

news

FALL/WINTER 2014



Harley, a participant in Equinox's Transitional Living Program, is committed to reaching her educational goals.

Back to School: Helping Homeless Youth Pursue Their Education

"My first priority is always school – if you don't have an education, there's not much you can do," said high school senior Harley. But even a serious student can find it difficult to follow her educational goals if she's homeless.

"I didn't have much of a childhood. I grew up very fast. My stepdad was abusive to my mom. I tried to protect her and my little brother, but they kicked me out of the house."

On her own at 17, Harley stayed briefly with cousins, "but Social Services said I had to go." She was then placed in Safe House in Schenectady, a temporary shelter for homeless, runaway and exploited youth. At Safe House, Harley learned about the Equinox Transitional Living Program (TLP). "I liked the idea of TLP right away because of the independence and stability."

Young people like Harley who come to TLP

have no other options for safe and stable housing, and often lack the physical and emotional supports many of their peers take for granted. TLP provides supervised, structured apartments or dorm-like housing, life skills training and development, counseling and support, guidance in choosing healthy lifestyles, and opportunities to exercise leadership and participate in their communities. TLP is available to youth ages 16-21, including young parents and their children. So far in 2014, 38 youth have been served by TLP.

A top priority is helping youth continue or resume their education. But TLP youth, who may stay in the program for up to 18 months, face a variety of obstacles to school success. Most have been physically or sexually abused or neglected, many suffer mental health issues, often untreated, such as depression or ADHD, and almost all have few positive connections with adults. Some have special learning needs and truancy histories,

have stopped attending or have dropped out of school.

But those who arrive at TLP are also engaging, creative, and resourceful young people with a desire to be accepted and loved, and hopeful for a better future.

"We have youth that are motivated. They want to find employment or go to school, and they want the support to get there,"

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CEO's Message

equinox
news

Fall is a very busy time at Equinox. In September, during National Recovery Month, we hosted more than 300 participants at the annual Treatment Works March. Individuals and families in addiction recovery were joined by recovery professionals and providers, advocates, law enforcement, dignitaries and supporters from throughout the area to raise awareness that treatment improves lives and that recovery from addiction is possible. Also in September, Equinox sponsored the 10th Annual Out of the Darkness Walk for R.I.T.A. to support local survivors of suicide loss and to educate the community about suicide prevention. A team of 42 Equinox walkers – including staff members and their families – participated in the walk.

October is National Depression Awareness Month and National Domestic Violence Awareness Month – campaigns that speak directly to two of Equinox's core service areas. An estimated one in 10 American adults suffers from depression. Last year, Equinox provided outpatient or residential services to nearly 1,000 individuals with serious mental illness, many of whom suffer from depression. Our staff clinicians use a breadth of therapeutic treatments – individual and group therapy, medication, Personalized Recovery Oriented Services (PROS), and case management – to help our clients move forward on their paths to healing and independence.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month brings an opportunity to shed light on this serious issue, and offer hope to victims. Equinox has operated Albany County's only emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children since 1989. Please see page 3 to learn more about the Shelter's 25 years of service to the community and our many other DV services.

Of course, we are also very busy with the countless preparations for our 45th Annual Thanksgiving Community Dinner. Staff, along with an incredible group of volunteers, is working behind the scenes to make sure that 10,000 people in the Capital Region who are lonely, homeless or in difficult circumstances will enjoy a delicious holiday meal.

Best wishes for a wonderful Thanksgiving,

Dorothy S. Cucinelli

Dorothy S. Cucinelli, PhD

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"We have youth that are motivated. They want to find employment or go to school, and they want the support to get there," said Megan Elbrecht, Harley's Case Manager.

With the guidance and support of their Case Manager, youth explore options and choose an educational path. Options include enrolling in their home district, enrolling in the Albany City School District, obtaining a High School Equivalency (formerly GED) or vocational certification, or pursuing post-secondary education.

Harley came to TLP last March. Although she had been happy at Steinmetz Leadership Academy in Schenectady, she transferred to Albany High School because it was so much closer. While she finished out the school year there, it was an overwhelming experience. With Megan's assistance, Harley transferred back to Steinmetz for her senior year.

TLP staff take on the role of a supportive family, as they advocate for youth and help remove any barriers to their education. They make sure youth have school supplies. They attend all school meetings with guidance counselors and teachers. They proofread papers, provide Internet access for research purposes, offer homework assistance and enlist tutors when needed. They also receive copies of report cards and discuss progress with each youth.



TLP is a supportive home-like setting for homeless youth.

They also receive copies of report cards and discuss progress with each youth.

"I take school very seriously," said Harley. "I want to help people. I want to be an RN in a NICU."

Harley and Megan meet up to three times a week. Megan makes sure Harley has what she needs. For example, does she need to see a doctor or the dentist? "Harley is very much an 18-year-old, we talk about choices she makes. Were they the best for her? Were they positive?"

Harley is also learning how to grocery shop economically, how to clean an apartment and how to manage money. "I'm learning about keeping a budget. When you come here, you should start budgeting right away so that you are ready when it's time to move out."

"When I have a problem, I go to Megan, but I also go to [Case Workers] Stacy and Amanda. I have a lot of problems with my family. I need to talk things out and cry and they'll let me do that. I really take advantage of their help."

The support and guidance she has received at TLP has helped Harley make a plan for her future: "I want to go to Monroe College in New Rochelle. It has a good nursing school. It's a small school, and I do better in small classes. I've already applied and visited."

"There are lots of youth out there who don't have parents, or somewhere to live or anyone to care for them," said Harley. "They need TLP – this place and this structure. I know when I leave here I'm going to be ready to do what I need to do to survive." ●

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Equinox DV Services Grow to Better Serve Community

When the Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter opened in 1989, there was nothing else like it in Albany County – only homeless shelters, and those did not accept children. Since then, the Shelter has added staff, expanded programs, reached underserved populations, and even relocated. But it remains the county's sole provider of emergency shelter for domestic violence victims and their dependent children. In its 25-year history, the Shelter has given protection to more than 2,500 adults and 1,300 children. Last year alone, it was a source of safety and desperately needed help for 175 adults and 86 children.

"When we opened, New York State had just established regulations for DV shelters, and how to pay for them. We had a bare bones staff, 15 beds, three flights of stairs and clients that were exclusively women and children," said Kathy Magee, Director of Domestic Violence Services.

By the mid-1990s, however, funding was made available to add programs beyond emergency shelter. "That allowed us to expand greatly. Finally, we got to a point of having enough services and staff that we could make a real difference," said Ms. Magee.

Another significant step in helping victims stabilize their lives came in 1998, when Equinox created its transitional housing program – known today as Project Break Free – to serve

as a post-shelter safety net for victims who are building skills and working toward independence. Project Break Free can serve about 30 clients a year who are in need of housing and financial assistance. For up to two years, clients receive help finding housing, safety planning, counseling and support groups (for adults and children), case management, education and job training assistance, job placement services, and temporary financial assistance with costs such as child care and transportation.

The need for services continued to grow, and in 2006 Equinox acquired a larger facility. The new Shelter, which is staffed 24 hours a day, has 30 beds and a more diverse population. Residents – who stay an average of 39 days, but may stay for up to 90 days – receive room and board, individual and group counseling, support groups, parenting education, case management and advocacy. All services continue to be free of charge.

The move to a new location precipitated a review of shelter policies, particularly at what things caused the most stress for residents – individuals who were living away from home, with strangers, and coping with serious trauma.

A cleaning service and a cook was hired to eliminate frequent conflict over chores, including cooking for 18 to 30 people, and forcing

residents to comply with house cleaning standards of others.

"We added a tv to each bedroom and were able to eliminate arguments over what tv shows to watch. We also created a playroom off of each lounge so parents could observe their children, but still be with adults or watch adult television," said Ms. Magee.

Shelter policies have changed also to accommodate more people with mental health and substance abuse issues, which are not uncommon in someone who has been subjected to abuse. Case Workers and other DV staff are able to refer clients to the Equinox Counseling Center for chemical dependency and to the agency's Mental Health Services as needed.

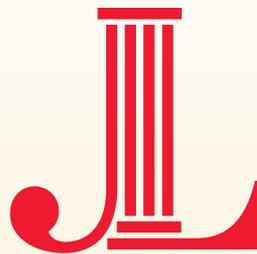
"All along our philosophy has been to continue to observe as we provide services. Where are the gaps?" One identified gap was that women are not the only victims of abuse.

Equinox Domestic Violence Services has been a leader in outreach to underserved populations. Equinox was one of the first in the state to offer shelter to men, and now offers specialized programs for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning) victims. Equinox is still one of the only agencies in the state delivering elder abuse services, and is now working to expand services to those with disabilities. ●

Equinox DV Shelter a Reality Thanks to Junior League of Albany

In the early 1980s, it was the Junior League of Albany that took on the task of establishing the county's first-ever domestic violence shelter. Equinox Board member and former League president Lorraine D'Aleo, who was instrumental in the creation of the Shelter, noted: "Mary Powell, a member of the public affairs committee, was also a member of the Albany County Domestic Violence Task Force at the time. She found that the county had no DV shelter to serve women and children." Thankfully, the League took on the project. Volunteers

dealt with fundraising, site-location, and government and media relations. "It was a multi-faceted project that capitalized on the talents of many different people in the League," added D'Aleo. The League donated \$20,000 in seed money, raised the balance needed, found a house and got it into shape, and, after issuing a request for proposals, chose Equinox to run the Shelter. The doors opened June 1, 1989, and thanks to the vision and commitment of the Junior League and Equinox it has been serving the community ever since.



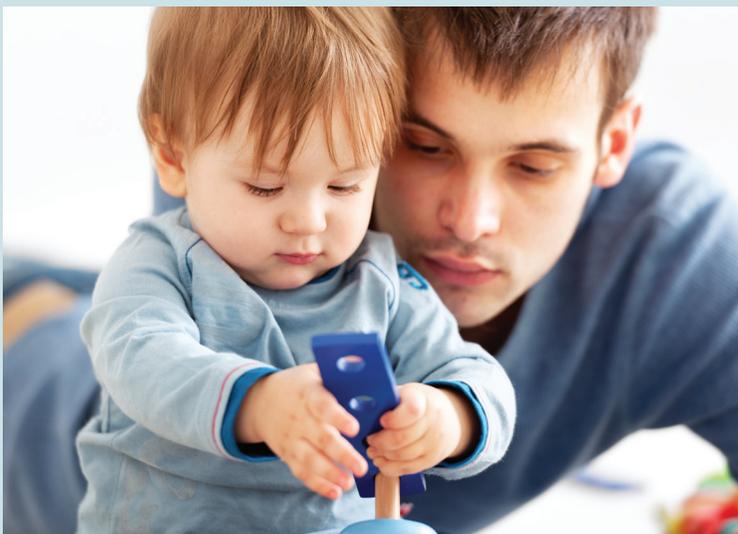
**JUNIOR LEAGUE OF
ALBANY, Inc.**
Women Building Better Communities



Domestic violence happens in all parts of our community – regardless of socioeconomic level, ethnicity, age, religion, or sexual orientation. National Domestic Violence Awareness Month – October – gives us an opportunity to shine a light on this insidious abuse, and encourage everyone to support efforts that help victims escape their abusers and take control of their lives.

Equinox offices will be decorated in purple, the color linked to domestic violence advocacy. Employees, along with the general public, are encouraged to wear purple on Wednesdays throughout the month, and participate in awareness activities.

Visit us at [facebook.com/EquinoxAlbany](https://www.facebook.com/EquinoxAlbany) throughout October for information about DV prevention, youth & dating violence, what you can do to help, community awareness events and more. ●



SAVE THE DATE!

Equinox Domestic Violence Shelter Commemorates
25 Years of Exceptional Service to the Community

Please Join Us at Our Anniversary Luncheon

Wednesday, May 6, 2015, 11:30 am – 1:00 pm
Wolfert's Roost, Albany, NY

If you would like to receive an invitation or for more information, please contact Stacy McIlduff at smcilduff@equinoxinc.org; 518.434.6135.



A Safe Haven for Pets

Love for a pet can be very powerful. In fact, it is not uncommon for a person to stay with an abuser because they fear for the welfare of a pet left behind. To eliminate this barrier to escape, Equinox is a partner with the Safe Haven program, which places the pets of domestic violence victims at undisclosed foster care locations. By providing protection for beloved pets – who may also be in harm's way – Safe Haven can provide the peace of mind that is needed for abuse victims to seek their own safety. The program, which is run by the Mohawk Hudson Humane Society, houses about 30 animals each year.

Equinox in the Community!



Cap Com Federal Credit Union generously donated backpacks full of school supplies to Equinox. As a result, Outreach Center youth and residents of Equinox House for Youth (EHY) headed back to school with all needed supplies! Pictured l-r: Stacy McIlduff, Equinox Annual Giving Officer; Theresa Petrone, Foundation/Public Relations Administrator, Cap Com ; Angela Pastizzo, EHY Manager; Connie Adsitt, Director, Residential Youth Services; and Carie Sala of Cap Com.



The Family Resources Program hosted more than 20 families at a Family Night Group of insightful dialogue with Congressman Paul Tonko on August 12. Congressman Tonko spoke about his Strengthening Mental Health in Our Communities Act of 2014, which renews a commitment to improving the lives of individuals and families impacted by mental illness.



Equinox hosted the annual "Treatment Works March" in September to raise awareness that recovery from alcohol and drug addiction is possible and that treatment improves lives.



Team Equinox participated in the 10th Annual Out of the Darkness Walk for R.I.T.A. (Remembrance + Intervention + Together + Awareness) on September 21 at the historic Saratoga Race Course. Sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – Capital Region NY, this event supported local survivors of suicide loss, provided healing and educated the community about suicide prevention.

STAY CONNECTED!

Visit us at equinoxinc.org and at facebook.com/EquinoxAlbany. Or visit us in person. Call (518) 434-6137, ext. 5366 to schedule a tour. We'd love to see you!

ANNUAL equinox



Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner

NOVEMBER 27TH IS OUR 45TH ANNUAL DINNER

- Volunteers will serve 500 dinners at First Presbyterian Church and deliver 9,500 meals to individuals and families who are homebound, lonely or in difficult circumstances.
- **PROJECT SOUP**, a partnership between Equinox and Price Chopper, provides soup kitchens and food pantries with turkey soup to feed those in need beyond Thanksgiving.
- More than 3,600 volunteers will play a role in this cherished community tradition.
- To volunteer, make a donation of cash or goods, or to request a dinner, call the "T-Day" Hotline – **518.434.0131** – beginning October 22.
- The Thanksgiving Dinner is funded entirely by donations from individuals, groups, schools, congregations and businesses.



UPCOMING EVENTS

November 27 Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner. Hotline is open Oct. 22 through Thanksgiving: 518.434.0131

December Holiday Gift Drive. Join this annual effort and help make a brighter holiday for someone in need. Call today for more information.

May 6, 2015 Domestic Violence Shelter 25th Anniversary Luncheon, Wolfert's Roost, Albany.

Fall 2015 In 2015, Equinox's annual spring gala will be moved to the fall. Save the Date: Nov. 5, 2015. Watch for updates about this exciting new event!

For more information on our events, contact 518.434.6137, ext. 5302 or email smcilduff@equinoxinc.org.



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