



Joanna Gaydos becomes clinical director of Plaid House

Joanna Gaydos has spent 20 years at Plaid House, starting her career there as a youth counselor after getting her degree from Wilkes University and moving up the ladder until she reached clinical director under Executive Director Neville Newton. It is a job that excites her.

“This acknowledges everything I have to stay in this work,” said Gaydos. “It is what we do with the kids. Things happen in their lives – the good and the bad – and we are there to help.”

Gaydos has spent two decades on her climb. She spent her first years at Thenen House as a youth counselor and then was promoted to senior youth counselor, acquiring a master’s degree in social work from Fordham University along the way. She also became Plaid House’s Life Skills coordinator and program manager at Thenen House, Plaid House’s home for older residents.

After becoming senior social worker, Gaydos ran all of the Plaid House programs. Her new title came about

after Newton recognized that, with the transition to more intensive treatment over the years, that her title should reflect that clinical focus. It also coincided with the state requiring more treatment services in return for a long-awaited increase in rates.

“It made sense to have a clinical director’s role here,” Gaydos explained.

Now she is helping all 22 people who report to her how to provide the treatment the residents need.

“Of course the biggest thing is delivery of clinical service,” said Gaydos. This includes for all residents of Plaid House individual therapy sessions, group therapy sessions, and 24-hour care with the staff pledging to be the best it can be.

Another concept that had been promoted by the state is staff wellness. “While they are working, we are taking care of them, and they are taking care of themselves,” said Gaydos.

The original foundation for this policy grew out of the pandemic. Plaid House staff did a fine job of keeping both residents



Joanna Gaydos

and staff illness free, and serious incidents were avoided.

One of the most important jobs one can have as clinical director is supervision of Plaid House’s compliance with the rules and regulations that group homes have to follow. “This runs from how the facility is maintained to even the shoveling of snow,” noted Gaydos.

There are important procedures for intake of new residents and the initial assessment of how they will live in a group home environment. “We get some latitude in how we handle this,” said Gaydos. “The state gives us the structure, and we build around it.”

There are dozens of other responsibilities that Gaydos shoulders daily. She also has a family and is involved in community activities.

But what Gaydos does best is making sure the lives of Plaid House residents are secure while they are in her care. With two decades of experience, she has proved her value to the Plaid House organization.



President's Message

Plaid House was established in 1975 as a group home for adolescent girls who could not live at home for a variety of reasons. Over the past 47 years, we have made adjustments so the program could better meet the changing needs of our residents. These changes were made as a result of the changing needs of our girls and included changing the staffing patterns.



Marilyn Miller-O'Mella

At the times we made changes, we sometimes struggled with hiring and maintaining staff. One of these staffing changes was going from the house parent model to one social worker with youth counselors. Since then, Plaid House has been

very lucky to have a core group of staff who started as youth counselors and made the decision to stay at Plaid House, taking advantage of the learning experiences we offered. We have encouraged further education and set up a tuition reimbursement program so the youth counselors

could attend graduate school while continuing to work with our residents.

Joanna Gaydos has been with the program for 20 years. She started as a youth counselor, continued to work while attending graduate school and obtained her MSW.

She has had a variety of jobs while remaining at Plaid House, and it is a perfect example of using her experiences along the way to benefit staff and residents. She now works as the Clinical Director assisting the Executive Director Neville Newton in maintaining a stellar reputation for Plaid House, in the local community and in the state, while supporting the staff.

Liz Roman also started as a youth counselor and has earned an MSW. She was recently promoted to clinician, and is using all she learned as a youth counselor and senior youth counselor to work with the residents and their families.

When Neville Newton was interviewed, he was asked by a Board Member how he was going
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Liz Roman gets promoted to title of clinician

One of Plaid House's long-serving youth counselors and senior youth counselors has earned her master's degree in social work at Rutgers and has been promoted to Plaid House clinician.

She is Liz Roman, who was just named clinician in July.

A clinician runs individual and group therapy sessions and takes a lot of the responsibility for the work Plaid House does with families. "We help coordinate work with the family, and we are constantly communicating with residents' care teams," said Roman.

Roman noted that Plaid House has

social workers on call 24 hours a day via cell phone, and staff is comfortable coming in when it might not be a regular work day for them. "If there is an emergency, the staff is available," she said.

"As social workers we wear a lot of hats," Roman noted, "and you have to juggle a lot of things around."

"My years as a youth counselor and senior youth counselor really prepared me for the clinician's position."

Roman said getting her master's degree and being promoted at the same time to clinician fell right in with her career goals. "Plaid House, as small an agency as it is, really does provide a lot of opportunity to learn and grow," said Roman. "I love working here. I didn't want to leave here. Everything fell into place. I am really grateful for that."

Roman said she loves and appreciates the staff of Plaid House. "I also like the philosophy of Plaid House," she added. "We are trauma-focused. We are sensitive to issues these kids have with trauma."



Liz Roman

According to Roman, everyone at Plaid House is very aware of what their residents have been through. "We don't want to be reactive," she said. "So we are very sensitive to their experiences with the world and to their behaviors."

She said she is looking forward to growing in her new position and learning new ways of reaching youth at Plaid House to improve their experiences while they are there.

"I love working here. I didn't want to leave here. Everything fell into place. I am really grateful for that."

– Liz Roman

Plaid House starting to accept youth who identify as trans

Having youth who identify as trans or LGBTQ is now a normal, everyday occurrence at Plaid House, and that makes new clinical director Joanna Gaydos pleased.

“We’ve made it a non-event,” she said in a recent interview. “We haven’t revamped our policies. That’s because accepting trans youth is not a treatment issue. These kids are finding their own identities.”

The first referral Plaid House received from a trans youth occurred about five years ago, Gaydos said, but it was determined that the individual involved did not want to live in an all-female group home.

As Gaydos explained, state licensing permits only biological females to reside in a home such as Plaid House. They cannot have already transitioned to male.

But five years is a lot of time later,



and Plaid House had its first trans youth last summer. He is now living with a family, but now the house is host to a second trans youth, a young man who has made fast friends at Plaid House.

Gaydos said before the young man came she talked to all the staff and then reached out to assure him that no one would do anything that might make him feel unsafe.

“Then we actually asked him to teach us, to tell us if we are making him uncomfortable,” noted Gaydos. She said she was thrilled there were no such impediments.

“We said we were going to adapt – and we did! Actually, it was a seamless transition. And it was a nurturing female environment that made him feel safe in his treatment.” Taking in this youth, Gaydos said pointedly, was “one of the best decisions Plaid House ever made.”

Plaid House has always taken gay young women. Sexuality is never discussed. “It’s there, but we’re not asking about it,” said Gaydos.

Despite the issue of transitioning youth being controversial, there has been no pushback from the community. “These kids live this,” noted Gaydos. “They see it in school and other places. It is commonplace in their world.”

President’s Message

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to improve staff retention. I do not remember his answer at the time, but his encouragement of staff development and continued education has been one way we have been able to keep staff and use their experiences to assist our residents. As Neville says, “Social workers who have worked in the program have so much more to offer the staff and residents.”

Plaid House could not do what we do without the dedication of our staff, and we are grateful to those who have been with us for so long and given so much to Plaid House.

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The Mission of Plaid House, Inc.

The mission of Plaid House is to provide residential and supportive services to adolescents. Plaid House teaches skills that foster positive growth, independence and family reunification.