

# The Clarion

September 2002 • Volume III, Number VI

## Into each life ...

**For some people, emotional pain and the inability to function come as a steady, driving downpour. Counseling Services professionals help part the clouds of despair and reveal sunny days ahead.**

“Sometimes the pain just fills my office,” Chris Shestak says, describing a day in the life at Catholic Charities Counseling Services. “I tell clients to leave their pain here and be without that pain for a while.”

At any given time, counselors in Fort Wayne and South Bend are lending understanding ears, assessing needs, and offering support to as many as 125 individuals and families seeking emotional well-being and increased functionality in their lives.

Chris is the clinical supervisor in Fort Wayne, overseeing a staff of three

full-time counselors: Neerja Meyan, Tyson Flora, and Arlene Kuntzman. In South Bend, the diocese is served on a part-time basis by counselors James Wittling, Janet Pancheri, Nicole Taulbee, Magdelene Clay, Adele Erhardt, and Brigitte Weischer. Greg Sowles, Ph.D., serves as a consultant in Fort Wayne, while Diane Prosser, Ph.D., is the consultant for the South Bend office. Limited services are also available in Huntington, Decatur, Elkhart, and Warsaw.

All Catholic Charities counselors have earned master's degrees and are either state-licensed mental-health counselors or in the process of satisfying the requirements for licensing.

The agency works with clients regarding fees. Some clients have health insurance covering mental-health issues. If they don't, fees are based on household size and income. “Our goal is to turn no one away because of an inability to pay,”

Chris says. “We've applied for Medicaid approval, and we're looking forward to the aid that will provide in fulfilling the mission of the agency.”

While some people view the need for counseling as a sign of weakness, it's really a sign that a person is open to exploring avenues that will lead to a

Chris Shestak counsels a client in the Fort Wayne office.

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better life. “Counseling helps people think differently and function better,” Chris says.

Counselors work predominantly with what Chris calls the “worried well,” people who suffer from anxiety disorders or depression for myriad reasons. Many clients are couples in distress, courting separation or even divorce. Counselors can help some people with more serious conditions, such as bipolar disorder, but those individuals most often are referred into the care of a psychiatrist, in addition to counseling.

Perhaps the most prevalent underlying cause for the emotional problems that counselors attempt to solve is the aftermath of child abuse. “If I had a magic wand, I’d eliminate child abuse. Of course, I might be eliminating my job, too,” Chris says.

“Abuse during childhood has a phenomenal impact on a person’s ability to have normal relationships with people,” Chris continues. “People who are abused as children think that the

world is not a safe place—people may love them, but they’ll hurt them, too. Some people develop a feeling that they’re unworthy of love, even God’s love.

“Abused children are often very protective of their parents and believe that they must be rotten kids,” Chris adds. “They grow up hating themselves and afraid to let people in because those people might find out how horrible they are.”

Counselors work to establish trust and to demonstrate what constitutes normal relationships, while helping clients learn to challenge the distortions in their thinking that go along with symptoms of anxiety or depression. They then encourage clients to take the relationship skills they’ve learned and use them with other people. “A lot of what we do is teaching,” Chris says. “We teach people how to manage their emotions, and we teach them about relationships. Sometimes, we’re the first people to show them that someone really cares about them.”

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The mission of Catholic Charities states that it serves everyone from conception to death, and, in that spirit, counseling is available to everyone on the age spectrum, from kids to seniors. Three counselors—Kuntzman, Taulbee, and Clay—provide services in diocesan schools through a contract with Catholic Charities.

Older adults present a different set of challenges. “We’re looking at ways to better service the geriatric population,” Chris says. “Seniors have the highest percentage of completed suicides. Older people grew up during a time when seeking help was considered a sign of weakness, so they’re unlikely to seek help now. Family doctors treat the physical ailments, but very often don’t recognize emotional problems.”

The development of psychotropic drugs to correct the brain-chemistry imbalances that result in conditions such as clinical depression has been a boon, Chris says. “There are times when

I listen to people and I hear biologically based symptoms. I advise them to see a doctor and find out if medication—in conjunction with counseling—is right for them. Sometimes we can’t work with people if they’re not on medication, because their symptoms are just not manageable without the medication to assist them—and us—in their safety.”

Clients may require short- or long-term counseling. In some cases, counselors refer clients to Catholic Charities Case Management, which connects people to other agencies and services available.

Chris emphasizes that counselors are there to suggest options. “We won’t tell you how to live your life,” she says. “If whatever you’re doing isn’t working, we’ll suggest alternatives that might work. We’ll collaborate with you and help you set goals. But the decisions are ultimately yours to make. It’s always about the clients and what they think they need.”

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Counseling for Catholic Charities provides a latitude to Chris' liking. "In a secular setting, governmental guidelines might not allow counselors to talk about spiritual issues," she says. "Here, clients may tell us about how God must hate them, and we tell them about how God loves them. It just feels so good. I feel that this is where God wants me." ■

## Cries for help

If you or someone you know is in need of counseling, please call and explain the situation to a counselor, who will then assess the situation and determine if Catholic Charities can provide the level of service necessary. In the Fort Wayne area, call (260) 422-5625 or (toll free) (800) 686-7459. If you're in the West Region, call (574) 234-3111 or (toll free) (800) 686-3112.

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## D I D Y O U K N O W ?

Our adoption program:

- Provided 9,508 hours of foster-parent training in fiscal year 2001–2002.
- Finalized 96 special-needs adoptions.
- Had 83 requests for adoption search and reunion.
- Provided foster-parent liaison services to 292 foster homes in Allen County.
- Completed 250 home studies for adoption, foster-home licensing, relative adoption, stepparent adoption, guardianships, and custody.

In 1991, Catholic Charities' South Bend office was the first agency in Indiana to offer open adoption placements, identifying information exchanged by birthparents and adoptive parents prior to placement with an agreement or contract that follows.

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 United Way of Chicago

# A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## A reflection: Christ is in all of us

Phyllis Mizer, a longtime member of our Catholic Charities staff, retired on June 26. Phyllis joined the agency in 1981 and was a brief and emergency services caseworker. During the



13 years I've been with the agency, I learned a great deal from Phyllis.

There are a lot of demands in the job of a brief services worker. Phyllis would see a steady stream of clients each day. People would come with varying troubles and requests for assistance. I always thought how easy it would be to develop a very callous attitude toward clients. But that never happened with Phyllis. She would always listen respectfully to each person's story. She always offered assistance. Sometimes she wasn't able to give the person exactly what they asked for, but she always gave them some ideas, made referrals for assistance, and was always interested in their well-being.

A woman of great faith, Phyllis saw Christ in every person that came through our doors.

I was reminded of just how special Phyllis is several months ago. I was at the pharmacy waiting to get a prescription filled when a man, about 30 years of age, came in. He was wearing old and tattered clothes; he didn't look too clean; and he also looked and acted like someone with a mental illness. He immediately began talking and asking a lot of somewhat personal questions—why was I there, what was my prescription for, did I have insurance, and so on. I was becoming increasingly uncomfortable and wanted to get out of the drugstore as quickly as possible.

The young man asked me where I worked. Although I hesitated for a moment, I couldn't think of a better response than the truth and told him I worked for Catholic Charities. "Do you know Phyllis Mizer? Does she still work there?" he asked. I replied that I knew her and she still was at the agency.

"You know, I've made a lot of my mistakes in my life, and several times I had to go to Catholic Charities for help," the man said. "Sometimes Phyllis would help me, and other times she didn't give me what I asked for, but she always treated me with respect."

That remark hit home. I was reminded not only of Phyllis' gifts, but of my own shortcomings. I saw that young man as an annoyance, a person to be avoided. I failed to see Christ in that person. It was a lesson for me that I hope I never forget.

That encounter also made me very proud of the work we do at Catholic Charities. Every day I hear comments from people about how helpful our staff is and how well people have been treated. I know that we provide services that are professional. It's also good to know when we encounter people in need, we see Christ in that person.

I wish Phyllis a long and happy retirement—it's well deserved. I thank all of the staff members of our agency for the quality and care demonstrated in their work.

God Bless.

*Kathleen Donnellan*  
Kathleen Donnellan

## N E W S

### Photo opportunity

The agency needs a digital camera. If anyone has one they want to donate, please call Debi Krabach at (260) 422-5625.

### On the move

The West Region offices in South Bend will be relocated to a newly renovated building at 1817 Miami Street (within the St. Matthew's campus) in late October. All phone and fax numbers and e-mail

addresses will remain the same.

### Bargain bonanza

RSVP (Retired Seniors Volunteer Program) in Auburn has received a very large donation from a gift shop in Elkhart. The organization is offering great bargains on a wide array of gifts and seasonal items for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. There's also a large selection of collectible animals

from Ty, Gund and Russ. Other items include a huge inventory of flags, windsocks, picture frames, and ornaments. RSVP has reduced the original price to 25 percent of cost.

The RSVP shop—at 107 West Fifth Street in Auburn—will be open for business on August 30 and 31; September 1; October 3 and 4; November 7 and 8; and December 7, 12, and 13.

Take advantage of this great opportunity to purchase

Christmas gifts—and save many of your hard-earned dollars!

### Counseling offices

Please call (800) 686-3112 if you'd like to schedule an appointment at Catholic Charities' counseling offices in Warsaw or Elkhart. The Warsaw office is open Tuesday afternoons and evenings, while the Elkhart office at 222 Middlebury Street is open Thursday afternoons and evenings.

## U P C O M I N G E V E N T S

### Fort Wayne

• **Preservice training for permanency planning sessions 11 & 12**—October 8 (6–9 p.m.), October 15 (6–9 p.m.), and November 9 (9 a.m.–3:30 p.m.). Preregistration is required; call Robin Springstead at (260) 422-5626.

• **First Aid, CPR, and Universal Precautions**—October 5 (9 a.m.–5 p.m.) and November 9 (9 a.m.–5 p.m.). Preregistration is

required; call Robin Springstead at (260) 422-5626.

• **“Breaking Barriers from Within”**—Case-Management Initiative and the Immigration and Refugee Resettlement departments will host the first session of this program on Saturday, September 28.

• **Unity Dinner**—The Immigration and Refugee Resettlement departments will sponsor this annual event on Saturday, October 19.

### South Bend

• **PSM: Communities of Salt & Light training**—Offered in September. Call Sean Wendlinder at (574) 234-3111 for details.

• **Immigration Services**—Will open in South Bend this quarter.

• **Adoption Education Groups**—Will meet in South Bend from late August through September 7.

• **Faithful Citizenship Candidate Forum 2002**—St. Joseph Parish in South Bend on October 22 at 7 p.m. Federal and state candidates for representative and senator are invited to address issues that concern people of faith. Open to the public.

### Welcome, new staff members

**Dayna Difilippo**  
Assistant Teacher,  
Children’s Cottage

**Elizabeth Fallon**  
Child Care Assistant  
Teacher, Circle of Mercy  
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