



Hope House Hosts ‘The Best Day At Work’ to Counteract the Worst Ones

By Joy Brown

Every month, Findlay, Ohio-based Hope House personnel celebrate what they call “The Best Day At Work.” It’s not much – maybe lunch or a team-building activity. But it’s a decompression opportunity that full-time staff anticipates. It’s also a time that they consider to be indispensable for their mental health.

As a nonprofit that assists the homeless with transitional housing, this is a place that regularly interacts with people who have reached rock bottom. They’re despondent. They fear for themselves and their children. Despite giving it their best shot, they have ended up on Hope House’s doorstep. As a result, workers not only help with whatever logistics are involved with finding housing but with soothing weary souls.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Hope House workers said most people seeking assistance had never needed social services. Many had lost their jobs and couldn’t pay rent and feared getting the virus. They arrived at Hope House with no idea where to turn or what to do next.

“Our staff felt the consequences of that increased need,” said Hope House CEO Sue Lehman.

Today, Hope House personnel have been hearing “horrendous” stories from international newcomers, said program supervisor Rebecca Padron, “layered trauma” that reaches into all the recesses of everyday living. The children “are clearly traumatized and continuing to be traumatized” by instability and unfamiliarity in America, she noted. For migrants of all ages, the emotional hardships that impacted them before arriving in Findlay have yet to be addressed, with basic needs like housing and employment being prioritized.

To top it off, Hope House hasn’t been able to financially assist many migrants, even those living in hotels, because they earn too much to qualify for assistance. Therefore, they frequently have to say “no” to people in great distress, which is enormously difficult.

“We come into this field because it’s a helping profession. That’s what we’re here for. But day in and day out, repeatedly, we’re having the same conversation of, ‘I’m sorry, we can’t help you,’”

said Starr Laytart, Hope House assistant director. “We get at least 10 calls a day from folks who need our assistance, but we can’t find them housing.”

What Hope House and several other service providers often go through from working with the most vulnerable and needy populations is referred to as “vicarious trauma.”

Vicarious trauma “is the experience of absorbing others’ pain in times of their distress so deeply that it affects your own well-being,” explained the Cleveland Clinic in an April 2024 article. Putting oneself in another’s shoes, as empathetic service providers can’t help but do sometimes, “can hurt. Bad,” the story pointed out.

“We talk a lot at Hope House about listening,” said Lehman. “We may not be able to solve their problems, but if we listen to what these people are saying, that can still have a huge impact. We acknowledge their feelings. We’re doing the same thing with our team.”

Lehman credits the general longevity of staff to “such a high level of support we give to one another. That’s an integral part of our day.”

Events like “The Best Day At Work” provide time to temporarily step away from daily stress. The Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation has provided a mental health grant for such purposes. “We have a donor who actually donated money specifically for this, for our staff, because they recognize the importance,” said Lehman.

“I’m extremely grateful for the staff we have and the culture we have created,” Lehman said.