



Riverbend Family Ministries: A collective of tools and resources

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WOOD RIVER - Before Riverbend Family Ministries opened its doors ten years ago, Tammy Iskarous had a kernel of a vision to serve families in the Riverbend. She wanted to create something that would help children and families in the Riverbend who have experienced a trauma, most often due to violence, addiction, poverty, and homelessness. That kernel of a vision has grown into a collective of Nonprofits that calls 131 East Ferguson Avenue in Wood River, Illinois home, and many volunteers who also believe in the vision of Riverbend Family Ministries.

When Riverbend Family Ministries first opened their doors in 2007 they served 51 families. This past year they have helped over 1,800 families! Tammy Iskarous, the Executive Director, said that “the thing each of our families has in common is they’ve reached a point in their lives where they need a little extra support. Whether it may be help paying for their utility bills, rent, mortgage, working on their resume and finding a new job, or just having someone to talk to and pray with; we’re happy to be that safety net.”



Riverbend Family Ministries has been able to grow and help families all around the Riverbend over the past ten years. Under their one roof the collective of Nonprofits work together as a team, a community that is there for families of the Riverbend. The collective of Nonprofits includes: Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), [Client Service Department](#), Pathways Counseling, Refuge, Youth Development, Group Intervention, Warm Neighbors Cool Friends, and their newest, Amare. Under the roof of Riverbend Family Ministries, these Nonprofits are able to collectively work together to holistically provide families and individuals the resources, training, and tools they need to be self-sufficient.

This collective of Nonprofits focuses on trauma-informed care. This means they don't focus on the disease or focus on telling someone they are bad for doing something. They ask, “What’s going on in your world? What is your story?” They do this in order to

better understand the children and families, and the better they understand, the more they are able to help and give resources to those in need. Iskarous beamed, “that is how we are supposed to treat people. It is innate in all of us to love, genuinely love. We are not born with hate, we are not born with criticism, we are not born with the prejudices, and things that we see today. So to be able to genuinely lean in with expertise on trauma, be able to lean in and say, ‘what’s your story?’ and then with the collective work together to figure out how to get the family with trauma to the next level. And that's what (Riverbend Family Ministries) does.”

Riverbend Family Ministries recently expanded their space, adding more rooms for therapy and offices for the collective of Nonprofits. Refuge has been able to grow at Riverbend Family Ministries, and Riverbend Family Ministries was able to update and expand their space for their therapy needs. Another reason for the expansion was the collaboration with Amare.

“Madison County has the highest rate of kids in foster care per capita in our whole state. We have a real big problem,” Erin Bickle of Refuge remarks. Refuge works to prevent childhood exposure to violence and abuse through direct therapeutic work with families, supportive services for child-serving organizations, and community-wide prevention education. Their primary focus is on children from birth to 11 years old, as they are the age groups with the biggest gap in violence prevention and intervention services in Madison County.

Amare’s mission is to achieve the highest standard in the involvement of the community to promote personal and public wellness. Amare will advocate, communicate and encourage change for those suffering from drug/alcohol addiction, depression, and/or suicidal tendencies along with the families and community. Amare, meaning love in Italian, focuses on just that, uncritical loving and helping those in active addiction or early recovery and becoming their resource.

According to Iskarous, “it only takes \$26.00 to put someone on a train, to get them to Chicago, to get them to detox and rehab. That’s it!” But sometimes what happens is when they come back to town they have the same family, the same friends, the same environment, and the question of now what, and this is where Amare comes in. They will wrap around those families, and really give them the support and resources that they need. Sometimes it’s finding them a job, getting them housing, finding them sober living homes, or finding them the tools they need to be successful. Iskarous commented that “there’s hope, there’s healing, there's a foundation, and there is a different way to live life.”

“I was both surprised and encouraged by the many ways Riverbend Family Ministries can assist families that have experienced trauma. They have so many branches of

service that collectively work together to help families overcome challenges from all different aspects of their life. The volunteer staff has changed the lives of so many families in the Riverbend community and are an irreplaceable resource to the area as a whole,” concluded David Janes, Scott Credit Union Wood River Branch Manager, and an Ambassador with the RiverBend Growth Association.

“I personally did not realize the full extent of the value and services RiverBend Family Ministries brings to our area. To have an organization where families in our community who suffer trauma and hard times can go to for guidance and personal growth is vital. After one visit with the very passionate Tammy and her team, I’m certain that any man, woman or child who steps into their welcoming facility are taking a step towards a better situation. I would encourage all families who are struggling to take a look at the services they offer and know they’ll receive the utmost understanding, respect and genuine care as they find a path in the right direction,” observed Jen Jackson, Marketing Director of Helmkamp Construction, and a Member of the RiverBend Growth Association Board of Directors.

Riverbend Family Ministries provides resources and training for smaller nonprofit organizations in the Madison County area. They work together under one roof, providing families and individuals with the tools they need to be self-sufficient. Their collaborative method focuses on holistic efforts for children, youth, and families who have experienced trauma, most often due to violence, addiction, poverty, and homelessness. Walk-ins are welcomed at 131 East Ferguson Avenue, Wood River, Illinois. They can also be reached by phone at (618) 251-9790, or you can find them on Facebook and like their page for up to date information.

The RiverBend Growth Association supports Riverbend Family Ministries, and their members, by offering a Showcase to member businesses. Please visit <http://www.growthassociation.com/page/member-benefits/> if you would like to know more about this member benefit. The RiverBend Growth Association is the Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development organization for the 12 communities known as the Riverbend. For more information about the Growth Association, please visit www.growthassociation.com or call (618) 467-2280.