



Annual Report 2015



Welcome



Dear Friends,

I am pleased to share with you the Synod Community Services 2015 Annual Report. Inside you will find an outline of the services we provided to the community and a Statement of our Revenue and Expenses for the year.

Founded in 1972, this year marks our 43rd year of work as a supportive service organization. Thanks to the contributions and hard work of countless staff and stakeholders, 2015 saw programmatic and client achievements of which we are very proud.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Synod's service culture is our genuine devotion to the clients we serve. This dedication was in evidence this year when one of our programs faced a setback: the owner of the home in which 6 individuals had lived for many years lost the house in foreclosure. Synod stepped in and purchased a 4 bedroom wheelchair accessible home in which all 6 residents could live and remain together. This is the spirit of community that we try to manifest in all our actions, large and small.

A Message From Our CEO

This report contains evidence and anecdotes of a sample of the work we are doing to make our communities better, every day, and I would like to express a heartfelt thank you to those that make it happen. Synod would not be the premiere service provider it is without the tireless dedication of our staff. Their leadership, compassion and expertise help to transform and enrich the lives of those who face serious challenges taking full advantage of what our communities have to offer.

Likewise, we would not be the organization we are today without the support of our donors and friends. Their financial and other support help us to continue pushing the envelope of what compassion and skill can accomplish when put in service of a therapeutic partnership.

I encourage you to visit our website www.synodhelps.org to learn how you and Synod can work together to make positive change for our communities. Thank you again for your support and commitment.

Keta J. Cowan, ECEO, Synod Community Services

Community Housing

Housing Hope

The stigma around mental illness has for a long-time contributed to the relegation of those with mental illness into neglected and oppressive spaces. From early in the history of the United States, treatment was formed around the premise of “institutionalization” where those with mental illness were discarded into asylums and massive state hospitals which were largely unsafe and provided little-to-no humane care for those individuals. Maltreatment was an unfortunate and rampant practice during this time.

The mental health system experienced a massive shift in its approach to treatment during the 1970’s. Precipitated by the rise of the Civil Rights movement, disability rights came under scrutiny during this time and de-institutionalization, the process of undoing the confinement of those with mental illnesses from state hospitals back to the community began.

Synod House was born out of this spirit of relocating services back into the community for a more integrated approach. Synod House was Synod’s first program to provide housing and services for men with mental illness in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Successfully 40 year later, Synod maintains and staffs 12 community group homes. Within these groups homes support for a diverse group of needs including: skill rehabilitation, person centered planning, assistance with community access, meals, and assistance with personal needs.

In the Fiscal Year 2015, Synod provided:

- 185,243 hours of support service
- 12 staffed programs providing life supports and housing to 70 individuals at a time, totaling
- 24,695 amount of bed-nights of housing and assistance, and
- Staff accompaniment of 2,305 appointments

Staff are always welcoming: A hug or a high-five or just talk to us.

– Group Home Client

Hoarding Abatement

Helping to Make Space for Growth

In recent years increased attention has been given to hoarding as an issue affecting both individuals and communities. While formerly hoarding behavior has been considered as a symptom of other diagnoses such as depression and obsessive compulsion, it is now being understood as a separate and unique condition that is psychologically complex and requires adaptive responses from community resources and mental health providers. Hoarding is a disorder characterized by the collection of a large volume of possessions that can be debilitating and distressing to individuals and families of individuals who experience it. Hoarding is estimated to affect 1.4 million homes in the United States. However despite the pervasiveness of hoarding behavior it often remains a hidden issue and only comes to light in dire and life-threatening situations when the amount of possessions accumulated ultimately overwhelms the living space within the home.

At the forefront of addressing this issue in Washtenaw County is the Hoarding Task Force. Organized in 2006 the Hoarding Task Force of Washtenaw County is a public-private partnership of 14 agencies that seeks to raise awareness of hoarding, preserve safe and appropriate housing, and provide early intervention strategies. The Task Force follows the harm-reduction model, a strength-based evidenced-based practice, which focuses on working with the clients to initially reduce immediate danger while improving quality of life.

The Hoarding Task Force offers important services including the Speaker's Bureau which supplies community and professional education and training on various aspects of hoarding behavior. However, since the Task Force consists almost exclusively of a volunteer membership, one large community need that they have not been able meet is direct, hands-on service.

Since this kind of service is necessary in helping reduce the amount of accumulated possessions and assisting with physical clean-out, Synod has sought to address this gap through the development of our hoarding abatement program. The hoarding abatement program works to return functionality and usability of clients' living spaces through methods of removal that apply best practices. It is one of only a few select resources throughout Michigan communities to do so.

In 2015,

- 38 individuals received 186 hours of assistance through the Hoarding Abatement program
- 91.9 percent of those we assisted agreed to repeat visits to continue discarding unneeded goods.

Economic Guidance and Money Management

Although every person is distinct in a myriad of ways – from disposition and personality, to hobbies, lifestyle, and background – we are unified by the same basic needs that often require the same resources to acquire them. Synod's Economic Guidance and Money Management program allow the client to learn and acquire key money management skills by offering support with budgeting and bill pay that make certain that their utilities, housing, food and clothing are prioritized and paid for first.

Our staff account representatives offer help through organizing budgeting and reconciling accounts. They also provide aid to clients who benefit from support negotiating with creditors over inflated, unsubstantiated or overdue bills and support with navigating communications with utility companies.

From the early 1990's Synod has been providing help through this program, assisting thousands of clients to attain and sustain stable and independent lives in the community. Through Synod's distinct relationship with the community through this program we have been able to witness clients attain personal goals like returning to work, purchasing vehicles, getting married, opening and learning to manage their own checking and savings account and ultimately stepping down from Synod's service entirely.

This program aims to:

- Protect the benefits of a client by making sure that all annual eligibility requirements are met and that necessary documentation is submitted on time.
- Instruct clients on prioritizing costs related to their basic needs while learning to conserve in order to spend on less urgent items
- Preserve a client's dignity and privacy when advocating and negotiating for them through assisting in the least intrusive manner possible
- Equip clients to live as independently as they can by providing money management assistance

In 2015, Synod

- Met the living expenses and basic needs of 186 people
- Oversaw the management of over \$2,000,000 for household bills and necessities

My payee goes all the way to help and gives me the extra help when I need it. I can count on you guys.

– Financial Services Client.

Supported Housing

Constructive Problem-Solving

Synod acts as the owner and manager of three separate properties that provide safe, well-maintained, low-income housing and that are committed to fostering caring, supportive atmospheres for special populations to live in and grow.

Deake House, positioned between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti, is a Single Room Occupancy home for homeless and formerly homeless seniors. Dedicated to re-housing the homeless and aging population of Washtenaw County, Synod has partnered with the Housing Bureau for Seniors to maintain a shared house for Washtenaw county residents over the age of 55. Deake House is an immediate housing resource for seniors who have no other housing options and have fallen out of traditional housing, often due to financial limitations. Tenants may stay as long as they like.

In 2015, Deake provided 1,296 bed-nights of housing.

The Linda apartments, situated in Monroe, Michigan consist of two renovated apartment types with 3 one bedroom options and 1 two bedroom option. These apartments are intended for individuals living with a mental illness, and tenants are often referred by Monroe Community Mental Health. While no participation in mental health services is required for stay, traditional responsibilities and rights of tenants apply and tenure can continue without an end-date as long as the conditions of the lease agreement are fulfilled.

In 2015, Linda provided 2,502 bed-nights of housing.

The Co-op is an all-male Single Room Occupancy duplex in Ann Arbor, Michigan with space and on-site staff support for up to 6 tenants. The Co-op is a sober housing facility where all common areas are shared among the tenants where safety and healthy community dynamics are prioritized by the on-site staff. While tenants receive recovery services they also find assistance from staff in learning and adopting skills to build self-sufficiency such as cooking, laundry, budgeting and cleaning. A large portion of the men who find housing in the Co-op were formerly homeless.

In 2015, the Co-op provided 1,970 bed-nights of housing.

Synod has given me the space I need to regroup and prepare to move forward again.
–Supported Housing Client

Community Staffing

Supporting Independence

There are many individuals who are not eligible for or do not desire to receive services through traditional mental health providers, but whose well-being could significantly benefit from supportive service. Trained, experienced staff are made available by Synod to provide on-going or discrete supports that are aimed at drawing the client toward their individual goals. No referral is necessary for this process. The result of this is a thoughtful and innovative solution for reaching and engaging with underserved populations.

In 2015, Synod delivered more than 19,000 hours of community staffing in Washtenaw and Oakland counties.

Everyone worked very hard to help me. They were empathetic and caring. I'm very grateful.
– Acute Services Client

Conservatorships and guardianships

Another resource open to the public that does not require a referral are conservatorships and guardianships provided through Synod services, where the well-being and care of severely disabled individuals who require legal support to carry on their affairs and assistance with making decisions is organized by Synod. If, for instance, families are not able to sustain the provision of necessary assistance, an independent decision regarding the possibility and fit of an organizational guardian or conservator for the individual will be made by Synod. Synod will submit the required documents and petitions and coordinate with the court appointed guardian *ad litem* to make a complete assessment of the needs of the clients.

Community Pooled Trust

An Innovative Solution to Losing Benefits

Michigan residents with disabilities who are granted Medicaid health insurance or Supplemental Security Income (“SSI”) are held to expectations and limitations regulating the amount of resources they are allowed have in their possession. A disabled person’s health insurance, which may well be his or her only method of income, is sensitive to discontinuation for a few reasons that can be difficult to predict and anticipate. These reasons include late back payments from Social Security for benefits on which the person has been waiting, legal settlements from accidents, or inheritances from loved ones.

A pooled disability trust is one answer for those whose finances do not allow for attorney fees for establishing and sustaining a private trust. Synod’s role is to pool the money with the intention of investment management while opening an individual sub-account for every participant with a disability.

In Michigan the only community pooled trust to exist, be available to everyone, and accept deposits of any amount is the pooled disability trust that Synod has created. Prior to the development of Synod’s program, those with existing wealth were almost exclusively the only ones that gained from trust funds. The Synod pooled disability trust keeps the Medicaid and SSI benefits intact for individuals with disabilities while still accruing funds for services not included in Medicaid. Dental work is one such service that the fund covers, as well as

goods that lend to the beneficiary’s dignity, health, purpose, joy, and optimism.

One Synod client who had a disability resulting from a car accident received a legal settlement amounting to over \$50,000. However, since she was also receiving SSI and Medicaid, this amount was far over the \$2,000 cap on resource limits enforced by Social Security. Synod staff stepped in to coach her through creating a sub-account within the agency’s pooled trust, that would keep the money from her legal settlement. In doing this she was able to stay below the \$2,000 resource limit, as Social Security can not count the funds in the pooled trust against recipients. By utilizing the pooled trust, she was able to remain eligible for Medicaid and SSI. She has been able to access the money in her pooled trust sub-account for necessary services and goods not covered by Medicaid or SSI including utility bills, therapy, dental care, and payment towards the purchase of a vehicle.

This year the Synod Pooled Trust:

- Has over \$300,000 under management
- Preserved benefits for 77 disabled individuals

Financial Information

Statement of Activities

October 1, 2014 - September 30, 2015

REVENUE

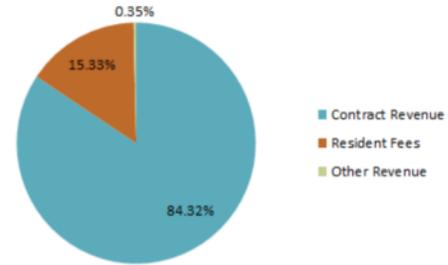
Contract Revenue	\$4,622,488
Resident Fees and Fees Paid on Behalf of Residents	\$840,277
Other Revenue	\$19,285
Total Operating Revenue and Support	\$5,482,050

EXPENSES

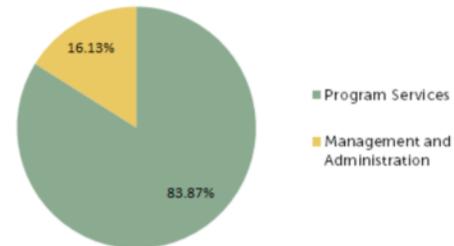
Program Services	\$4,373,359
Management and General Administration	\$840,954
Total Operating Expenses	\$5,214,313

Net Assets - beginning of the fiscal year	\$2,172,520
Net Assets - end of the fiscal year	\$2,440,257
Change in Net Assets	\$267,737

Revenue FY 2014-2015



Expenses FY 2014-2015



How You Can Help

By Making a Financial Contribution

Your donations allow Synod to provide essential assistance, including meals, medication delivery, bill pay and mental health support, as well as other basic and necessary care. Because the cost of providing these services has outpaced government funding, we have been forced to terminate services to many disabled people who have no-one else to turn to. They need your help.

By Becoming a Synod Volunteer

Volunteers have helped pay bills for homeless mentally ill adults, painted kitchens and called bingo on a Friday night. We're calling for individuals at every level, from those who wish to work directly with clients to people working on their behalf at our main office.

By Donating a Vehicle

Our resources have so thinned that we are forced to tell staff, "If the car breaks down, park it." We can no longer afford to repair the vehicles needed to transport clients, deliver medication or provide meals. If you have a vehicle that's old but running, donate it to us! Your car can deliver service to elderly and disabled individuals who need a hand.

By Supporting Our Fundraising Efforts

To leverage greater value from your gift, please consider donating gift certificates or items for auction or raffle. Every little bit helps.

Call 734-483-9363 for more information.

Thank You

2014-2015 Donors as of September 30, 2015

Synod Community Services would like to thank all those who provided support during the 2014-2015 Fiscal Year.

Matthew Ajluni
Harriet Bakalar
Cambridge Consulting
Group
Natasha Duvall
Derek Gideons

Jamie Karosa
Michael Masserant
Bryan McNamara
John Nipper
Judy Owen
Connie Priess

Tom Stachler
Judith Steeh
Edwin Tobes
VFW Post 2502

Planned gifts to SCS can be made through bequests, trusts, charitable gift annuities, life insurance, personal property, real estate and retirement plan assets. As a 501(c)3 not for profit agency, gifts to Synod Community Services are fully tax deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. A letter will be provided acknowledging all donations.

Meet Our Team

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Supervisor

Contact Us

Administrative Offices
615 S. Mansfield
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Phone: 734-483-9363
Fax: 734-483-9577

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 980465
Ypsilanti, MI 48198

www.synodhelps.org