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Security Health Plan: Invests in Marshfield special needs outreach ministry

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Caption: Volunteer hair stylist Jody Krier puts the finishing touches on Sara Krier's hair before the ABIDE Together prom for the Marshfield area special needs community. To the right are volunteer stylist Ashley Vruwink styling Alyssa Kluge's hair, and stylist Miranda Langfoss. About a dozen hair, makeup and nail stylists volunteered to help prom attendees prepare for the big night.

MARSHFIELD – "We desire to positively impact the lives of individuals with special needs and their families emotionally, socially, and spiritually by creating events and opportunities within our community," Joni White said. White is the ABIDE Ministry Director at North Ridge Church, Marshfield.

Security Health Plan of Wisconsin, Inc. will invest $1,000 in ABIDE Together as part of its Employee-Driven Corporate Giving grant program. Each month Security Health Plan awards a $1,000 grant to a different charity or organization that is nominated by a Marshfield Clinic Health System employee. Employees are encouraged to nominate organizations making a positive difference in the community.

Cindy Lee, a registered nurse at the Health System's Child Development Center, nominated ABIDE Together for the grant.

ABIDE Together is, as White described it, the "outreach arm of the ABIDE ministry at North Ridge Church that goes out into Marshfield and the surrounding community."

The ABIDE ministry, she said, is the special needs ministry at North Ridge. ABIDE Together was formed last fall when the need to expand the ABIDE ministry was realized.

“The name is new but the passion isn’t,” White said. “We knew we needed to expand ABIDE because the need for more community outreach was apparent, so we were able to come together and form ABIDE Together.”

Lee said she nominated ABIDE Together because it is important to her as a parent of a young adult with unique abilities.

“I believe there is a need for more social activities for all special need individuals in our area,” Lee said.

Earlier this month ABIDE Together hosted their fourth annual prom at Hotel Marshfield. With 125 guests and over 200 volunteers making it happen, the event provided a special night for the attendees, including pre-prom hair and makeup, a red-carpet welcome, food, flowers, shoe shine, photo booths, dance and a respite room for families and caregivers.

This is the fourth year North Ridge Church has hosted a prom for the special needs community. In the past, it was named Night to Shine, sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation.

North Ridge Church Outreach Pastor Beth Zarnke said, “The beautiful part of the prom event is it is for individuals ages 14-100, all who wish to feel part of a larger community. It is so touching to see individuals with different needs and abilities come together and have a special night. This is what we want in life.”

White added, “This is how life should be: disabled, non-disabled, just people hanging out and having a good time doing life together. It is really awesome.”

White said she got involved with the organization shortly after moving to the Marshfield area from Tennessee and attending one of the first Night to Shine proms with her daughter. She said while her daughter attended the dance, she was able to relax in the respite room ABIDE provided for parents and caregivers.

“It was a beautiful expression of love from the community,” she said.

Zarnke said the Security Health Plan grant has so much more than just a financial

impact on ABIDE Together.

“Yes, it impacts us financially, but it also connects us with other community partners,” Zarnke said. “By doing that we are connecting with Security Health Plan’s employees and agents, our congregants, and the area special needs community. The donation obviously is wonderful and we are grateful for the support for the event, but for us, the collaboration and connectivity that happens as a result of that donation means so much more.”

In addition to the prom, the group hosts events including a summer luau, fall dance and recently, a winter game night.

Lee said following the game night the event organizers had people telling them how much they enjoyed it and that they want to do it more often.

“It really validated for us that there is a need for more socialization and that we need to have more community events,” she added.

The group is always open to volunteers and donations and anyone is welcome.

“We want people to be able to rub shoulders with our special needs community,” Zarnke said. “We are all still people and we want people to succeed. We are always looking for new partnerships with local organizations, whether it is through volunteering or through financial resources.”

To get involved, make a donation or learn more about ABIDE Together, visit their website at www.northridgefamily.org/ministries/outreach or check out their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/abidetogethernrc/.