

OUR MISSION IS TO PROVIDE DIVERSE SERVICES THAT INSPIRE PEOPLE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIVES IN THEIR GREATEST TIME OF NEED.


FROM THE DESK OF THE CEO:

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to share Guardian Angel's 2023 Newsletter, as we reflect on a wonderful year of service and celebration. Our phenomenal staff reached 58,319 people, 12,775 through direct services, across seven programs, and 45,544 via prevention education and community outreach. All of our essential services were implemented 24-hours daily, seven days a week. We provided 9,622 nights of emergency shelter and 28,866 meals to adults and children fleeing the horrors of domestic violence, while also manning three emergency hotlines in our Sexual Assault Services Center, Adult Protective Services and Groundwork programs. We advanced our mission to provide diverse services that inspire people to improve the quality of their lives in their greatest time of need. Guardian Angel Community Services commemorated milestone anniversaries, celebrated accomplishments and gathered for many memorable awareness events and fundraisers. We also completed a comprehensive strategic planning process, and were so grateful to experience the continued generosity of our community. We hope you enjoy reading about the exciting achievements of the last year. On behalf of our Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and everyone at Guardian Angel Community Services, thank you for your support of our mission.



Sincerely,



Ines Kutlesa, MA. LCPC. LPHA. CCTP

Chief Executive Officer



Foster Care Program Achievement



The DCFS Performance Monitoring Team (APME) and high ranking DCFS officials honored GACS Foster Care staff by coming to the agency with a beautiful cake.

On March 17, 2023, Guardian Angel Community Services' Foster Care Program achieved the ranking of 1st in the State of Illinois for Foster Care Permanency Goal Achievement! This is a truly extraordinary achievement. A celebratory luncheon was planned by Chief Executive Officer, Ines Kutlesa to honor our Foster Care team. Throughout the month of May, the agency celebrated "National Foster Care Month." We are eternally grateful for all of those who support and those who foster hope for children in need.

Karen Ward Recognized for Administrative Excellence

Dr. Karen Ward, our wonderful Office Specialist, was first selected as a finalist from hundreds of nominations, and then won the Spirit Award for Administrative Excellence at the Chicago Admin Awards Good As Gold Gala! It was a spectacular evening at the Chicago Marriot-Marquis and Karen's impassioned acceptance speech left no dry eye in the room! Dr. Karen Ward has earned both an MBA, and a PhD in Educational Leadership, and still chooses to be in a supportive role at Guardian Angel to help all of us and those we serve, truly extraordinary and telling of Karen's commitment to our mission and passion for what we do! We are so grateful for Karen's amazing support and advocacy for Guardian Angel over the last 20 years!



Karen Ward pictured with Ines Kutlesa at the Good as Gold Gala

“Night of Champions” - 15th Annual Angelica: Dancing With Our Local Stars Gala & Fundraiser

GACS' celebrated the 15th annual Angelica: Dancing With Our Local Stars Gala & Fundraiser on April 1, 2023 at Bobak's Signature Events (Woodridge) welcoming more than 500 guests in attendance. To commemorate the milestone, a “Night of Champions” competition was held featuring first place dancers from the past 15 years. “Angelica” is highlighted by a dance competition for which local “stars” prepare a dance routine with a professional to perform at the event. We were thrilled to have returning event emcee Pete Colarelli (Exxon Mobil, Midwest Government Affairs Manager) lead us through a night of excitement and raising awareness of our mission to provide diverse services that inspire people to improve the quality of their lives in their greatest time of need. Guest speaker, Rabbi Jenny Steinberg-Martinez, shared her story of surviving childhood abuse and ended her moving speech with these words, “We can make violence a thing of the past. We can grow beyond our own levels of understanding and compassion. We can do it together.” Past champion dancers rose above and beyond the challenge and delivered unforgettable routines. Captivating the night were: Mitchell Cunningham (UnityPoint Health, 2017 winner), David Nelson (David Nelson Exquisite Jewelry, 2012 winner), Jamie Shimer (Hometown National Bank, 2018 winner), Michele Vana (Jay it Forward, 2016 winner), and April Veerman (Duly Health, 2022 winner). Concluding each dance routine, a panel of local star judges provided their “expert” commentary. 2023 judges included Dr. Ernie Tan, semi-retired urologist and a veteran judge for this event, Anthony Storcz (Oak Forest Police Department) who was the second-place winner in 2022's event, and Tom Sterba, owner of Sterba's DanceSport in Naperville, and professional dancer who has participated in the event from the very beginning. Jamie Shimer of Hometown National Bank took home the mirror ball trophy along with her partner James Dutton, owner of Arthur Murray Dance in Naperville and Oakbrook Terrace. The agency honored top donors and supporters, 2023 Award Recipients included: Moe Joe's Cajun and Caribbean Cuisine (Plainfield) – Corporate Donor of the Year; Scott Slocum – Volunteer of the Year; The Wiers Family – Private Donor of the Year; and Debby Meeker, Guardian Angel of The Year. Angelica 2023 was certainly a year to remember, and we are forever grateful to the many supporters and donors who make this event more and more memorable and fantastic, year after year.



2023 Past Champion Dancers and Dance Professionals strike a pose before the competition begins



GACS Staff gather for a group shot at the end of a successful evening of fundraising

Strategic Planning for The Future

VISION | MISSION | VALUES

Guardian Angel's Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of staff and Board Directors, was hard at work earlier this year for the important exercise of strategic planning, defined as a process by which we review operations and set direction, by determining resources needed to achieve specific, and attainable long-term goals. The strategic planning process allows for setting annual programmatic goals by developing operational plans, based on our long-term strategic plan. Our GACS Strategic Planning Co-facilitator was Dr. Katheryn Wiedman of CenterPoint Institute, who did a phenomenal job, and was very impressed with our operations, staff, Board, and the difference Guardian Angel makes in the community.



VISION
TO PROTECT & SAVE LIVES

MISSION
TO PROVIDE DIVERSE SERVICES THAT INSPIRE PEOPLE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR LIVES IN THEIR GREATEST TIME OF NEED.

VALUES
CENTRAL TO OUR PHILOSOPHY OF CARE IS ADVOCACY FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE.
WE BELIEVE IN THE INALIENABLE HUMAN RIGHT TO LIVE AND WORK SAFELY, FREE FROM VIOLENCE, OPPRESSION, AND ABUSE.
WE ARE GUIDED BY THE PRINCIPLE THAT PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION, AS WE JOIN THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY OF HEALING.
WE STRIVE TO INSTILL HOPE THROUGH CLIENT-CENTERED SERVICES PROVIDED IN A SAFE AND CONFIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT.



Recap of October: Domestic Violence Awareness Month 2022



GACS staff volunteering as the "Gatekeepers" at Witches Night Out 2022

Every year during October: Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), GACS participates in many awareness events and activities. October 2022 was no exception! We had a successful awareness month, hosting and participating in a variety of events including: Grundy County Take Back the Night, Will County Take Back the Night, Witches Night Out, and our Angels Against Abuse 5K.

This past fall, we kicked off the month of October in Grundy County, where the agency operates a satellite office in Morris, IL. "Grundy County Take Back The Night" is a free event, organized by our Groundwork Program and held annually at the Grundy County Court House. This year's kickoff took place on October

5th and included keynote speaker, Kim Jensen, who's daughter, Elizabeth Link tragically lost her life due to domestic violence. The event concluded with a luminary walk to Gebhard Brewery where the Morris Women's Club provided refreshments.

The 12th Annual Angels Against Abuse 5K Walk & Run was held on October 8, 2022. The event was hosted by Guardian Angel's Groundwork and Suzy's Caring Place programs for victims of domestic violence. A keynote speech was given by longtime GACS supporter, Will County State's Attorney, James W. Glasgow. Additional funds were raised through raffle baskets, ticket sales, and generous donations from our community supporters. GACS is eternally grateful to all of those who show their support to the agency, especially by attending or otherwise supporting our awareness events. For more information on the programs benefiting from DVAM event proceeds, visit our webpage: www.gacsprograms.org

Witches Night Out is a costume fundraiser for women who want to make a difference in another woman's life. Proceeds go to Will County Agencies serving women & children. The agencies selected provide services and support that help women secure their independence, regain their dignity, and become self-sufficient (www.witchesnightout.com). The event is held annually at the Jacob Henry Mansion (Joliet) and has continued to grow in popularity, year after year, with tickets selling out in record time. Additionally, Guardian Angel staff serve on the committee and volunteer every year as the "gatekeepers" and scan thousands of tickets for attendees, as they arrive. GACS was so thankful to, again, have been selected as a recipient of proceeds from the 2023 event.

On Thursday October 20, 2022 the 23rd annual Will County Take Back the Night (TBTN) event was held at Joliet Central High School. The event was free to the public and included resource tables, a vigil honoring lives lost to domestic violence in Will county, and a march in the surrounding area. Annually, TBTN brings survivors, supporters, activists and community leaders together in a call to end violence. The 2022 event featured speaker Eden Strong, who is a local survivor of domestic violence and the founder of Rise From The Ashes, a nonprofit assisting financially struggling victims of domestic violence in legally separating from abusers through the civil court process. Learn more at www.edenstrong.com. For more information on the annual Will County Take Back the Night event, visit www.willtbtn.com



GACS Staff gather for a group photo at the conclusion of the Angels Against Abuse 5K

Holiday Giving: Angels on Assignment 2022

The 2022 holiday season was filled with so much joy this year at Guardian Angel, thanks to the generosity of so many! Throughout the month of December we received in-kind donations of wish list items, Christmas presents, and gift cards from more than 50 community groups, organizations and individuals! We were overwhelmed by the incredible spirit of giving. Pictured below are just a few examples of the many donations received during the holiday season. We are grateful to all of our donors for taking the time to shop and deliver the wonderful gifts and supplies. We are also thankful to our dedicated volunteer, Michele Vana, who helped take in these gifts, sort and organize them for distribution, making it so joyful for our clients and their families.



Chief Development Officer, Jane Ukleja and Senior Development Specialist, Val Muersch accepting donations in December 2022

Recap of April: Sexual Assault Awareness Month 2023



Janice & Sammy Jo Masokas perform at "Songs for Survivors" on April 14

April, recognized nationally as Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), was highlighted by numerous awareness and activities hosted and attended by our Sexual Assault Service Center (SASC). 2023 marked the first year that the program was able to resume in-person events since 2019. A music-themed event, "Songs for Survivors" was held on April 14 at Double J's Bar and Grill. The event featured music by former SASC staff member, Janice Masokas and her husband Mike (Full Circle Acoustic) with a special guest appearance by their daughter, Sammy Jo. The Masokas family is so talented and we are grateful they share their gift with us. Funds were raised through a split the pot and raffle.

Denim Day was celebrated on April 26. For the past 24 years, Peace Over Violence has run its Denim Day campaign on a Wednesday in April in honor of Sexual Violence Awareness Month. The campaign was originally triggered by a ruling by the Italian Supreme Court where a rape conviction was overturned because the justices felt that since the victim was wearing tight jeans she must have helped her rapist remove her jeans, thereby implying consent (peaceoverviolence.org). On this day, allies of the cause are encouraged to wear denim to show their support. SASC teamed up with TCBY (Shorewood) and The Great American Bagel (Joliet) who helped with promoting this movement.

The month of awareness activities concluded with "Walk a Mile" held at the Joliet Public Library, downtown location, on April 27th. The event featured a rally, survivor speaker, raffles and awareness activities followed by attendees participating in a mile-long march around the area sidewalks to bring attention to sexual assault & gender-based violence. More information on the annual awareness events and Sexual Assault Awareness Month can be found at gacsprograms.org/saam.



Walk a Mile attendees gather for a group photo halfway through the mile-long march in Downtown Joliet

125 Year Anniversary of Guardian Angel Community Services

On October 19, 2022 Guardian Angel Community Services celebrated its 125-year anniversary! We reflected on this historic milestone and Guardian Angel's time-honored history of when the Sisters of St. Francis Mary Immaculate purchased a small cottage behind their Motherhouse that became the first Guardian Angel Home on October 19, 1897. To commemorate this monumental achievement, Assistant Majority Leader for the House Democratic Caucus and State Representative Natalie Manley presented a House Resolution, which included the organization's storied history and achievements. Since the start of the 21st century, Guardian Angel Community Services has served over 700,000 people through direct services, prevention education, and community outreach, expanding its services by an extraordinary 705%. Guardian Angel Community Services has an exemplary history of adapting programming in response to community needs, including opening satellite offices in Joliet, Plainfield, Morris, and Crete, and expanding emergency shelter beds for survivors of domestic violence by 50%; more recently, the organization responded swiftly to the global COVID-19 pandemic, with its heroic staff serving on the front lines to deliver 24-hour essential services. Guardian Angel Community Services continues to withstand the test of time while demonstrating community leadership and service towards significantly improving the quality of life of citizens." Additionally, the agency was humbled to have all of these achievements further recognized by the Illinois State Senate and Senator Meg Loughran Cappel, and United States Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth.



GACS Staff, Board Directors and supporters gather on October 19, 2022

The Sue & Larry Wiers Counseling Wing of Healing

The Sue & Larry Wiers family was recently honored as our Private Donor of the Year for their tremendous support and advocacy of our mission. Their extraordinary gifts of service and support led to the establishment of our Sue and Larry Wiers Counseling Wing of Healing in 2021. This beautiful and welcoming space includes 5 counseling rooms, tailored for adults and children, and is utilized by all agency programs. The renovations completely transformed the space with a beautiful and calming aesthetic which is so important, especially for healing from trauma.



GACS on the Global Stage



Ines Kutlesa with Congresswoman Lauren Underwood



Ines Kutlesa at the United States Embassy in Zagreb, Croatia



Ines Kutlesa with Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton

This year we were, once again, on the global stage, as Guardian Angel's Chief Executive Officer, Ines Kutlesa, presented on the mission and work of Guardian Angel and the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, as Chairperson of the Council's Gender Based Violence Committee, at the United States Embassy in Zagreb, Croatia. The event was cosponsored by the Federal Women's Program and the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility Committee of the U.S Embassy. High ranking officials were present including the Chargé d'Affaires, Alex McKnight, who was the diplomat serving as the acting Ambassador, and Acting Deputy Chief of Mission, Amy Davison. Ines was also honored to be invited by Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton to represent Guardian Angel Community Services and the Illinois Council on Women and Girls at the Democratic Lieutenant Governors Association's National Conference at the Sheridan Grand-Chicago, as a panelist on: The Wisdom Is In the Room: Fostering Equity in Government, moderated by Lieutenant Governor Stratton. Ines also co-hosted the Illinois Council on Women and Girls Gender Based Violence Committee's Webinar this year with Lieutenant Governor, Juliana Stratton, during Women's History Month, known as the Know Your Rights Campaign. Experts statewide came together to provide resources to those who have been impacted by gender-based violence, to help individuals understand their legal rights, to raise awareness against gender-based violence, and to address cultural barriers victims of domestic and sexual violence face across the State of Illinois. Additionally, the Director of Government Relations of the National Organization of Women (NOW) invited Ines to present at the national conference of the National Organization of Women at the Palmer House, Chicago, and it was a tremendous honor to be there in this capacity. In recent news Ines was also invited to serve on United States Congresswoman Lauren Underwood's Advisory council, a tremendous honor indeed.

Save the Date

THE ANNUAL GALA BENEFITTING GUARDIAN ANGEL'S PROGRAMS

ANGELICA

dancing with our local stars

SATURDAY APRIL 6, 2024

BOBAK'S SIGNATURE EVENTS | WOODRIDGE, IL



GUARDIAN
ANGEL
COMMUNITY SERVICES
Changing and Saving lives since 1897

WWW.GACSPROGRAMS.ORG/ANGELICA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS RECOGNITION

Kathy Giegerich: 20 Years of Service



Congratulations to Board Director Kathy Giegerich for 20 years of service & volunteerism on our Board of Directors.

Lou Ann Johnson: Lifetime Achievement



Congratulations Board Director Lou Ann Johnson on receiving the Michael Austin Clark Lifetime Achievement Award.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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HEATHER JOURDAN
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LOU ANN JOHNSON
JAMES RUZON
ADAM UNDERHILL
LARRY WIERS

GACS' CORE PROGRAMS:



EXCHANGE CLUB CENTER
Parenting classes for the prevention of child abuse & neglect

FOSTER CARE
Nurturing and safe homes for children, foster home licensing & support services



GROUNDWORK DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAM
Comprehensive services for individuals & families impacted by domestic violence

PARTNER ABUSE INTERVENTION PROGRAM
Support & education for the development of healthy relationships



SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE CENTER
Sexual assault & rape crisis services, prevention education and outreach

SUZY'S CARING PLACE
Transitional housing & support services for survivors of domestic violence



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