

The Macomb Daily (<http://www.macombdaily.com>)

Sue Coats retiring as Turning Point chief

Sue Coats retiring after 17 years as director

By Gina Joseph, The Macomb Daily

Tuesday, June 26, 2018



Turning Point has come a long way and there's still work to be done.

However, Sue Coats can retire as president knowing she has completed her mission to create an organization that provides shelter, services and programs to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

"I feel really wonderful," said Coats, who will say her official good-byes during a retirement party at Bath City Bistro Tuesday. "I feel honored to have been able to lead Turning Point, which has made such an impact and a difference in so many lives."

When Coats was sexually assaulted there was nothing but attitude for victims.

In order to report the crime committed by a stranger, who broke into her home, she had to go the hospital and to the police afterwards and in both cases she received no compassion and no show of concern for what she needed -- including a sanitary napkin to stop the bleeding.

"I was treated like I was annoying," Coats said, recalling the horrible attack that led to her involvement in Turning Point, where she started as program director of sexual assault services in 1990, and has served as CEO since 2001.

The attack happened at around 2 a.m. but it was not until 3 p.m. that Coats was finally given permission to go home and take a shower.

"I had no idea what my rights were. It was all about what they wanted and they needed but not what I needed," she said.

This is no longer the case in part because of Turning Point's Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program (SANE).

Of the goals reached over the years Coats said she is most proud of establishing this program in 1999.

"That was my baby and I loved the changes that were due to that program," she said, in a previous story about the program earning the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's Visionary Voice Awards.

The program operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and provides comprehensive medical forensic examinations to adult and child sexual assault survivors. Specially trained nurses and advocates meet the immediate physical and emotional needs of sexual assault survivors and provide crisis intervention, which helps police in building a criminal case. Coats said once the program was established it became clear that treating victims of sexual assault with respect and care increased the chances of a good outcome in the criminal justice system. A study released after the program demonstrated the percentage of convictions in sexual assault cases in Macomb County increased 21 percent. The study was the first of its kind in the nation and went on to be reported to other cities and communities, many of which have established their own programs.

Then there's the Macomb Community Domestic Violence Council.

Started and staffed by Turning Point, the group helps communities respond to domestic violence by creating opportunities to learn about effective individual and institutional responses to survivors, assaulters and children who experience such trauma. One of the latest initiatives has the council partnering with McLaren Macomb Hospital, where all first-year resident physicians take part in a series of educational seminars and role-playing scenarios in order to screen for, identify and appropriately respond to patients who are the victims of domestic or sexual violence. The new curriculum leads to increased knowledge of intimate partner violence, allowing our physicians to refer victims to the appropriate community resource in a timely manner.

"It's important for us to include the recognition and care of domestic violence victims in our residents' training, and it is something we find they greatly benefit from," said Vanessa Sykes, manager of graduate medical education at McLaren Macomb. "It imparts on them a component of compassion and understanding when caring for all patients who might be in a distressed or agitated state."

Although retiring Coats has left Turning Point in good hands.

"I have absolutely all the confidence in Turning Point's next leader, Dr. Sharmen Davenport," Coats said, adding more on Davenport's background will come at her farewell party.

As for what's next for Coats, she's taking her work to the next level.

"I'll be working for the State of Michigan Division of Crime Victim Services," Coats said. "I believe my work will be related to helping communities expand their services and resources for sexual assault victims.

"It's a good use of my experience and passion and it will help me transition into retirement," added Coats, who has one daughter and four grandchildren.

During an interview in her office adorned with artwork and awards, Coats insisted that while she's proud of what she has done she did not do it alone.

"This progress/success of Turning Point wasn't just me," Coats said. "It is the result of the support and hard work of countless staff, volunteers and allies!"

Among its longtime allies being its community of Mount Clemens.

"Sue Coats provided great leadership and vision for Turning Point for many years," said Mount Clemens Mayor Barb Dempsey. "I want to wish her all the best in her retirement as she starts the next chapter of her life."

URL: <http://www.macombdaily.com/lifestyle/20180626/sue-coats-retiring-as-turning-point-chief>

© 2018 The Macomb Daily (<http://www.macombdaily.com>)