, and then became an Assistant Home Manager and a Home Manager at the Oakleaf Home in Harrison. She was then promoted to Community Living Specialist working in the office and at the Mt. Pleasant Home and recently became a Director of Residential Services.



April Orser (at far right) with her family

April is known for her gentleness and humor. She is funny, compassionate and dedicated. If you had the opportunity to work with April, it is always apparent that consumers love her and enjoy her company. April is creative, artistic, always willing to do what is needed, and a great advocate. Mother Teresa said that “Service is Love in Action” and watching April brings life to that saying. Simply stated, she has brought joy and meaning to many consumers over the years and many parents feel that April is the person to work with their son or daughter.

A CULTURE OF GENTLE TEACHING

Thanks to a generous gift from The Alden and Vada Dow Family Foundations, Listening Ear staff are now being trained in the art of “Gentle Teaching” Developed by Dr. John McGee who wrote Mending Broken Hearts, the approach is being incorporated into the agency’s training curriculum to benefit the 160 child and adult consumers for whom the agency provides support in nine central and northern Michigan counties.

Gentle Teaching includes proactive strategies for establishing healthy supportive relationships and for helping consumers feel safe and loved. It is especially effective with consumers who are nonverbal and have complex needs.

Michele Chapman, one of the Directors of Residential Services who was trained to mentor others in the method said, “We learned that the central purpose of staff presence in the lives of consumers is to nurture, teach, and sustain the experience of connectedness, companionship and community.” The program emphasizes that as caregivers, staff are the heart and soul of it all - as mentors, teachers, advocates, skill builders and most of all as hope givers. The training described four pillars on which companionship and relationships are built. They are: helping consumers feel safe, loved and valued, loving, and engaged.

Four tools for caregiving were also taught: words , hands, eyes and presence. Over the course of this year, more than 370 staff and 12 foster care families will receive training.



Lorrie Williams (in middle) with her two daughters

RAISING AWARENESS



Last spring, staff and two consumers had the opportunity to raise awareness about the challenges faced by runaway and homeless youth among Michigan legislators. Transitional Living Program (TLP) Case Manager, Erin Rubingh, and Counselor/Case Manager, Rachel Eaton, accompanied two TLP youth to Dome Day sponsored by the Michigan Network for Youth and Families (MNYF) in Lansing. While at the State Capitol, staff and youth met with Michigan Senator Bruce Caswell, Representative Joel Johnson, Representative Kevin Cotter, and staff from the offices of Representative Kevin Cotter and Senator Darwin Booher. They also met with other MNYF members, toured the capital and sat in on a session.

In addition, Listening Ear consumer Danielle Wisneski attended a Legislative event as a member of Mt. Pleasant’s RICC chapter. RICC, facilitated by Mid Michigan Industries, promotes services and advocates for persons with disabilities. Danielle discussed the needs of persons with disabilities with Michigan Legislators Senator Emmons, Booher, and Moolenaar and State Congressmen Cotter and Johnson. One challenge she mentioned was the issue of transportation. She said “I also learned a lot about the RICC program... and things we can do to make a difference for those with disabilities.”



We are thankful for these supporters!
(Gifts made since the last newsletter). . .

LISTENING EAR CRISIS CENTER FUND

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 - Kathy Tarrant
- CONSUMER NEEDS & DREAMS FUND

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- Merrill & Karen Bressette in Honor of Laura Faber
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- Nancy Langlois
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SCHUSTER FAMILY FUND

- Donald Schuster

Thank you to these GENEROUS DONORS

- The Alden and Vada Dow Family Foundations toward Gentle Teaching training. (See article on page 2.)
- The Association of Psychological Science Student Caucus for its fundraiser whose proceeds benefited Residential Services’ Weekend Recreation Program.
- Anonymous to meet consumer’s baseball dreams.
- Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie 4540 for its fundraiser benefiting the Children’s Foster Care recreation activities.
- Optimist Club of Mt Pleasant for its bowling fundraiser benefiting the Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Program.
- Trusted Choice Dan Fulwider Award for Community Involvement via Bonnie Hayward and the General Agency.
- The Vos Estate for donating furniture and other household items that were distributed to consumers in the Residential Services programs.
- Anonymous gift to Crisis Center operations.
- Marge Zurakowski who donated a microwave for Residential Services consumers.

Thank you goes to these donors who directed their United Way gifts to Listening Ear this last year:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Betsy Banta | Donald Schuster |
| Michele Chapman | Paul Siers |
| Ellen Fuller | Janet Smith |
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| Floyd & Shirley Reed | |

(Shown at left)
Nine youth from the Transitional Living Program and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Program, accompanied by staff and interns, went on a late spring retreat at Mystic Lake YMCA Camp in Lake, Michigan. While there, the youth navigated a challenge course and a climbing wall, played Ga-Ga (dodge-ball), and learned kayaking and archery. Youth were empowered by trying new, challenging activities and by practicing teamwork.