

Napa Valley **Register**

Napa's new Aldea CEO comes from a "family of public service"

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Kerry Ahearn is the new CEO of Aldea Children & Family Services in Napa. These stuffed animals are located in the nonprofit's Courage Center. The Courage Center provides child victims of sexual and physical abuse with a safe, friendly location where interviews and physical examinations can be conducted.

Jennifer Huffman, Register

Kerry Ahearn was always taught to help the less fortunate. In fact, she said, she comes from a family of public service.

Her father was a social worker and her mother was a superintendent. Ahearn, a mother of two and Boston-native, has been working in social services for more than 20 years, mostly working with children and families.

As of December, Ahearn has been doing this type of work in Napa and Solano counties as the CEO of Aldea Children & Family Services, which provides behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment programs and foster care to the community.

Ahearn most recently served as the director of children and family services for San Mateo County Human Services Agency, but previously was the regional director of Victor Community Support Services, a nonprofit similar to Aldea, for nearly five years. And, she says, she is excited to be working in nonprofit again, especially in Napa County, where agencies appear to collaborative and the community is supportive.

"I've heard of Aldea while working in the field," Ahearn said. "I heard it had a very good reputation."

Not much about Aldea needs changing, Ahearn said. Going forward, the nonprofit's leadership will focus on continuing its already successful programs while also trying to expand its community partnerships.

Aldea recently cancelled one of its Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Program, which provided personal assistant-like care and supportive services to 32 developmentally disabled adults, due to state funding cuts. The services that Aldea provided, though, will be replaced with other similar services by agencies who specialize in that kind of care, Ahearn said.

Despite the funding cuts, Ahearn is optimistic about the future of Aldea and its ongoing support from community partners like the Napa Valley Vintners.

The biggest challenge for nonprofits and in human services is supporting staff, Ahearn said.

"Many times, they are working with a very traumatized population, so there's a real need for them to be able to take care of themselves so that they're not experiencing burnout." The cost of living, especially in the Bay Area doesn't help, she said. "We can't pay as much as the county – we don't pay as much as Kaiser."

Ahearn said that Aldea tries to make up for the discrepancy in other ways by providing them

with flexible schedules, providing training and opportunities for professional growth.

“There’s a lot of things that Aldea does to make sure that people get what they need,” Ahearn added.

Aldea provides mental health treatment and substance abuse treatment for youth and families, helps provide a safe space for youth survivors of sexual abuse, and provides foster care services as well as follow-up case management and transitional housing to formerly fostered youth.

“The SOAR program is really a feather in our cap,” Ahearn said, adding that the program, Supportive Outreach & Access to Resources (SOAR), supports early detection and treatment of psychosis in young adults.

“The outcome and trajectory are amazing,” Ahearn said.

By treating people early, she said, their ability to be positive community members and have a well-rounded life really increases.

Aldea is able to provide people with wrap-around services in addition to “state of the art” interventions, Ahearn said. Services can be catered to an individual’s needs, she said, citing one case involving a very anxious teenager who had never been able to really play as a child and how drama therapy and improvisation helped him “learn to laugh again.”

While the number of people their working with has declined, Ahearn said, the needs of these clients are much greater.

“I think the needs of our families have changed because our area has gotten so expensive,” Ahearn said. “Families have gotten very stressed – they have multiple jobs, little or no access to healthcare, and are having a difficult time meeting their needs.”

That’s why, she says, Aldea and other community organizations are trying to make getting help easier on families.

“We’re making it a priority to work with families within the community rather than having them come to us,” she said. That means more outreach and education in schools, setting up home visits, being out in the community more and partnering with UpValley Family Centers.

“We want to make sure that they have access to our services,” Ahearn said. “When they can’t come to us, we’ll come to them.”