Grand Haven

Momentum Center staff continues engaging with its members

Contributed
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While the physical building of a Grand Haven-based nonprofit remains closed amid COVID-19 concerns, its staff continues to engage with members remotely.

The Momentum Center for Social Engagement staff and volunteers are practicing “physical” distancing as opposed to “social” distancing. A Facebook group was established to share resources, updates and materials. Through the online group, staff and volunteers livestream activities such as yoga, poetry, bingo, journal writing and cooking. Members who don’t have access to technology receive care kits.

Just as they do at the Momentum Center, members are encouraged to check in on Facebook. Staff are alerted if someone feels suicidal.

In addition to calling members about the center closing at the Stay Home, Stay Safe executive order, staff and volunteers have called past members to see how they’re doing and invite them back, and they’re also serving as phone buddies.

In serving vulnerable populations, the center’s Barbara Lee VanHorsssen said closing the building “was a real gut punch.”

“When the sole reason you exist is to keep people from becoming isolated and then you have to close the door and tell people to go home, it is beyond painful,” she said. “But we also recognize it is
that means we all have to be even more attentive to our mental health. Exercise, meditation and social engagement all have proven health benefits, including helping ease symptoms of depression and anxiety.

“Knowing we are all in this together offers the critical knowledge that we are not alone, that even as we practice physical distancing, we are socially connected,” she added. “Of course, this is true for all of us and not just our members.”

Momentum Center staff members are available and on-call during business hours. The members portal on the website is more accessible and has information about updates.

Anyone interested in becoming a member for $1 a year can contact Momentum Center Manager Jenna Vipond at jenna@momentumcentergh.org or by calling her at 616-422-3596.

VanHorssen said they are also extending the invitation for others who are struggling to become a virtual member of the Facebook group only. Nonprofits have also been notified and informed if they have clients who are isolated, Momentum Center staff and volunteers will work to connect them with a phone buddy to proactively reach out a couple of times a week.

Through the change in operations, the staff has found members who weren’t coming into the building but are engaging online. VanHorssen said they’ve discovered online engagement is a viable means for connecting with individuals who struggle with social anxiety and for those whose schedules conflict with normal operating hours.

When the center reopens, VanHorssen said components of the virtual community will continue.

“We are grateful for that learning and the ability to serve more people in our community who struggle with mental illness, addictions and disabilities,” she said.

Currently, the center is following state and national orders, guidelines and recommendations by remaining closed, and they plan to reopen once authorities say it’s safe. VanHorssen said everyone is anxious to be in each other’s company again, but they can’t do it while it puts everyone’s health at risk.