

A Word From the Executive Director



Dear Friends and Family of Third Way Center,

Happy May!

May has arrived, and with it, the continued presence of loss for our founder, **Dr. Hildegard Messenbaugh**. Her vision remains a guiding light for our path and mission.

While I try to avoid it, she is everywhere. Hildegard's influence on my life and on so many of ours was profound. It wasn't always easy; she was often more comfortable with chaos than most. She believed that authentic relationships could be forged more quickly in conflict than in peace.

It is still difficult to accept that she is gone. Grief is an unpredictable force, coming and going as it pleases. Rationally, I understand the need to face—to fully feel—the emotions that accompany the loss of someone who shaped so much of my life. Yet, my non-rational self wants to escape these feelings. I want to remain busy and occupied, to run from the pain and the void she left behind. This urge to avoid pain is, I know, perfectly normal. Nevertheless, her enduring legacy of resilience and her unwavering faith in our youth continue to propel us forward, especially through challenging times. With truth, there is hope.

We are deeply concerned about the recent **Medicaid cuts** and their direct impact on our ability to provide essential services to our youth in care. These financial pressures challenge us to find creative solutions to sustain the quality of support they deserve.

May is dedicated to two vital observances: **Better Hearing & Speech Month (BHSM)** and **Mental Health Awareness Month**.

In observance of BHSM, we are focused on early recognition of communication disorders and ensuring our youth have the necessary tools and support to communicate effectively.

For Mental Health Awareness Month, we underscore our unwavering commitment to quality treatment and the importance of accurate diagnosis. Mental health is unique to every individual and intersects with all aspects of life. We are dedicated to reducing stigma, fostering open dialogue, and advocating for accessible mental

health care, despite the challenges posed by a disjointed, micromanaging, and broken state system.

Young people transitioning out of care—whether moving to independent living, returning home, or entering a lower level of service—desperately need consistent aftercare and, perhaps, longer residential care. Shortening the length of stay primarily based on behavior, a current systemic practice, is a critical mistake. The youth we serve are highly vulnerable to self-harm, harming others, criminal activity, and homelessness. That is why we need to invest in their future by treating them when they need it at the level they need it.

While not all succeed, their chances are significantly improved by the timely provision of appropriate care. A major systemic issue is that eligibility for programs like Third Way Center often requires youth to have first experienced multiple failures elsewhere. This just makes treatment more difficult.

The loss of former youth in care is a heartbreaking reality that highlights the urgent need for a stronger, more supportive continuum of services. Ultimately, investing in their mental well-being now yields positive returns for society as a whole.

Graduation is a profoundly moving and inspirational event, marking not just an academic milestone but a monumental personal victory for each student. We have 8 graduates, and many entered our program with a difficult or interrupted school history, making this achievement an accomplishment of unparalleled significance. Their extraordinary perseverance and hard work are a testament to their resilience, the dedication of our staff, and our “let’s just try one more thing” environment.

Thank you for all your support. We can’t do this very challenging work without our community.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Renee