

WILL COUNTY

Housing and hope

More than 40 years after its founding, Community Service Council remains on front line for those in need

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It's easy these days to assume that the need for housing assistance and clinical counseling services has been suddenly brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But these areas of community concern have only been exacerbated by the current crisis, and were prevalent long before the virus emerged and will be around long after it is controlled.

Fortunately, local residents confronting these issues the last four decades have been able to seek the assistance of the Community Service Council (CSC) of Northern Will County, a 501(c)3 nonprofit formed in 1978 to specifically address the housing and counseling needs of a growing population.

"CSC offers vital services at a low cost or no cost that otherwise would not be available to the most vulnerable community members," says executive director Robert Kalnicky, who has been with the organization since 2007.

The CSC's housing services help to prepare prospective buyers for the issues and challenges associated with home ownership. The agency also offers a foreclosure prevention

program to help families stay in their homes during economic duress.

"This year we began a forgivable grant program to assist lower-income families with home repairs for health and safety issues affecting their home," Kalnicky explains. "In response to COVID-19, we have also secured funding for rental and mortgage assistance, helping families to make those payments and stay in their homes."

The CSC's clinical counselors, meanwhile, help families and individuals with a wide range of issues, including drug addiction, couples counseling, divorce, marriage counseling, school-related issues, depression and anxiety, anger and interpersonal relations. They also offer outreach with programs such as grief counseling and support for the caregivers of seniors.

In addition, the CSC provides court-ordered driving-under-the-influence evaluations, court-ordered drug and domestic violence assessments and non-court-ordered anger, drug and domestic violence assessments for clients.

"We have a strong relationship with the Will County court system and work to rehabilitate domestic violence offenders,



PHOTOS PROVIDED

ABOVE: The Community Service Council of Northern Will County has been offering housing assistance and crisis counseling to those in need since 1978. **RIGHT:** The council offers its services at low or no cost to accommodate the most vulnerable.

as well as bring families back together through our Family Reunification program," Kalnicky notes.

Any area resident can take advantage of the CSC's services, with housing services available at no charge and clinical counseling operating on a sliding scale based on the client's income. In 2019, the agency aided 748 unique clients.

Like most social service agencies, Kalnicky says, funding is an ongoing challenge for the CSC. While community businesses and partners remain extremely generous in helping to keep the agency's programs affordable, priorities shift from time to time, making it an uphill battle — especially during uncertain times like these.

But perhaps the biggest hurdle Kalnicky and his team face is simply making the public aware of the CSC's existence and the many ways in which it can help. With the ongoing pandemic, more and more families and individuals throughout the area are likely to need the housing and counseling services the agency provides, making it vital that people know this type of help is readily available and affordable.

"As much promotion and outreach that we do, we still too often hear people comment that they didn't know that we were here or all the services we offer," Kalnicky says.

Visit the council at www.thesc.org for more information.