

Lake County Sheriff's Office
John D. Idleburg, Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE

Collaborating Partners



Lake County Sheriff's Office • 25 South Martin Luther King, Jr., Avenue • Waukegan, Illinois 60085

For Immediate Release

Stakeholders Gather to Celebrate Expansion of Living Room Wellness Center

The Independence Center, in partnership with Lake County's Sheriff's Office, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office, and Lake County Government, are excited to announce the expansion of the Living Room Wellness Center, an innovative support center for those living with mental health issues or substance use disorders that is a critical component of Lake County's ongoing effort to safely reduce our local jail population.

On August 19, 2021, the Living Room Wellness Center officially expanded its operations, and is now open seven days a week, all year, for anyone in Lake County experiencing increased mental health symptoms or near-crisis due to emotional distress. The Living Room Wellness Center offers free-of-charge crisis intervention, peer counseling, person-centered safety and crisis planning, as well as basic needs like healthy food, clean showers, and transportation.

A significant milestone of this expansion is that law enforcement will now have the option of bringing people to the Living Room Wellness Center for treatment and care rather than to jail. People in need of care will have the opportunity to have access to safe and professional services centered toward their needs, versus going to jail. The initial phase will be limited to the Lake County Sheriff's Office and its COAST program. Members of COAST have interacted with 1,634 residents living with mental symptoms. COAST will leverage the Living Room Wellness Center to ensure efficient coordination of services to those that require it. This availability will eventually expand to other law enforcement agencies and will be a new option

available to law enforcement officers, which they did not necessarily have before. Additionally, Living Room Wellness Center will be an added entry point for the Lake County Opioid Initiative's 'A Way Out' program for participants.

Sheriff John D. Idleburg said, "Jails are intended to be a place for violent pretrial detainees, not for those living with mental illness. We have been working with Independence Center and our criminal justice partners for a long time to make the expansion of the Living Room Wellness Center a reality, and this is an exciting first-step toward providing proper care and placement for our Lake County residents who are in need of proper resources."

"We believe that every person has the right to work toward achieving the same quality of life and self-fulfillment that all people live, said Judith Shaffer, Independence Center's Board President. "The Living Room Wellness Center, a nationally recognized model of support for people with mental illness, provides a welcoming, safe, comfortable, inviting environment that aims to decrease unnecessary hospitalizations, reduce our local jail population and develop a peer-based support network for every individual who reaches out for help. Since opening last August, the center has helped over 300 individuals with increased mental illness symptoms or near a crisis by providing safe and professional services centered in dignity and respect. We are proud to be in partnership with Lake County's Sheriff's Office, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office, and Lake County Government, and believe this expansion will help build stronger communities."

Lake County State's Attorney Eric Rinehart said, "This achievement is critical to the well-being and safety of Lake County residents. Chair Hart, Vice Chair Cunningham, Sheriff Idleburg, the MacArthur Foundation, and Healthcare Foundation of Northern Lake County have showed amazing leadership and wisdom in setting this plan into motion. This Center will protect the community and satisfy our moral duty to treat those in need."

This project was made possible by funding from The Independence Center, two grants from the Lake County Sheriff's Office, and a grant from the Lake County State's Attorney's Office. The 'Grand Reopening Ceremony' was attended by members of the community, community stakeholders, and elected officials.

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