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Southeastern

Directions for Life

SUMMER 2025 ISSUE

Southeastern Directions for Life

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The Housing Tree: Homeless Outreach

Hannah Jones, Homeless Outreach Coordinator

The Homeless Outreach Team at Southeastern Directions for Life has created a powerful symbol of success—a handmade “Housing Tree.” Adorned with vibrant sticky-note houses, each bearing the initials of a client who has transitioned into stable housing, the tree stands as a daily reminder of progress, perseverance, and hope.

Each time a client secures housing, they're invited to write their initials on a house and place it proudly on the tree. For them, it marks a fresh start and honors the hard work it took to reach that milestone. For staff, it's a shared celebration and an ongoing source of motivation.



The sticky-note houses come in a rainbow of colors, each one representing the caseload of a different team member. Together, they form a vibrant record of dedication, giving every staff member a personal connection to the tree—a living symbol of the lives they've touched. With every new house, the tree grows richer, and so does the sense of pride in the work being done.

For clients, the heart of the tree lies in its sturdy trunk, where small, colorful houses appear one by one. Each house tells a story of someone who has found stability, safety, and a place to call home. Many clients stand before it, tracing the houses with their eyes, imagining the day their own will be added—a quiet promise that they, too, can plant new roots and build a brighter future.

Navigating Change: Life After School from a Mental Health Lens

Michael Digatono, CSW-PIP, Clinical Director of Counseling & Children's Services

Leaving school and stepping into the “real world” is a major life transition. This milestone is celebrated publicly, and rightfully so, but may create a range of different emotions personally. Graduation, whether from high school, college, technical school or other programs, is a proud and noteworthy occasion. Yet for many, it is also the end of a season. It's a transition that can come with feelings of uncertainty or loss, which may include friendships, structure, or the daily routine that the educational system once provided. Suddenly, the future can start to feel undefined- there will be job applications to navigate, adult responsibilities to take on, and more, all while feeling like you're supposed to have a clear sense of direction. A 2022 survey from Timely Care has found that nearly 70% of college seniors feel somewhat or very stressed about entering the workforce.

Why does such a wonderful accomplishment create these challenging emotions? One explanation is cultural: There is current societal pressure to “have it all together” by your twenties: stable career, perfect relationship, financial independence. Social media makes this even harder, fueling a belief that others are doing better, moving faster, and living life more fully. But the reality is, the story that society tells us is just that- a story. Most of the time, people work through their options and attempt sensible next steps in a more genuine, reasonable, and individual time frame.

The good news is, it's okay not to know right away. There's nothing wrong with needing some time to acclimate to new life circumstances, evaluate choices, and/or try some options. Seeking advice or support is normal and recommended. Paying attention to your mental health in this transition period might mean giving yourself grace; you worked hard to get to this place, and a little rest is OK! Things like therapy, connection with current friends and being open to new relationships that may look different, establishing some routine in your day-to-day life, being mindful of physical health and good nutrition, and even simple acts of kindness toward others can all make an important difference in your mental health and ability to move forward in a meaningful way.

At Southeastern, we believe that no one should have to navigate life's transitions alone. We believe in the power of listening, supporting, and showing up for our community, each other, and ourselves. Let's keep doing this together.

Housing Tree cont.

The Housing Tree reflects more than just individual milestones—it represents the heart of Southeastern's Homeless Outreach Program. This program identifies and engages individuals in the community who are experiencing homelessness and living with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI), providing intensive, wraparound support to promote stability and independence.

Our outreach efforts extend throughout the community, meeting individuals where they are—at locations like the Union Gospel Mission, Bishop Dudley Hospitality House, Downtown Library, The Arch, Minnehaha County Jail, St. Francis House, and the Center of Hope, to name just a few. These partnerships allow the team to build trust, offer immediate support, and connect individuals with services in real time.

Services include psychiatric and nursing care, medication management, case management, and connections to vital community resources. Staff assist with applications for food stamps, Social Security, Medicaid, and subsidized housing. They help clients navigate every step of the housing process—from identifying preferences and viewing properties to completing rental applications and securing furniture and food. Education around mental illness, landlord-tenant responsibilities, and long-term support strategies are also key components of the program.

Though simple in form, the Housing Tree has become a meaningful fixture in the office—rooted in hope and growing with every life changed.

Co-Responder Partnership with Southeastern and Sioux Falls Police Department

Kim Hanson, Director of Community Support Services

On June 6th, 2022, Southeastern expanded its partnership with the Sioux Falls Police Department (SFPD) to include a co-responder model. This model consists of a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) police officer and a mental health professional trained in crisis de-escalation, who ride together in a squad car and respond to all mental illness related calls that are dispatched through the SFPD. The pair reports to the scene together to assess the situation, problem solve, offer resources, screen for services, complete referrals, or provide other support to assist that individual with getting their needs met.

Summer 2025 marks our fourth summer of operating the co-responder model. The officer from the SFPD who has been assigned to this unit is Andrew Parrott, an eleven-year veteran to the police department, who serves as a School Resource Officer (SRO), during the school year and covers four schools. He is also an active member of the US Army Reserves. Southeastern has identified six staff to take part as the mental health professionals for this program. Kim Hansen, Director of Community Support Services does oversight and coordination of the co-responder team. Additional Southeastern staff members include Stacey Hosmer (Intake Specialist/Liaison), Jaclyn Behrend (CARE Team Coordinator), Adrienne Hook (CARE Team Coordinator), Hannah Jones (Homeless Outreach Coordinator), Kayla Hoogendoorn (CARE Specialist), and Rachael Kayser (CARE Team Coordinator).

Since launching, the co-responder team has been averaging five crisis calls each day—successfully connecting people to the help they need and, in many cases, allowing them to remain safely in their homes. Depending on the individual's needs, the team may coordinate with service providers for immediate crisis resolution, facilitate voluntary admission to psychiatric inpatient care, or arrange screenings for outpatient mental health support. Already, the SFPD has seen a clear reduction in repeat service calls for individuals who previously required frequent assistance. The project will conclude on Friday, August 15, but the vision is much bigger—our goal is to make this life-changing partnership a year-round resource for the community.

Normalizing Mental Health Dialogue

Michael Digatono, CSW-PIP, Clinical Director of Counseling & Children's Services

"I have a terrible migraine," or "My allergies are so bad today," -these remarks are met with sympathy at best, and neutrality, at worst. Ongoing conversation may also include active offers to help, words of advice from some who have had similar experiences, or words of encouragement. But what about, "I am having an anxiety attack," or "I am just struggling to cope lately." Talking & expressing concern about physical health is common, acceptable, and normal. So normal, that the most ordinary of greetings, "Hello! How are you?" is often followed by a description of physical wellbeing. Sharing concerns/communicating about mental health can be more complicated.

The good news is that we have already made many incredible advances surrounding mental health today. Insurance coverage has improved as mental health has been recognized as real and treatable. Many employers offer EAP programs including support for mental health. Many schools have counselors and organizations like Southeastern working with students. Many medical clinics have on-site mental health providers. Telehealth has improved access for rural South Dakotans. Yet, while acceptance in medical circles and improved access is a major accomplishment, the normalization of discussion within our personal circles and general society has been a bit slower to adjust.

The road to having our mental health dialogue be as similar as possible to our physical health dialogue is still a long one. Yet, it is important to keep walking down this road together; it is truly a life-saving journey! We can be proud of how far we have come while recognizing we are not at our goal quite yet. Until then, I invite you to be a part of this change to help normalize mental health struggles and seeking help.

Let's work together to bring awareness and work to end the stigma around mental health.

Thank you!

Southeastern is so grateful for all of those who donate to our organization! With your support, we are able to provide services that enhance the emotional and behavioral well-being of children, adults, and families and our communities.

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Email List

We now have the option of sending our newsletter to your email! Simply scan the QR code and complete the form to add or update your information. Share the link with family or friends that may want to hear what we are up to.



We look forward to hearing from you!



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