

heroes: Listening, walking alongside, and holding hope

Throughout Michigan, quiet heroes leave a profound imprint on those with mental illness.

BY BRIANNA NARGISO • [HEALTHY COMMUNITIES](#) • SEPTEMBER 23, 2025



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Some of OnPoint's unsung heroes are, from left, Delora Andrus, Joy Winger, Sheri Hiscock, and Lynn Yetman.



listeners, advocates, and guides, stepping into moments of crisis, confusion, or despair to help people find their footing again.

Three such individuals: Cathy Potter of [OnPoint](#), Sandra Fleischman of [Sanilac County Community Mental Health](#) (CMH), and June Wilson of [LifeWays](#), show us what dedication to mental health looks like in practice. Their stories reveal not just the challenges of the work, but also the resilience, compassion, and commitment required to meet people where they are.

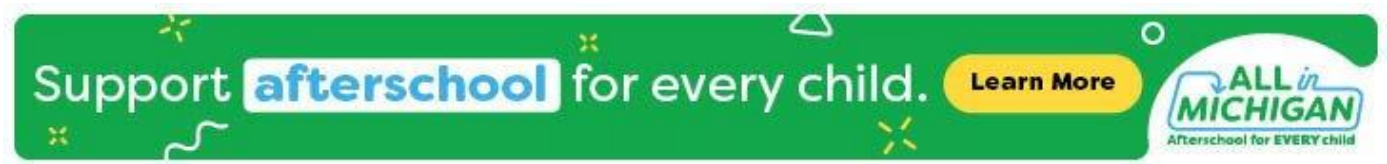


Cathy Potter: The journey into mental health wasn't a straight line.

Cathy Potter: listening with purpose at OnPoint

For Cathy Potter, customer service coordinator at [OnPoint](#), the journey into mental health wasn't a straight line. She began in clerical work more than three

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“I felt I could make a difference in an individual’s life just by simply listening to them, answering their question, or connecting them to the right person,” Potter says. “I realized how important my role is within the agency.”

On any given day, Potter answers calls, greets clients, and works with leadership to resolve concerns. What might look like routine office work from the outside is, in reality, a daily practice of empathy and patience.

Her motivation comes not only from helping others, but also from the support she herself has received during personal hardships.

“I just want to keep showing up for OnPoint customers until the day I retire,” Potter says.

To her, the impact of community mental health is straightforward: “Life can be challenging at times, and it’s okay to ask for help. Everyone matters.”

Sandra Fleischman: bridging lived experience and professional care

In [Sanilac County CMH](#), Sandra Fleischman has spent 17 years serving others through community mental health, first as a peer support specialist and now as a health coach supported by a grant. Her work is rooted in both training and lived



Sandra Fleischman: What matters most is trust.

caseworker encouraged her years ago.

“Yes, I’ve had the training, the mental health professional development (CEUs), the certification,” Fleischman says. “But what truly sets my role apart is the insight that comes from my own lived experience. I’ve been where many of the people on my caseload are, and I’m willing to be vulnerable, open, and transparent about that.”

Her work spans meeting clients at shelters, helping them navigate medical appointments, and partnering with physicians and nutritionists to run support groups.

Beyond tasks and titles, what matters most to Fleischman is trust. She recalls the pain of having to give up her caseload when her grant position required her full-time attention, a change that felt like breaking a promise to clients who had relied on her consistency.

One story she carries with her is of a woman learning to set healthy boundaries after years of being taken advantage of.

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place where people can come as they are, feel welcome, and find support. That kind of connection is important for hope and recovery.”



June Wilson sees parents panicked over a child’s suicide attempt, teens living in unstable homes, adults who have nowhere else to turn.

June Wilson: meeting crisis with compassion at LifeWays

At [LifeWays](#), a community behavioral health clinic serving Jackson and Hillsdale counties, June Wilson works as a crisis clinician on the mobile crisis team. Fresh out of graduate school, she chose crisis work for the intense, hands-on experience it offered. Over time, it became more than just a training ground, it became her calling.

kept me here.”

Wilson sees people at their most vulnerable: parents panicked over a child’s first suicide attempt, teens living in unstable homes, adults who have nowhere else to turn. The work takes a toll. Cases stack up quickly, leaving little time to decompress, and some nights she comes home unable to talk. But even in those difficult moments, she shows up because she knows how much one encounter can matter.

She recalls a young woman abandoned by her adoptive parents and placed in a youth home. Wilson worked with her for months, encouraging her to hold on until she could move into a residential program.

“It was one of those cases I went home and cried about often because it was just such an unfair situation,” Wilson says. “But being able to see her transition to a better situation — that’s what has stuck with me.”

For Wilson, the importance of community mental health lies in accessibility and stability. Many of her clients have no one else.

“We are those people’s family,” she says. “Being a stable support in the community is huge. Just knowing, ‘Hey, I can go there. I can get a bus pass if I need to. I can stop in the lobby and hang out there for an hour while I have some water.’ That stability is everything.”



Mental health work is not only about therapy or medication, it's about presence, trust, and small moments of change that can alter the course of someone's life.

The common thread: hope

Though Cathy Potter, Sandra Fleischman, and June Wilson work in different roles and in different counties across the state, their stories echo the same sentiments: the power of listening, the value of lived experience, and the importance of showing up, day after day, for people who may feel forgotten.

They remind us that mental health work is not only about therapy or medication, it's about presence, trust, and small moments of change that can alter the course of someone's life. These unsung heroes embody what community mental health is aimed to be: a bridge to hope, recovery, and belonging.

As Fleischman put it: "Being trusted and sharing in those moments is one of the greatest privileges of my life."

teens and adults of all ages have to find the mental health help they need, when and where they need it. It is made possible with funding from the [Community Mental Health Association of Michigan](#), [Center for Health and Research Transformation](#), [Genesee Health System](#), [Mental Health Foundation of West Michigan](#), [North Country CMH](#), [Northern Lakes CMH Authority](#), [OnPoint](#), [Sanilac County CMH](#), [St. Clair County CMH](#), [Summit Pointe](#), and [Washtenaw County CMH](#).



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