

Nonprofits report 2018 was a busy year

Leaders reflect on highlights of the past year and share hopes for the next 12 months

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The past year has been an eventful one for many nonprofit agencies in Hinsdale, with new leadership, new locations and new initiatives making headlines in 2018.

This is the first in a two-part series that runs each January about the seven nonprofit organizations who call the village home. Community Memorial Foundation, Hinsdale Historical Society, Hinsdale Humane Society and The Community House will be featured in a Jan. 10 article.



HCS Family Services

Larger food pantries came in handy during 2018 for HCS Family Services.

"We were able to share over 600,000 pounds of food with 1,000 families from 24 local communities," said Stan Cook, executive director.

Attendance is up 30 percent at the Hinsdale pantry in the Memorial Building and more than 50 percent at the pantry in Anne M. Jeans School in Willowbrook. The school pantry, which first opened in November 2016, moved in February to a new dedicated space as part of a multi-million dollar addition at the school.

"The space that we have there is over 50 percent bigger than what we had before," Cook said. "It's a much nicer space for our guests."

The food pantry in the lower level of the Memorial Building in Hinsdale received a makeover as well.

"We invested in new shelving and were able to double the capacity of the pantry, so we can hold twice as much food as we did before," Cook said.

HCS received support from local organizations, including the Burr Ridge-Hinsdale-Oak Brook Lions Club, whose donation paid for an extra refrigerator and freezer to store more fresh produce, meat, milk and dairy products.

The agency has been particularly busy in the past couple of months, distributing more than 200 Thanksgiving meals and working with a host of school, community and church groups to provide hundreds of gifts through its holiday assistance program.

"We were able to distribute gifts to 850 individuals this year, which was really, really tremendous," Cook said. "It's the type of thing we could never do without all the partners that assist us."

HCS also serves the community by salvaging food that otherwise would go to waste, Cook said, noting that an estimated 400,000-plus pounds of food were collected from stores such as Jewel, Brookhaven, Target, Walmart and Whole Foods.

And more than 400 people were afforded rewarding volunteer opportunities.

Cook believes the agency is making progress in its efforts to educate residents about the number of people who are going hungry in an area noted for its affluence.

"DuPage County has the second largest food-insecure or hungry population in the state of Illinois," he said. "That's something we're trying to help people understand."



Robert Crown Center for Health Education

After selling its building at 21 Salt Creek Lane, Robert Crown Center for Health Education opened 2018 in good financial shape.

"We started the year with a lot of cash in the bank, which is always a good thing," said Barb Thayer, executive director.

Moving to new offices at 15 Salt Creek Lane and eliminating all in-house programs was a transition for staff, Thayer said, but one they worked through successfully.

"We ended up, in the long run, delivering programs to 7 percent more students than we did in the year prior. That for us is a huge increase," she said, noting a typical increase is 3 percent and the officials had projected a 10 percent decrease following the sale of the building.

Schools responded well to the change in delivery.

"Many didn't even know we delivered programs in schools. They had been coming for 40 years. They would come and book the program for the next year," Thayer said.

The center's drug programming was completely overhauled to provide a blended learning model that engages students before and after the instructor presentation and includes pre- and post-tests to measure learning. Participation in drug education was up 20 percent in 2018.

"That's something that we're trying to continue to grow," Thayer said.

Sex education is being updated as well, with pilot puberty classes that are more interactive and have a greater emphasis on social-emotional learning. Thayer noted the "Me Too" conversations and constantly evolving gender issues that educators must be prepared to address.

"We're doing a lot of education ourselves around those topics," she said.

The goal, Thayer said, is to have repeated interactions with kids as educators deliver a full continuum of sex and drug education.

"The idea is that we will continue to see students over and over and over, not just one time," she said.

Thayer said she's pleased to see the center's former headquarters put to good use by its purchaser, the Hinsdale Humane Society.

"It was such a win-win for

the community," she said. "So many people gave money to build that place, not just the Crowns. I'm just thrilled that somebody — and such an important organization within the community — is able to use it."



Wellness House

The big news of 2018 for Wellness House is a new partnership with the University of Illinois Clinical Cancer Center in Chicago to reach underserved communities in the area, said Jeannie Cella, president and chief executive officer.

"They actually contacted us about forming a partnership. They have the medical wherewithal but not the psychosocial," she said.

After the official launch at the end of this month, more than 50 Wellness House programs will be offered at the Mile Square Federally Qualified Health Center. Participants can take cooking classes, attend support group meetings, learn about exercising and more.

Building a program that meets the community's needs, finding a suitable space and creating a narrative for the funder about its expected impact required significant effort, Cella.

"That takes time," she said. "I can take no credit for it. My program people were just phenomenal."

Wellness House has been working since 2015 to develop 16 partnerships across the Chicago area as part of its "Wellness Beyond Walls" initiative. The UIC partnership is a deeper dive, Cella said.

"Our goal is not to build buildings. It's to grow partnerships and strengthen partnerships," she said.

Part of that effort involves

One wish

Nonprofit leaders shared one desire for the year ahead.

"That everybody that needs our services will become aware of us and feel comfortable coming to us. There are a lot of hungry people out in our community. I want them to be able to come and take advantage of our services."

— Stan Cook, HCS Family Services

"Creating deeper relationships with schools so that we continue to see students over and over and deliver the full continuum of education, either sex ed or drug ed. We really don't want to see them just one time. We want to make sure that they have all the information that they need."

— Barb Thayer, Robert Crown Center

"Securing the future for this model of meeting people in underserved communities through the quality, innovative programs Wellness House has always offered. Hinsdale is our home base. It will always be our home base, and we will always be growing in Hinsdale as well."

— Jeannie Cella, Wellness House

securing financial resources.

"We made the commitment that we were going to grow our donor base outside of Hinsdale, too," Cella said.

The UIC partnership will be fully funded by a grant from the Coleman Foundation and a gift from an anonymous donor.

Here in Hinsdale, Wellness House is seeing substantial growth in its kids program.

"There has been more need for not only families that have a child with cancer but families that have children where an adult has cancer or a sibling does," Cella said.

While the fact that more and more people are being diagnosed with cancer can be discouraging, Wellness House focuses on the opportunity to serve them.

"What's exciting is they are finding their way to Wellness House," Cella said.