



# Safety Net News

January, February, March 2021

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## Alliance sees client numbers rise in 2021

By Jane Otto  
McLeod Alliance volunteer

When comparing last fiscal year's statistics to this year's, McLeod Alliance Advocate Glynis Vacek noticed some compelling differences.

"Overall, the numbers I am seeing from last year versus this year are fairly comparable," Vacek said. "But there are a few significant changes."

To arrive at that conclusion, Vacek compared the first and second quarters of both fiscal years. The first quarter is the months of October through December and the second is January through March.

The changes she saw reflected increases in partnering with other agencies, criminal and legal advocacy, referrals, and crisis calls. Those differences also reflected how the pandemic has prevented clients from seeking help. The stay-at-home order and working from home had many clients at home with their abusers and fearful to call for help when needed. As the pandemic begins to ebb, clients have begun to return.

"The coordination of services was quite low at the beginning of this fiscal year, but there was really a dramatic increase as our clients started reaching out again," Vacek said.

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### Local student collects donations

Pictured above is Chanice Whalen, an area college student, who coordinated and collected donations of hygiene products for McLeod Alliance clients.



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### Funding bills go to Senate

The U.S. House recently passed two bills, whose funds help support the Alliance and similar agencies.

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[www.mcleodalliance.org](http://www.mcleodalliance.org)  
for current news.

## From the Director's desk:

### Many changes, but the same caring advocacy

**H**ello all and happy Spring! (I think ... as I write this the temperature is 37 degrees.) The past 12 months in the state of Minnesota have been mentally and physically exhausting. We have had to greatly adapt to the way our office runs. There have been many changes in the ways we provide advocacy to clients. We are still here, however, and continue to provide the same confidentiality and caring that have



Rhonda Buerkle

become the cornerstones of our agency.

In these crazy times, I will leave you with a verse from *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* by John O'Donahue.

*"Gradually you will return to yourself, having learned a new respect for your heart, and the joy that dwells far within slow time."*

Please reach out to our office if you need domestic violence advocacy. We are always here for you.

*Rhonda Buerkle*  
Executive Director

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## From the Board Chair:

### Supporting a kinder, gentler world for all

**I**n all honesty, this past year has been a struggle to write and tell you about our organization. Domestic violence should be on the forefront of my mind, but with all the news in our country, I can't sit by and solely focus on domestic violence. It is sad, but so much of what we see today, in my opinion, is what our organization fights to end. Violence and victimhood are a never-ending circle that we need to break. Now, I may offend some readers, and for that I am sorry, but I need to speak my truth about what I see.

Defunding the police will only make everything 1,000 times worse. We will return to the wild west days of Jesse James – lawless. Rather than cutting their budgets, we need to fund training programs – crisis intervention programs for them. Just like our soldiers returning home from wars, these police officers see and do things they regret.

In our world, neighbors can call the police hundreds of times, if they are concerned about a victim. But until the victim makes the decision to leave the abuser and press charges, there is often little the officers can do. They are bound by law.

Police officers see and hear stories of abused children. They are the first on the scene to grizzly accidents.

Are there bad apples? Yes, let's not lie about that. Do officers make mistakes? Yes. Are there people who make mistakes in every job? Yes. Would you want



Susan Noyes

to be criticized daily for how you do your job? No.

Law enforcement work closely with many other public service members who also do not receive credit. Social workers, fire fighters, tow truck drivers, ambulance personnel – their jobs span a wide range of issues and topics that all come back to my circle.

At the heart of our circle is mental health. Mental health is the root of many of our society's problems. Let me start with a history lesson here. Throughout history humans have found ways to be truly cruel to one another. We have enslaved each other, degraded each other,

demoralized each other, and fought wars against each other. We have crucified people, burned them on stakes, whipped and starved them. We have imprisoned them, and attempt to wipe out entire cultures of people. We can be truly evil when we want.

We need to stop, because I feel social media is our new platform to exacerbate this cruelty. Via social media, we are free to say whatever we want. Who cares about the consequences, because you are not looking anyone in the eye when you say those things. Frankly, if I am going to be stabbed in the back, at least I want the opportunity to turn around and see who is doing it. We don't have that opportunity on social media. I have seen some of the nicest people I

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# The circle of victim and perpetrator

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know say some of the most horrible things on that platform.

Race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, none of it matters as far as death, illness, or mental health are concerned. We have and will be affected by them all at some point. Under our skin, we are all the same. How we process, perceive and feel about things is what makes each and every one of us unique. We need to celebrate that uniqueness, not tear it apart.

This brings me back to mental health. You don't walk in anyone else's shoes, so you don't know what your comment or meme is making them feel. Mental health is also a product and a reason for much of

our crime, addictions, joblessness, and homelessness. It's a circle.

If you were a victim of crime or abuse, you would take that with you mentally for the rest of your life. It affects every aspect of your life causing anxiety, depression, etc. Yes, I know not every victim becomes a perpetrator, but it does affect them in different ways. I personally know. I still have anxiety in certain situations and it has been over 20 years since I left my abusive situation. How often do we hear about those who commit a crime talk about the abuse or other tragedy they suffered in their life that led them down this road? The circle.

Now that I have gone on about this circle and how being a

victim and a perpetrator intermixes, you are wondering why. I ask why support McLeod Alliance? If it is to end the domestic violence, then we need to broaden our scope. We need to start at the heart of all of this, mental health. Write your local, state and federal officials. Tell them, that defunding all of our public service workers is not the way to fix domestic violence, drug abuse, homelessness. The way to fix it is to promote and incentivize mental health awareness, treatment programs, hospitals etc.

Thank you for your support of McLeod Alliance. Thank you for all you do to help end the circle of abuse.

*Susan Noyes*  
Board Chair

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## Clients, staff comfortable with Zoom court process

Continued from front page

Working with nonprofit partner agencies, such as Common Cup or United Community Action Partnership, on behalf of our clients has almost doubled since last year. In March 2020, partnering happened only 31 times, but increased to 53 times this past March. That increase began in October 2020.

Though advocates have assisted fewer clients with protection orders, they have referred many clients to the Minnesota Guide and File on the Minnesota courts' website. If clients aren't computer savvy, advocates can walk them through the process over the phone. However, Vacek said many clients prefer doing the computer process themselves.

"They feel safer doing this on their own, not having to worry about being overheard on the phone," Vacek said.

Criminal advocacy has also increased since March 2020. Since the pandemic, court proceedings are via Zoom, which was a learning process for everyone. Now that everyone's Zoom comfort level has risen, clients have been calling and have Legal Advocate Karina Robeck assist them as they participate in the criminal court process.

This past March the Alliance has assisted clients 67 times, an increase from just 41 times in March 2020. That number not only represents court hearings, but all that the criminal process entails. That can be assisting clients writing a victim impact

statement, making calls to court on clients' behalf, explaining how the criminal process works, and making sure clients understand their rights.

Advocates often make referrals for clients that range from legal assistance to finding shelter. That number has also increased. They made 283 referrals in October 2019 through March 2020 and 329 in October 2020 through March 2021.

Similarly, in January through March 2020 when Covid began to surface, the crisis hot line received 132 calls. A year later in those same months, the Alliance recorded 207 crisis calls.

Vacek said, "This tells us that our clients are reaching out again, which we are really happy about."

# Meet our newest board members ...

## Sandi Sportelli

Sandi originally hails from the Sleepy Eye Area.

Her family includes her significant other Jeff, his five sons and grandchildren, her mom, her sister, brother-in-law, nieces and great nieces, and of course, her wonderful dog, Nala Jean.

She has a master of science from Bemidji State University.

She presently works for Heartland Ag Systems.

She spends her free time with Nala in Therapy Dog International, riding motorcycle, and gardening.

She serves on the McLeod Alliance board because both she and her mom are domestic abuse survivors.

Serving on the board hasn't changed her perspective on domestic violence. It has just made her more passionate about serving. She wants to continue to bring awareness about the Alliance to others and help those in need.

An important thing that the public should know about the Alliance, she said, is that they help more people than the public may realize. Anyone can be abused.

One thing people may be surprised to learn about her is that she shot an eight-point buck on her first hunt.



## Lori Krenik

Though born in Rapid City, SD, Lori grew up in Hutchinson.

Her family includes her husband, Mike, her 29-year-old son, Matthew, and his wife, Erin; and her 26-year-old daughter, Alyssa.

A 1985 graduate of Hutchinson High School, she earned an associate degree in court reporting from St. Cloud Business College in 1987.

Since 2018, she has been the official court reporter for the First District Minnesota Judicial Branch in Sibley County. Prior to that, she worked as a freelance court reporter in Richmond, VA from 1987 - 2018.

In Virginia, Lori had extensive training and volunteered for several years as a court-appointed special advocate for children. Often, those children were from abusive homes. Hence, the McLeod Alliance seemed like a good fit for her to volunteer on the board.

Though she has only attended one board meeting, Lori knows through her past volunteerism in Virginia that domestic abuse affects a variety of socioeconomic and geographical households. No one is immune.

Through her board service, Lori hopes the Alliance continues to provide support and raise awareness of the long-term effects of domestic violence on everyone in the household.

The physical and emotional support the Alliance advocates provide victims is an important aspect the public should know about the Alliance.

As to a surprising fact about her, Lori said that she's pretty much an open book and doubts she could surprise many people anymore.



# Thank you, one and all!

*The Annual Fund Drive is our biggest fundraiser and that is due to all those listed below. This year you have donated \$23,725. The Alliance thanks you for supporting our mission to empower, support, and advocate for those in the throes of domestic abuse. McLeod Alliance sincerely apologizes if we have inadvertently left out any of our wonderful donors.*

Adamek, June Wendorff Memorial  
Anderson, Jennifer  
Anderson, Marlys  
Angvall, Judy  
Baumetz, Beverly  
Bear Lake Sunshine Society  
Beckman, Brenda  
Bergseng, John & Pat  
Bethel Lutheran Church Women  
Birkholz, Brenda  
Boller, Alice  
Brosz, Brian  
Buerkle, Myrna  
Cannon, Mike & Amber  
Citizen's Bank and Trust  
Citizen's Insurance Agency  
Concordia Ladies Aid  
Crary, Nan  
Daggett, Tom & Dr. Barb  
Eckhart, Ronda  
Eggert, Fran & Jan  
Felling, Jim & Becky  
Fowler, James  
Gavin, Janssen, & Stabenow  
Glas, Don & Jacque  
Gillard, Gail  
Hanson, Anthony  
Hassingier, John  
Haugland, John  
Hausladen, Beth  
Healy, Terri  
Hoffman, JoAnn

Holasek, Fred & Jane  
Home State Bank  
Horstmann, Stanley  
Horton, Carla & Carl  
Hults, Ken & Bev  
Hunyh, Kathleen  
Hutchinson Dental Center  
Johnson, Ralph  
Jonas Center  
Kennedy, Tom & Lori, in honor of  
Margie Schiffler  
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Knop, Ron & Sharon  
Krcil, Joyce  
Krentz, Linda  
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Lemke, Laure  
Long, Michael  
Lueneburg, Jeri  
Matthias, Ronda  
McCormick, Margery  
McGinnis, Catherine  
Merkel, Linda, in honor of all victims  
MidCountry Bank  
New Journey Women's Fellowship  
Noyes, Susan  
Nemitz, Carol  
Newcomb, Lucille  
Nuvera  
O'Donnell, Brian

Olson, Laurel  
Ostrom, Jean, in memory of Lee  
Ostrom  
Otto, Jane & Chris  
Parkview Dental  
Piehl, Chad  
Plato Lions  
Polzin, Ramona  
Purcell, Mary  
Rehmann, Dennis  
Remucal, Linda & Cris  
Schantzen & Schantzen  
Schumann, Ann  
Schott, Gary  
Snyder, Wm & Helen  
Sternier, Jeffrey  
Stearns Foundation, in honor of  
Mary Anderson  
Stearns, Roger  
Stearns, Rachel, in honor of  
Alliance Staff  
Slyter, Anna  
Smyth, M.D., Peter  
St. Paul LWML  
Stubson, Doris, in honor of Ethan,  
Hannah, Emile, & Maddie  
Stubson  
Tepley, Robert  
Ulrich, Tim  
Wagner, Doug & Lynda  
Winters, Jody  
Wuetherich, John

## News briefs

### Advocate attends suicide prevention class

As a volunteer member of Health Equity Coalition, Advocate Ofelia Vergara attended Spanish Suicide Prevention Training Class in February.

Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Services sponsored the class, which was free to all residents of those counties. Tammy Diehn, founder and executive director of 2B Continued, taught the class.

The class trained participants in QPR – question, persuade, and

refer. In QPR, the CPR of mental health, participants learn how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis, and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.

Anyone interested in attending or hosting a QPR class, can email [info@2bcontinued.org](mailto:info@2bcontinued.org).



## Nail company supports domestic violence advocacy

The Color Street Foundation has pledged \$50,000 to Futures Without Violence and and \$100,000 to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

Color Street Foundation is dedicated to raising awareness about and donating to causes that resonate with Color Street stylists and customers.

In an effort to raise awareness about domestic violence, advocacy, and direct survivor support, Color Street has introduced a new shade called “1 in 4.”

Crystal Meuleners, a Color Street stylist, gifted some of the “1 in 4” nail colors to the Alliance for its clients.

Individuals can show their support by purchasing the shade from the Color Street webpage or reach out to Meuleners, Color Street Stylist.

**Pictured at left is Crystal Meuleners holding Color Street’s purple nails.**

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## THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS LOCAL CONTRIBUTIONS

**January 1 through March 31, 2021**

### **Monetary**

Christ the King Church  
Church of St. Anastasia  
Citizens Bank & Trust Employees  
United Way  
Frontstream  
McLeod County  
Blackbaud Giving  
Network for Good  
Mindy Lemke

American Legion  
Stewart Lions  
Linda Merkel  
Vicky Powers  
Linda Krentz  
Carol Arlt  
Nan Crary  
Jean Neis  
Grace Lutheran ELCA  
Rivers of Home Church

Glencoe Lions  
Charities Aid Fund  
Cris & Linda Remucal

### **In-Kind**

Mandy Busse – six tie blankets  
Lael Sandahl – four tie blankets & six scarves  
Andrea Markworth – diapers & Hygiene products



*Thank you to all the groups and individuals who have generously donated to us. Your gift truly makes a difference in the lives of those affected by domestic violence! We apologize, however, if we have accidentally omitted your name. Please let us know and we will publish it in our next newsletter.*

# Funding bills wait for Senate passage

By Jane Otto  
McLeod Alliance volunteer

Agencies, like the McLeod Alliance, receive funds from two major sources of federal legislation. They are the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization and the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

Both federal bills impact Minnesota program funds, said Liz Richards, executive director of Violence Free Minnesota.

"The VAWA needs to be reauthorized every few years," she said. "It is not uncommon for the legislature to not get the reauthorization passed in a timely fashion."

Fortunately for McLeod Alliance and other agencies nationwide, a resolution exists that keeps the current VAWA in place until reauthorization passes. So, Congress can still fund such programs.

The last reauthorization was in 2013. The bill lapsed in 2018 due to congressional disputes over guns and transgender issues which were added to the bill. The

*"VOCA funding is the largest source of funding for domestic and sexual violence programs in the state."*

~ Liz Richards  
Executive Director,  
Violence Free Minnesota

House passed it in 2019 with bipartisan support, but the bill was not brought before the Senate.

Once again, the House passed the VAWA reauthorization this year. President Biden, who introduced the original VAWA as a senator in 1994, applauded the House for passing the bill in March with bipartisan support. He hopes the Senate follows suit. The Senate has not yet reviewed the bill.

The second piece of legislation, the VOCA, is funded through monetary penalties from criminal convictions. This is a non taxpayer source of money. The

fund, however, has been almost two-thirds depleted, because not all of that money source is being funneled into VOCA. The VOCA Fix Act was introduced in the House to rectify that.

This past March, the House passed the act with bipartisan support and it was then introduced into the Senate. Richards said that Senators Klobuchar and Smith support the VOCA Fix Act.

"VOCA funding is the largest source of funding for domestic and sexual violence programs in the state," Richards said. "There are some estimates that if nothing is done to fix the VOCA fund, there will be a significant decrease in VOCA dollars within two years."

That could have a negative impact on the Alliance and other similar programs. Hopefully, that will not come to fruition. It brings to the forefront the importance of ongoing community support the Alliance receives for which it is ever grateful.

## Calendar of Events

### May

#### Mental Health Awareness Month

May 18: 5:15 p.m. McLeod Alliance Board meeting, Library Square, weather permitting  
May 18 - 20 and 25 - 27: Conference on Crime and Victimization  
May 22: 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.: Winsted Women's Expo, Blue Note Ballroom in Winsted  
May 28: Office closes at 3:30 p.m., crisis line available  
May 31: Office closed, Memorial Day, crisis line available

### June

#### National Safety Month

No board meeting this month

June 29: Alliance Director attending digital Violence Free Minnesota regional meeting

### July

#### National Ice Cream Month

July 2: Office closes at 3:30 p.m., crisis line available  
July 5: Office closed, Independence Day, crisis line available  
July 20: 5:15 p.m. McLeod Alliance Board meeting, Alliance office

### Ongoing

Hispanic Support Group meets weekly on Wednesdays, while Support Group meets Thursdays. Masks and social distancing are required.

**McLeod Alliance, Inc.**  
**P.O. Box 393**  
**Hutchinson, MN 55350**

**Receiving duplicates? Incorrect addresses? New person in position?**

We'd like to know. Please contact the Alliance by mail, e-mail, fax, or phone, and we'll take care of the problem. Thanks.

**McLeod Alliance, Inc. Staff**

**Executive Director**  
Rhonda Buerkle

**Advocacy Coordinator**  
Glynis Vacek

**Bilingual Advocacy Program**  
Ofelia Vergara

**Legal Advocate**  
Karina Robeck

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