

A Word From the Executive Director



Dear Friends and Family of Third Way Center,

Happy June! Happy Summer!

June brings Pride month, Juneteenth, and Father's Day, to name a few. June also reminds us to educate and advocate for people with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear." - Mark Twain

According to the Veterans Administration, 8 million people suffer from PTSD in the United States, and I would guess that the actual number is higher. There are some who are unaware of the signs and symptoms related to experiencing assault, serious accidents, natural disasters, domestic violence, and/or other traumas. Trauma causes tremendous pain, shame, and fear. People often feel broken and struggle with making sense of how they feel.

Not everyone is susceptible to PTSD, which sometimes is part of the problem. Everyone's circumstances are unique. Research suggests that much of the debilitation associated with trauma is related to emotional support at the time. So, if it is not reported, or no one knows, or the support people are also experiencing the traumatic event, or there is mental illness or encephalopathy, or 100 other reasons, the feelings related will go underground in one way or another. It becomes a secret or minimized, and some can lock memories away, but not all. The kids at Third Way Center are the ones who continue to play out their trauma in one way or another. It doesn't go away for them, and that is how they end up with us.

At least 80% of Third Way Center's youth have PTSD, if not more. And it is complicated PTSD, meaning there are layers of abuse and neglect. We all try to protect ourselves from pain, and it goes against nature to look at it, face it, and deal with it when it seems there is no end in sight. We often believe that if we just keep on going, don't stop, the feelings will eventually go away. Behavior serves a purpose; it just does. Self-destructive behavior is about pain and fear, and there is often a disconnect between what has happened to them and what they are feeling

now. Their story is what makes the difference. A safe place to be while they are brave enough to tell, to trust in the process, and to figure out what to do about it.

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” - Audre Lorde

Don't we all just want to be seen, heard, and safe? Don't we all want to be recognized, accepted, and celebrated? Equity, compassion, and empathy are at the core of creating a place for inclusion, growth, and belonging. This applies to clients, staff, and the community, but implementing this concept is easier said than done. Diversity challenges us to be better and more knowledgeable, yet we are often pulled toward comfort. We all want to be with people like us, so it takes focus, determination, and strength to include those who are not like us for the greater good. It has to be a conscious practice and process for all of us. We need different perspectives. We need to be challenged and questioned - if we truly want to learn, adjust to our clients' needs, and be a safe place for everyone, for both clients and staff.

Pride events, like Pride Month, are celebrations of LGBTQ+ culture, history, and achievements, as well as calls for greater equality and unity. It's an opportunity to open ourselves up to different perspectives and examine our own biases. We do our best work when we feel a sense of belonging and safety; everyone deserves to experience that comfort, and discomfort (with support) when necessary. Third Way Center clients and their families deserve a place, need a place where they can struggle, develop, and heal.

Our clients and families remain a diverse group, and adolescence is a time of identity formation. Trauma can interfere with emotional growth and development. It's hard work to face what pains us most, but it can also save your life. It is sometimes, most times, necessary to understand your trauma and figure out what you need to do about it in order to really be free to be all that you can be.

If you have any comments or questions, please don't hesitate to let us know.

With gratitude and appreciation,

Renee