

# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

## with Wendy Wiegmann, Director of Programs



**“There’s consistently something new about this organization, about this work we’re doing. ... I’ve been able to enjoy growing with Simpson and taking on something new all the time.”**

— Director of Programs Wendy Wiegmann

When Wendy Wiegmann, Director of Programs, started with Simpson Housing Services in 1998, things looked quite different than they do today. “There were 11 employees, the shelter program, and 26 families in housing,” she recalls. Nearly 20 years later, Simpson has 89 employees and serves thousands of people experiencing homelessness. In 2018, 1,111 guests received a bed, 289 families with 649 children were housed, and 210 single adults received supportive housing.

Wendy started as an advocate for Simpson’s family programs in 1998 and stayed in that role through 2000. She served as the Family Programs Manager from 2000-2006. Wendy started as the Director of Programs in 2006 and has served in this capacity ever since.

“When I started as Simpson’s Director of Programs, everything came full circle for me. I was glad to join my two passions of working with families and single adults,” says Wendy. Prior to her work with Simpson, Wendy served as an advocate for single adults at the Dorothy Day Center.

What Wendy loves most about her job is the ever-changing nature of Simpson’s work. “I love that it is constantly changing. When people say, ‘Oh my gosh — you’ve been there 20 years? That’s a really long time. How could you stay in one place for 20 years?’ The answer is: It’s not the same place that it was 20 years ago, five years ago, or two years ago. There’s consistently something new about this

organization, about this work we’re doing. There’s a constant challenge and growth. When you are working with humans and systems, they’re always evolving. I’ve been able to enjoy growing with Simpson and taking on something new all the time.”

Wendy is highly regarded by all who know her and work with her. She is an admired leader and contributor within Simpson Housing Services and the broader community. Simpson’s leadership team, staff, and other community leaders involved in ending homelessness speak volumes about Wendy’s many strengths.

Executive Director Steve Horsfield reflects on Wendy’s strengths and contributions. “Wendy takes very seriously our work of carrying forward the voice of our participants, the experiences of our staff, and the people we are serving. She does a really good job of wading through that stuff and hanging on to the vision of what this really means to the people we are serving. ... Wendy is also not afraid to roll up her sleeves and do the work. When it comes to making sure that programs are being administered and delivered properly, she will do anything that is required within the program area.”

“Self-care is one of the reasons that Wendy is able to maintain the sterling reputation that she has around this work and in this town. She basically has two modes. One is either we are talking proactively and collaboratively about the

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### OUR MISSION

To house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness.

(cont.)

issue at hand. The other is, if we are not ... she is sitting quietly and listening," says Steve.

Janelle Leppa, Director of Family Programs, shares her thoughts about Wendy's leadership and dedication to helping people experiencing homelessness. "Early on, even when things were very different in the organization, Wendy would say, 'Let's work with the family. If there is an addiction, let's work with them. If there is a felony, let's work with them.' We talked about it. We wrestled. She listened. Wendy brought us through that. There were stumbling pieces as we were getting into it. ... I've seen her as this innovative leader from the start."

Janelle continues, "Wendy is gifted in so many ways. She's thoughtful. She's passionate. She's fair. She's funny. She has such incredible integrity. She's so dedicated to the mission of Simpson, for all the people that are a part of the system. Her continuity has just been amazing."

According to Director of Volunteer Engagement Christina Giese, Wendy's

steadfast presence has positively impacted Simpson. "Wendy's most valuable contributions have been creating and sustaining the level of programming that we have. We're not an agency that has had to have deep cuts in programming because our outcomes have been so strong. ... Wendy has been a steady presence for Simpson. She is thoughtful, smart, and strategic about what she does. She has formed a lot of collaborations with other agencies that are beneficial to the people that we serve."

After all these years, Wendy's passion and commitment for this work is strong. There are reasons that Wendy shows up to work day after day, as committed to the work as the day she started: "One is the people we work with. I have a strong belief that housing is a human right. Seeing the resilience that people have day after day with all the trauma they have experienced is beyond me in so many ways. The other is the people that work here. We have such committed, passionate, and caring people — advocates through and through. The people I work with and the people we serve — that's why I'm here, for sure."

2017 | 2018 IMPACT

**2,452**  
people served

**1,454**  
placed into housing

**682** men +  
**429** women  
received a shelter bed

**289** families +  
**649** children  
in our Family Housing Program

**150** children  
participated in a Children  
& Youth Services Program

**199** single adults  
received supportive housing  
services



## WHAT MAKES SIMPSON SPECIAL?

### Staying True to Our Mission in All That We Do

It's finally here. The long-awaited move-in day for Ellen, a participant in Simpson's long-term supportive housing program. Like Ellen, many women supported through this program have endured long durations of homelessness, chronic health or mental health issues, abusive relationships, and other barriers, making it more challenging to maintain stable employment and housing. Recognizing that moving day may be an exciting yet anxiety-provoking day, Ellen's advocate, Kristi, blocks off her calendar for the day and shows up. Kristi assists Ellen and her family by serving as a supportive and non-judgmental presence. Together, they accomplish the day's mission and create a fresh start for Ellen and her family.

Simpson Housing Services is a special organization, well-equipped to achieve its mission: to house, support, and advocate for people experiencing homelessness. Simpson's effectiveness lies within the staff's commitment to supporting this mission with persistence and compassion every day.

#### Our philosophy, mission, and values

Executive Director Steve Horsfield describes the philosophy of Simpson Housing Services and how it is experienced in every interaction.

"I am always inspired at the shelter when I walk by the front door at 5:00 p.m. and watch as the shelter staff welcome each shelter guest by name — all of them. I have guests that scratch their heads and ask, 'how does everybody remember my name?' That initial engagement, that dignity, that relationship creates the environment where work can happen. ... It's about believing in the strength of the individual, believing in people's capacity for self-advocacy. It's about engaging someone when they are in a point of crisis,

identifying the barriers, finding housing options that sound good, building that relationship, trusting their voice, and figuring out how to end the crisis."

Steve continues, "Our mission statement is the focal point for staff as they serve participants. Our mission and values stand up really well. ... They are well-positioned to be actionable. There is profound integrity to our direction that comes from that. ... Do what it says. And we do."

#### Our focus on relationships

Relationships are the foundation of our staff's work, according to Steve Horsfield. "The mechanism that makes our work possible is being in relationship. That's really where we start to differentiate ourselves, right from the genesis of this."

Janelle Leppa, Director of Family Programs, shares how this emphasis on relationship-building creates a safe space for participants. "Our advocates really take the time to get to know the parents and the family. They take time to be with the person, to carry some of the weight, and build trust. Through the work they discover, 'I bet this would be possible', uncovering the hope in everyone."

The participant-advocate relationship is helpful for participants who have lost natural supports that could provide needed emotional or financial support, according to Mary Gallini, Single Adult Programs Manager. "Whether it be in the shelter or when they get into permanent housing, we can be that sounding board, that listening ear, and resource person when sometimes people just don't have that."



## OUR VALUES

**Celebrate and embrace** the uniqueness and dignity of every person.

**Encourage people** to draw upon their own strengths.

**Promote the power** of self-advocacy.

**Believe that everybody** has the right to safe and affordable housing.



**“Simpson is committed to building purposeful relationships.”**

— Janelle Leppa, Director of Family Programs

### **Intentional programming focused on individual needs**

Simpson advocates help participants achieve actionable goals they set for themselves, according to Janelle. “Simpson is committed to building purposeful relationships. These are families — people — with real lives. We need to connect with a purpose, articulate goals, and ask questions: Are we on the same page? How do we need to move forward? Are the goals we are going for the most important? ... We need to be respectful of the family’s time, set goals, and measure progress, so the family can say this is a good use of time and feel a sense of accomplishment.”

The structure of Simpson’s programming impacts the quality of relationships and ultimately the participants’ progress. “We intentionally keep our caseloads small. For single adults, it’s around 15 people per caseload. For families, it’s around 14 per advocate. We limit caseload size, so advocates can focus on the people and the relationships,” says Wendy Wiegmann, Director of Programs. “In addition, the follow through and regularly scheduled checkpoints with advocates help participants experience more success.”

Flexibility across Simpson’s programming also facilitates housing stability for participants. “If somebody loses custody of their kids and they can’t stay in the family program, maybe they can come to a single adult program,” says Mary. “If someone is really struggling in scattered-site programming out in the community, we’ve referred quite a few people to a place with a 24-hour front desk that gives participants more control over what’s going on in their apartment.”

“Simpson’s strength in creating affordable housing options through rental subsidies also creates positive outcomes for our participants,” according to Mary. “You just can’t underestimate the importance of the financial support that we’re able to provide to people. ... It makes housing that would otherwise be unaffordable to people — affordable. We create affordable housing by using these kinds of programs.”

### **Committed to our mission through each person’s journey**

Simpson Housing Services is extraordinary because the staff stays focused on the organization’s mission and is committed to supporting people experiencing homelessness, for as long as it takes, to help them achieve housing stability. Simpson advocates support participants in this journey and celebrate with them along the way. “When something is accomplished it is always them [the participants]. Getting to be a part of their story is incredibly special,” says Janelle.

Mary Gallini shares that what sets Simpson apart may have as much to do with the people who are not stably housed as the people who have achieved housing stability. “We don’t give up on people. We really believe that housing is a right. When people have a history of trauma and many struggles, we’re going to keep working with them — even if it takes three or four more tries — so they have safe and stable homes and the support they need to succeed.”



## WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT Simpson Housing Services

# GIVE. VOLUNTEER. MENTOR.

- 1 Make a financial gift to Simpson:**  
Visit [www.simpsonhousing.org/donate-now/](http://www.simpsonhousing.org/donate-now/).
- 2 Serve a meal at the shelter:**  
Provide breakfast or dinner for shelter guests and learn first-hand how the shelter operates through this fun and rewarding experience. Please contact Matthew Ayers, at [mayres@simpsonhousing.org](mailto:mayres@simpsonhousing.org) to schedule a shelter tour and learn more.
- 3 Tutor or mentor a child in the Family Housing Program:**  
Forge a meaningful relationship with youth transitioning out of homelessness. Visit [www.simpsonhousing.org/volunteer/mentor-information](http://www.simpsonhousing.org/volunteer/mentor-information) for upcoming intro sessions.
- 4 Donate supplies:**  
Visit [www.simpsonhousing.org/ways-to-help/give-supplies/](http://www.simpsonhousing.org/ways-to-help/give-supplies/) for a list of supply needs for the shelter and housing programs.
- 5 Include Simpson Housing Services in your estate plans:**  
Your legacy support will ensure on-going programs and services to help people experiencing homelessness.

**For more information on how you can support Simpson contact Elisabeth Loeffler, Director of Development and Communications:  
612.455.0865 | [eloeffler@simpsonhousing.org](mailto:eloeffler@simpsonhousing.org)**

**give**  
TO THE  
**MAX**   
NOV. 15, 2018

On November 15, Simpson will be participating in the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Give to the Max Day. For more details about #GTMD18 visit our website at [simpsonhousing.org](http://simpsonhousing.org).



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**34<sup>th</sup> Annual**

MINNESOTA

**HOMELESS  
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**THURSDAY | DEC 20, 2018**

Honoring those who have died while homeless in Minnesota

**2019**

**ART 4 SHELTER**  
MAY 15TH, 2019

**New Location!**

**MACHINE SHOP**  
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HISTORIC VENUE

**300 2nd St. SE, Minneapolis**