

CLINICAL SERVICES

St. Anne Institute's fight for recognition

130-year-old nonprofit more than reputation

By C.J. Lais Jr.

Imagine being a vital part of the community for more than 130 years and having to reintroduce yourself time and time again. St. Anne Institute, based primarily in Albany, continually finds itself in that situation.

Founded by four Sisters of the Good Shepherd in 1887 as a place for "troubled and homeless women," and growing from a small, wooden building on Broadway to its multi-acre campus uptown with four other satellite offices throughout the region, St. Anne still has a bit of a PR problem.

"People are not really familiar," said Theresa Gabriel, chief operating officer at St. Anne. "They just think that we are, you know, a home for bad girls. That was our reputation, and that is kind of this inaccurate portrayal of what we do."

And what the nonprofit, community-based service agency does is help thousands of girls and young women, children and teenagers, as well as their families, each year through wide-ranging and comprehensive services. There are children and students in residence, along with outpatient services. A fully functioning preschool, other educational programs, a shelter for runaway and homeless youth, a treatment program specializing in sex abuse prevention and intervention, and

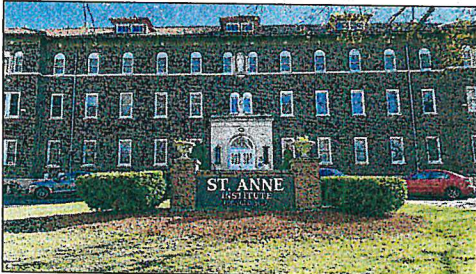
mental health services for adults and children at the satellite offices are just a few of the other types of assistance available through St. Anne.

While the numbers are constantly in flux, SAI is working with 30 residents and 200 others through outpatient clinical services, with more than 165 additional people connecting through education programs, prevention services, home health care management and more.

Now imagine adding in having to deal with a once-in-a-century global health emergency.

"Our business is a difficult business, and COVID on top of it is even more difficult," said Richard Hucke, CEO of St. Anne Institute.

It wasn't just difficult. Like other businesses and organizations, it required whole new levels of work. Every morning began with meetings where decisions were made about whether the preschool could open when a child tested positive for the virus, or whether the entire education program had to shut down or only parts of it. Virtual learning and therapy became key.



Sandra Tarkleson / St. Anne Institute

St. Anne Institute's main campus on North Main Avenue in Albany. It began life in a small, wooden building in 1887.



Christine Ransom / St. Anne Institute

The executive team of St. Anne. Front row from left: Diane Malecki, Michelle Parady, Terry Gabriel, Terri Boland, Sandra Tarkleson and Alexa Maelia. Back row: Linda Tanski, Rick Potter, Richard Hucke and Tami Flaherty.

Hucke acknowledges the unique situation in which they found themselves, but knows the mission never changed. "The COVID global pandemic has certainly slowed down services provision," he said, "but it hasn't stopped SAI from continuing our goal to expand our reach beyond the Capital Region and increase the accessibility and availability of much

needed mental health services."

Navigating the rules and strictures mandated by the government and various health departments required special treatment. Children in residence were already in lockdown, unable to go home for visits or to welcome family inside the buildings. So, not only were staff members mastering and managing the new world of Zoom calls, they also were negotiating with the Albany County Department of Health, which demanded that the children be kept isolated from each other and in their own individual rooms.

St. Anne convinced the health department that policy would not work for them, not with the youths they work with. A compromise was achieved to only confine the clients to their units or floors.

Hucke admits the pandemic brought "a lot of extra work for our clinicians, as well as our medical team." For instance, he said that most of the girls in residence at the main facility are fully vaccinated, "but that goes with a lot of work cajoling and explaining and supporting young people to get vaccinations."

In addition, Hucke said the agency was grappling with the move to the Medicaid Managed Care program in July, roughly two years after it was originally planned. And its current and future plans align with the Family First Prevention Services Act, signed by former President Donald Trump in February 2018 primarily as a budget act to temporarily keep the government in business, but also enabling states to fund and prioritize child welfare programs.



St. Anne Institute

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■ Social media: [facebook.com/stanneinstitutealbany](https://www.facebook.com/stanneinstitutealbany)

Child welfare is key to what St. Anne does. The children who receive services, according to Gabriel, are "here because they were not successful in their home units and in their schools, so they were sent to us. They have a tendency to go AWOL, truancy from school. They had pretty traumatic lives before getting here.

"Yes, the kids have many, many challenges, but they've survived through some very difficult times. They have faced stuff that most of the rest of us, thankfully, will never have to think about," Gabriel said.

Executive team members are quick to credit others with helping the organization weather the past 20 months. "There are a number of staff members who are still working here that are

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extremely, extremely dedicated. They were here 24/7. I have to say, that's pretty remarkable," said Gabriel, with unanimous audible agreement from her colleagues.

They also point to the generosity of community members and organizations, particularly during COVID.

St. Anne received donations of masks, PPEs, sheets, blankets, toys and games and many other items. And those donations continue, supplemented by a steady stream of holiday gifts for the children in all the various programs.

Now that the world is, hopefully, finding itself near the end of the pandemic, St. Anne Institute is thinking toward the future. But like many of us, it's already been changed because of it.

"We're restructuring staff to accommodate the new approach to services," said Chief Financial Officer Diane Malecki.

She said, "We look to making it a lean, mean, fighting machine."

Hucke points out several new and ongoing initiatives, including: receiving a grant from the Federal Program Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquent Prevention Program, which allows them to provide counseling services for clients with problematic sexualized behavior in the Mohawk Valley region; being granted a provisional Child Mental Health Rehabilitation Services license to expand the newly created Child & Family Treatment Support Services to the general population; and working closely with the Office of Mental Health to implement the Crisis Residence Program on the

campus in Albany.

He also said that outreach to local politicians has increased and already led to positive results.

State Sen. Neil Breslin recently approved a \$250,000 grant for SAI to rehabilitate an elevator for residents on campus. They've updated their website, too, and are committed to having a more regular and robust presence on social media.

"Our community-based services; I think, is where we're going to grow the most going forward," Hucke said.

Sandra Tarkleson, director of fund development and grants, has her eye on the financial future.

"We have recently embarked on capital campaigns to increase our funding efforts so that we can update and upgrade our facilities," she said, adding that "the modernization of that is for our students and our staff, as well as our outpatients."

St. Anne, a secular-run treatment center since 1981, also welcomes donations through efforts like annual giving, tributes, workplace campaigns and matching gifts and planned giving.

An annual charity golf tournament just returned in September, and a similar event is scheduled for March.

Still, the ever-present challenge of "brand awareness" remains.

"We want to make the world a better place and do something for society," Gabriel said. "I don't know that everybody understands that."

Added Tarkleson, "To know who we are and what we do is a benefit for us because we do provide essential services to our clients that, in turn, effect positive change to the communities which we serve."