

Second-annual gala will help Salvation Army deliver more mental health services in community



A 'magical evening' will unfold in Aurora next month as the Salvation Army's Northridge Community Church hosts its second-annual Mental Health Gala.

Set to take place September 19 at Northridge's campus on Leslie Street, just north of Wellington Street East, this year's gala aims to build on last year's successes, which raised more than \$33,000 to support and expand the Salvation Army's community mental health programs.

Prior to last year's gala, Northridge delivered its mental health programs with the support of a single psychotherapist covered by the church through a number of means, including the Salvation Army's annual Kettle Campaign. The funds raised last year helped Northridge further their efforts to double available services to address growing community needs.

'During COVID, the need was greater due to the cancellation of some access to programming at Southlake, and there was an overwhelming need for mental health services,' says Angela Covert, Community & Family Services Manager for Northridge. 'We were able to access two grants that allowed us to hire a second psychotherapist to meet that need and those two grants [covered] roughly a year in total. After that year was up, we wanted to keep Vicky (our second psychotherapist) on. We saw her worth, we saw her value, we saw the increased ability to serve more individuals.'

'We couldn't move on with only one psychotherapist again [so] we needed to find more grants or host an event to help raise money to be able to continue to have that second psychotherapist and that \$30,000 was definitely a good start in being able to keep her. The impact is double what we're able to do and Vicky herself comes with some really key skills in relation to trauma and group work around trauma.'

One initiative Vicky has taken on for Northridge is the development of The STAIR Program (Skills, Training, Adaptive and Interpersonal Relations), which is a 12-week program that offers support to individuals who live with PTSD. She is also overseeing two interns as they go through psychotherapy training themselves, thus paying it forward, and bringing on a third intern.

This third intern, who is due to start working this fall, has a specialization in children and youth services, which will allow Northridge to expand their mental health programs even further.

'It's overwhelming the impact this has had,' says Covert 'and this momentum can only continue with the community's support.'

'I wanted last year's gala to be an experience where people just had fun, had joy, had hope and were inspired by the speakers, learning about what we do here regarding our mental health programming, and that connection that a lot of people experience,' says Covert. 'This year, I want to see people who want to engage with us and have a buy-in on the mental health work that we do. A lot

of people don't understand that; they see us as a food bank, children and youth programming, day camps and, of course, from a global Salvation Army, we're involved in shelters, hospitals and the rest of it. For the fact we have a mental health program out of our church building that is not church-specific, a lot of people may not think that way.

?We want people to have some fun [at this event] and create a bit of joy so people really understand what we do and the good work that it is.?

The second annual Salvation Army Mental Health Gala will take place at Northridge on September 19 featuring a live musical performance from The Flailing Shilaleighs band, ?strolling magic? by Wij the Magician, inspiring speeches from mental health advocates, food and non-alcoholic drinks donated by local vendors, and a live auction to support the cause.

For more information on the event, including tickets, visit northridgesa.com/gala2024.

By Brock Weir