

### FY 21 Board of Directors

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During FY 21 LifeLinks provided **\$566,680** in free and reduced care.

As we look back on FY 21, it's easy to focus on stress and uncertainty. But we prefer to remember it as a year when our agency united, increased our programming, served more consumers than at any other point in our 56 year history, and rose to meet the mental health challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Here are a few highlights:

### COVID-19 Emergency Grant

Thanks to funding from the State of Illinois and SAMHSA LifeLinks launched into a new endeavor to meet the mental health needs of children, adolescents, and their families who are struggling with the emotional impact of COVID-19, but did not have insurance to pay for needed services. **Thirty-three (33) children received an average of 15 counseling sessions with 13 of them were successfully discharged from this program.** The quality of this program combined with demonstrated successful outcomes resulted in our agency receiving additional funding for FY 22 to expand this program to meet the emotional needs of not only children and adolescents, but also uninsured and underinsured adults.



### Telecounseling

Thanks to grant funding and the generosity of our donors, LifeLinks expanded our capacity to provide telehealth counseling. To date, every counselor has a laptop computer with a webcam and headset! This expanded service improves access to mental health treatment by helping consumers overcome barriers to care including scheduling limitations as well as mobility restrictions, illness, travel, childcare challenges, and transportation difficulties.

### Promoting Integration of Primary and Behavioral Health Care (PIPBHC)

In the primary care office healthcare practitioners work with LifeLinks' PIPBHC Behavioral Health Clinicians to address the physical, emotional, social, and economic needs of patients/consumers. By addressing common, disabling, and costly physical and behavioral health problems PIPBHC is positively impacting lives. **Last year, 513 consumers were referred for PIPBHC services** at the SIHF Healthcare Olney clinic. Through activity and diet counseling, some experienced lowered blood pressures. Others have reported that their diabetes is better controlled with improved blood sugar readings. Learning how to incorporate physical activity into their everyday lives has resulted in planned weight loss. Evidence based cognitive behavioral therapy has helped consumers cope with mental health issues such as depression, grief, anger, and anxiety.

Consumer satisfaction with PIPBHC has been outstanding. A comment received during a customer satisfaction survey sums it up - "I am very satisfied with the services I am receiving.

I want to thank you for such an amazing program. I survived the death of a spouse because of the counseling I am getting. I saw my doctor yesterday and realized that I did not need any Xanax or anything to get through my grief thanks to my counselor and this program...I know you help a lot of people, and I thank God for you every day." And, PIPBHC is just getting started! FY 22 will bring expansion into the SIHF Healthcare clinic in Mattoon!

# During FY 21 LifeLinks served a record number of consumers: **4,019 individuals, including 1,131 children.**

According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, 70% of adults living in the U.S., or 223.4 million people, have experienced some type of traumatic event at least once in their lives. Trauma is a risk factor in nearly all behavioral health and substance use disorders and is a central focus of LifeLinks' recent performance improvement initiatives. During the past year LifeLinks' transformation into a trauma-informed agency made giant strides! Three (3) of our counselors provide evidence based Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), a state of the art treatment modality for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as well as many other mental health concerns. A dedicated team of internal clinical experts provided individualized trauma training to our staff. As a result, team members from Support Staff to Claims Processors to Behavioral Health Technicians to Nurses and Clinicians can recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in consumers, families, and each other and are fully integrating their knowledge about trauma into day to day practice and interactions. FY 22 will continue this process through a close examination of our physical environment, its impact on people who have experienced trauma, and what we can do to prevent re-traumatization. Additionally, thanks to a generous donation from the Coles Community Health Program EMDR certified training experts traveled to LifeLinks in September 2021 to train the remainder of our licensed clinicians in EMDR.

## Trauma Informed Care



FIRST.IL LifeLinks First Episode of Psychosis or FEP, is a coordinated specialty care approach aimed at improving the health and quality of life for individuals who have experienced a first episode of psychotic illness. Individuals between the ages of 14 and 40 that have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, schizophreniform disorder or other specified/unspecified schizophrenia spectrum, other psychotic disorder, major depressive disorder with psychotic symptoms,

and bipolar disorder with psychotic symptoms during the past 18 months are eligible. FEP clients choose to participate in at least two (2) treatment components (counseling, psychiatric care, supported employment, family psychoeducation and/or case management.) **Only 13 agencies across the State of Illinois provide this well researched treatment modality, and LifeLinks is proud to be one of them! Thirty (30) consumers have participated in this program with excellent clinical outcomes and very high satisfaction.**

One of the available treatment modalities within FEP, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), is another program proudly provided by our agency. IPS is a supported employment service that helps consumers find jobs and become part of the competitive labor market. Research has shown that people who obtain employment through IPS have increased self-esteem, improved quality of life, and experience reduced symptoms. After the completion of a vocational assessment, a job search plan is created. The consumer, with support and encouragement from the employment specialist, applies for jobs. Once a position is obtained, the employment specialist continues to provide support to the consumer. **112 consumers were involved in the IPS program during FY 21 with 28 individuals successfully placed in jobs.**





*Of course, no annual report to the community would be complete without a message from our Executive Director, Lynette Ashmore, who celebrated her 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary with LifeLinks in September 2020:*

If there is one thing we, as an organization, have learned from the COVID-19 crisis is the importance of community, being there for each other and the power of resiliency. Yes, it's been challenging and we've been greatly impacted emotionally, physically and financially. And yet, those same challenges have led to program additions, service enhancements, procedure efficiency changes and opportunities that may never have occurred without the pandemic.

First and foremost, our services have been uninterrupted. LifeLinks provided telephonic and video services during the stay-at home order at the beginning of the pandemic. In-person services resumed in June of 2020 and continued throughout the entire fiscal year while many of the agencies in surrounding counties remained remote. The pandemic did accelerate the implementation of telecounseling, a desired service delivery method that had been stymied by payer sources denial of payment and refusal to recognize the validity of the service. The pandemic forced that change and now, with clinicians fully equipped, telecounseling is an option for individuals who need or prefer that method of service delivery. Another step forward in successfully meeting the needs of those residing in our communities!

With a request by The Illinois Department of Mental Health (DMH), LifeLinks partnered to design and implement services under a federal grant to provide no-cost behavioral health services to children, adolescents and adults who either developed mental health difficulties or experienced an increase in symptoms due to the impact of COVID-19. With approximately 150 agencies in the State of Illinois, to be singled out as a partner was quite rewarding in itself but to be able to help those seriously impacted by the pandemic has been and will continue to be even more rewarding throughout this next fiscal year.

Over the last year we have continued to expand our reach beyond Coles County. LifeLinks has a presence in the primary care offices of our partner, SIHF Healthcare, in Olney, Salem, Vandalia, Effingham, Charleston and Mattoon. In addition Individual Placement and Support as well as FEP are now provided in Champaign, a couple of programs that have been highlighted in this newsletter.

As I look back at the past year I am proud of how we've adapted to today's healthcare challenges, of the accomplishments and achievements we've experienced and the resiliency we've shown. I thank our wonderful communities for the never ending support of our endeavors and for trusting us with your behavioral health needs. Having served a record number of individuals this past year, LifeLinks recognizes and aspires to meet the behavioral health needs of our communities and fellow citizens.

The phenomenal LifeLinks staff, Leadership Team and Board of Directors have always shown great strength, endurance, resourcefulness and innovation but none greater than during these unprecedented times. If the annual report doesn't demonstrate that or if you want to hear more about LifeLinks, I invite you to call or stop by our office to see and hear of the great work we do. I can be contacted at 217-238-5719 or via email at [lashmore@lifelinksinc.org](mailto:lashmore@lifelinksinc.org). Together we can make a difference!

## **Leadership Team**

***Lynette Ashmore***  
***Executive Director***

***Megan Bennett***  
***Director of  
Outpatient Services***

***Mandy Bute***  
***Human Resources  
Coordinator***

***Debby Cook***  
***Compliance Officer***

***Sarah Gracey***  
***Chief Financial  
Officer***

***Our supporters make all this possible.***

***LifeLinks is grateful to have such generous donors who help further our mission to provide high quality, cost effective behavioral health services to meet the needs of the consumers, their families and our community.***

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Jerome C. Groniger  
Howell-Adams Family Foundation

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Jack & Lynette Ashmore  
Richard & Debby Cook  
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Dale & May Anne Hanner  
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Jennifer Stuart  
Jeremy & Sarah Gracey  
Industrial Services of IL, Inc.  
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Mattoon Council 1057 Knights of Columbus  
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**With Special Recognition**

**In Memory of Charlie Lathrop** by Abby Haughee

**In Memory of Vance Kidwell** by David & Debbie Kidwell

**In Honor of Jared** by Nancy McGow

**In Honor of PA Faller's Retirement**  
by First Mid Bank & Trust

***Annual Appeal Donations:***

**\$25 - \$499**

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