



LEAVEN

Turning Hardship Into Hope

Spring 2023

A Final Message From Mary Parsons, Outgoing Executive Director

Please join us at an open house to mark the official *PASSING OF THE TORCH*

as we honor outgoing Executive Director

MARY PARSONS

and welcome incoming Executive Director

NIKKI GERHARD

Thursday, April 20, 4:30-7 PM

Community First Credit Union | 1575 Dresang Way, Neenah

- Light appetizers and cash bar
- Official program - 5:30-6pm
- Cards and well wishes are welcome. The gift of your time is all that we ask.
- RSVP's appreciated but not necessary, direct questions to: events@leavenfoxcities.org

This has been the longest goodbye ever! After announcing my retirement last spring, the time has *finally* arrived.

It is with mixed emotions that I leave a place that has been such an important part of my life. For 20 years, LEAVEN has given me a routine, purpose, structure, identity, and community. The mission has provided emotional fulfillment, intellectual stimulation, social connection, and spiritual enlightenment.

This job has allowed me to see the best of humanity – the compassion of volunteers, gratitude of clients, commitment of the board, integrity of the staff, generosity of donors, and support of our community partners. Because of all these people, I have witnessed hardship to hope time and time again.

I am excited about LEAVEN's future in Nikki Gerhard's capable hands. I will be a sideline observer, willing sounding board, and huge cheerleader for her and LEAVEN's continued success.

A Welcome Letter From Nikki Gerhard, Incoming Executive Director

As the successor to the foundation of excellence that Mary Parsons has paved, I am truly honored and excited to join LEAVEN after having admired for many years the work the organization has accomplished. I want to thank everyone for your warm welcome, including staff and the Board of Directors for their support and assistance in helping me transition into this position. Following in Mary's shoes will not be easy, but with your participation and support, we can ensure that LEAVEN has a bright future!

I bring with me an extensive background in community development and affordable housing advocacy garnered through 17 years of professional experiences in municipal government. During my tenure with the City of Green Bay, I was introduced to affordable housing as the manager of the Green Bay Housing Authority. Through the provision of subsidized housing and case management, my team was able to provide direct client services to an average of 200 households annually. For the last seven years, I served as the Community Development Specialist for the City of Appleton, supporting local nonprofit organizations active in the Fox Cities local homeless continuum of care and affordable housing strategies. It was during my tenure with Appleton that I was first introduced to LEAVEN. Immediately, I could see the passion and respect that staff and volunteers have for those seeking assistance, and was drawn to the great- and necessary- work Mary and her team were accomplishing! As executive director, I will leverage my background in program development, strategy enhancement, fiscal expertise, and community outreach. I will continue to build LEAVEN's legacy, working alongside our devoted board members, enthusiastic staff, and motivated volunteer team.

I look forward with great anticipation to the year ahead! Thank you for your continued support of LEAVEN, and please keep us in your prayers during this exciting transitional time!

A Year in Review and a Look Ahead

In 2022, LEAVEN assisted 3,903 unique households, and distributed nearly \$780K in direct client assistance. We made 3,482 referrals to one or more of our LEAVEN Community Resource Center partners, of which 1,270 were successfully acted upon. We couldn't have done it without the support of donors like you. Together we stabilized these struggling households by helping them secure or maintain housing, keep their utilities connected, repair the family vehicle, or otherwise address their emergency need.

LEAVEN continued to refer eligible households to federal pandemic relief benefits, including Wisconsin's Emergency Rental Assistance (WERA) program, which distributed an estimated \$510M statewide in rent, security deposit, and utility payments. By connecting eligible households to these public funds, we were able to use our charitable dollars to help other economically challenged households with higher levels of assistance.

WERA closed applications on January 31, 2023, due to low remaining funds. The end of WERA and unwinding of other pandemic relief benefits, coupled with high rents and minimal affordable housing stock, is an ominous confluence of factors that will shift the demand for rent and utility assistance back to LEAVEN. Through your generous support and LEAVEN's responsible stewardship, we will continue to address the basic needs of our neighbors in need, preventing them from slipping into homelessness, greater poverty, and ill health.

In 2022, the LEAVEN Board identified three areas of focus and began developing strategies to help us better deliver on our mission to "stabilize and empower people in financial crisis by providing financial assistance, resource coordination, and case management to address near-term and long-term basic needs."

Strategy #1:

Reimagine and redesign a client experience that is simple, seamless, inclusive and respectful of our applicants' time, while balancing this ease of access with our commitment to stewardship. Compassion with accountability.

To this end, we implemented system and process changes that simplify the way people access our services. We recently launched a new custom case management system that gives people the option of submitting information *before* their appointment at LEAVEN. By having much of the demographic and expense information completed ahead of time, we hope to reduce the fear and shame our clients may experience in verbally sharing this sensitive information. We also expect to get more accurate data, reduce our no-show rate, and shorten our appointments. The time-savings we gain by this new process will allow our interviewers to focus on each clients' unique situation and provide greater opportunities for resource coordination with our onsite partners.

Embedded in this goal is our duty to communicate and effectively interact with people across cultures, races, and barriers, thereby fostering inclusiveness and reducing the risk of misunderstanding, hurt feelings and unconscious bias.

In 2022, LEAVEN board, staff, and a select number of volunteers embarked on a Cultural Competency journey led by Dr. PaFoua (Pam) Her with 4Chi Business Solutions. In alignment with their equity work, the Multicultural Coalition (MCI), underwrote this training at no cost to LEAVEN. "As a com-



Dr. PaFoua (Pam) Her

A Year in Review and a Look Ahead (continued)

community member each of us has a personal, lived experience that has shaped us in ways that many times we haven't taken time to deconstruct. This journey is integral to making personal, organizational, and ultimately community change. The cultural competency journey begins with each individual, understanding who we are and then looking around us with a shifted lens that provides deeper understanding to create impact," Dr. Her said.

This thought-provoking journey provides insights and guidance that directly impact organizational culture and the lenses in which diversion, equity, and inclusion are developed, integrated, and sustained. While the training with Dr. Pam will be completed this fall, the journey does not stop there! Staff will continue to be intentional about incorporating aspects identified and learned during the course into the organizational practices of LEAVEN.

Strategy #2

Build awareness of our services, positioning LEAVEN as the first point of entry for people in need of financial assistance.

The first step towards accomplishing this goal required a quality website that was engaging and easy to use. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Peggy Heller, we are excited to announce the launch of our new website (leavenfoxcities.org)! Redesigned with Give Help/Get Help options, the site provides easy access to the information visitors seek. We are indebted to Peggy, who volunteered her time to provide us a website we are proud to share with you. Please check it out! And while you're there, sign up to join our email list.

Our Marketing Committee is exploring other ways to build awareness of our mission and appeal to a variety of stakeholders – including clients, donors, volunteers, community partners, and more.

Strategy #3

Ensure LEAVEN is addressing both near-term and long-term basic needs and providing assistance that is sustainable.

To better understand LEAVEN's impact on our clients' stability, we ask about their ability to meet their financial obligations in the future. 65% of our clients report they won't need additional assistance, 11% believe they'll need more help, and 14% aren't sure. We continue to explore ways to address the 35% whose stability is tenuous. Collaboration with our LEAVEN Community Resource Center partners will be the key in addressing the barriers and challenges that prevent some clients from achieving self-sufficiency.

Match Giving Programs

At LEAVEN, we believe that every donation - regardless of size - has the power to make a difference. But what if there was a way to make your donation go further? Employee match programs may be your answer. Employee match programs are a benefit that companies offer to encourage and reward giving among their staff. Think of this as free money you are empowered to employ on behalf of your community. Most companies that have these programs will match an employee's gift one-to-one, but others match gifts two-to-one, and some even match donations three-to-one! This means that your gift can be worth two to four times as much as what you donate.

Employee match programs require a small amount of effort to engage, but the work will pay off for the nonprofits you choose to support. Don't leave money for social good on the table! Find out if your employer has a match program and take advantage of it this year and every year.



Do you want to get more involved in LEAVEN's mission? Consider becoming a LEAVEN volunteer. Opportunities are available in various roles. To learn more, go to our website: leavenfoxcities.org or email Kiara at LEAVEN: kiara.west@leavenfoxcities.org



LEAVEN
TURNING HARDSHIP INTO HOPE

LEAVEN INC.
1475 Opportunity Way
Menasha, WI 54952

**Join us April 20, 2023
for a special LEAVEN
event. Details inside!**



LEAVEN
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Staff

Nikki Gerhard - Executive Director
Emily Lewis - Director of Client Services
Kiara West - Volunteer & Community Development Coordinator
Cheryl Marciniak - Client Services Coordinator
Mary Meyers - Client Services Coordinator
Danielle Schneeberg Iddrisu - Front Office Coordinator

LEAVEN Main Office -

1475 Opportunity Way, Menasha

LEAVEN Board of Directors

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