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Sign of the Times: Banner Recognizes Contributions of KidsPeace GA Workforce During COVID-19 Pandemic



BOWDON, GA (April 8, 2020) - The banner stretches above the employee entrance at KidsPeace Georgia's facility, displaying a simple, straightforward and necessary message for uncertain times:

HEROES WORK HERE

As the nation salutes its first responders, healthcare professionals and others serving the public amid the coronavirus pandemic, KidsPeace Georgia's Residential Services Manager Gary Russell wanted to remind his colleagues at the Bowdon facility how much their efforts mean to the kids and the community they serve.

"Everyone tends to think about the work hospital staff and police officers are doing currently, but they don't recognize how our staff are also on the front line of this situation, caring for kids with serious mental health issues who have nowhere else to go," Russell said. "Our staff are sacrificing being with their own family and kids during a very difficult time, they aren't paid a lot, and yet they continue to come to work every day to do a necessary job. I wanted to let them to know they're important, too."

So this week Russell paid for and hung the "**HEROES WORK HERE**" banner over the entrance, so that associates would see its sentiment each time they came in for their shifts.

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“Gary never said a word to anyone about the sign,” Lou Shagawat, executive director of KidsPeace Georgia, said. “He’s an outstanding leader who has remained committed to helping children for 20 years.”

Russell began his career in mental health in 2000 and was part of the original staff of the Bowdon facility when it opened in 2004.

“Gary has two young daughters and his wife is an RN and unable to be home very much. Yet, he continues to come work each day, leading by example,” Shagawat added. “His thoughtful and much-needed gesture to recognize our staff speaks to his leadership during this difficult time.”

In a photo on the facility’s Facebook page, Russell (*center, in red mask*) joined colleagues to demonstrate the “social distancing” and masking that associates are practicing at the facility, which cares for up to 80 young people working to manage mental and behavioral health issues. Shagawat praised the efforts of Russell and his fellow associates in continuing to treat kids in need during the pandemic.

“KidsPeace Georgia has implemented a robust infection control and pandemic plan, including social distancing, to mitigate the risks to our staff and kids,” he noted. “As a result of our staff’s diligent efforts, as of now we have not had any confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff or kids at our Georgia campus.”

“I am both grateful and humbled by our staff’s continued commitment, and by the support of a community who has ensured we have adequate PPE supplies and keeps us in their daily prayers.”

And Russell’s gesture is extending far beyond his location; KidsPeace is now planning to display his simple, straightforward “**HEROES WORK HERE**” message on banners at its residential treatment facilities in Pennsylvania and Maine as well.

(Photo Caption: A banner saying “HEROES WORK HERE” hangs over the employee entrance at KidsPeace’s Bowdon, GA facility. Gary Russell, residential services manager (center, in red mask), had the banner made and displayed to honor his colleagues in their caring for children coping with mental and behavioral health issues amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Russell and other associates are demonstrating social distancing and masking protocols at the facility.)

Across KidsPeace’s mental and behavioral health and foster care operations in eight states, our dedicated associates serve thousands of children and families every day. But they can’t do it without your support. Please make a donation today – go to www.kidspeace.org/coronavirus-response-at-kidspeace for more information.

Since 1882, KidsPeace has been building on its expertise to give hope, help and healing to children, adults and those who love them. Through its comprehensive range of residential treatment programs; accredited educational services; unique psychiatric hospital and foster care and community-based programs, KidsPeace is dedicated to helping people connect, transform and overcome their challenges to ensure a stable future, transition to adulthood and gain independence. Since its doors opened, nearly 300,000 children have participated in one of the multitude of programs KidsPeace offers.

For additional resources or more information on how to get involved, become a foster parent or make a donation, please visit www.kidspeace.org. Follow us at www.facebook.com/kidspeace.org or on Twitter @KidsPeace.

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