

Podcast # 100 David's Refuge (Publish date 10.21.24)

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Guest: Rory Lawrence, Director of Wellness, David's Refuge

Transcription:

Music.

Tania Anderson

0:08

Welcome to the ARISE Podcast. I'm Tania Anderson, CEO at ARISE and with us today is Rory Lawrence, who is the Director of Wellness for David's Refuge. Welcome.

Rory Lawrence

0:17

Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Tania Anderson

0:20

Oh, we're so happy to have you here. So let's talk about David's Refuge, which is a local nonprofit here in central New York. It's been around for a while, and you have a really exciting special mission.

Rory Lawrence

0:31

Yeah, absolutely. David's refuge has been around since 2011 and it was actually founded by a local couple who had lost their oldest son to a rare disease, and after he passed away, they really wanted to be able to give back to the community, and they realized that one of the most impactful pieces while caring for David was the way that people had poured into them, and so that was really the foundation of David's Refuge to create an organization where they were going to be able to pour into caregivers and empower them and encourage them and love them, so that they could just really bring the best version of themselves to their children every day.

Tania Anderson

1:18

So, we're going to talk a little bit about what that pouring into actually looks like. But what I'm hearing and what I know about David's refuge is that, you know, a lot of us who are caregivers of children, or really anyone in our family that has either a disability or a long term illness, we're spending so much time and attention to their needs that we don't take care of ourselves, and that taking care of ourselves part is that's really your focus.

Rory Lawrence

1:47

It absolutely is. And that's what they also realized, is that there wasn't another organization locally that was really pouring into the caregiver and pouring into the parents, and so that's really what David's refuge is about is about really pouring into the caregiver in a variety of different ways. And we have a number of different programs that have grown and flourished over the years, and we kind of call them buckets now. And so we have three different buckets of services and programs. And so it's our respite, our wellness and our community buckets.

Tania Anderson

2:24

Okay, so that's what we're pouring from three into three buckets or out of three buckets. I'm not sure how that works. So, so tell me, tell me about these different lines of service.

Rory Lawrence

2:34

Absolutely. So, our respite bucket was really our first type of service that we started with. And so that service is where we send caregivers away for the weekend. So they get to go to a local bed and breakfast or hotel, and they stay for two nights. And the really neat piece is that we also send a number of caregivers, and so they all have breakfast together each day. And so it's an opportunity to connect with other caregivers, but it's also really an opportunity for caregivers to take a breath, turn their brains off for a couple of days and just be able to relax and rejuvenate themselves.

Tania Anderson

3:13

So, this is a weekend where, if it's a parent's they're away from their child, if they're not having to do the direct care for that period of time, and they're connecting with people who have a similar experience.

Rory Lawrence

3:25

Exactly. It's just and we've seen just such wonderful experiences from our caregivers, and just such a lovely time to really just relax and be able to step away from the day to day demands of caregiving,

Tania Anderson

3:43

And you said there's several couples or families that would be involved, so just generally, like three to four in a place for the weekend. How does that work?

Rory Lawrence

Yes, so we have all different sizes, so it can range anywhere from five to we have a couple of locations now where we'll have 10 or 12 couples out of them. And we also have decided over the last few years we do single parent weekends, and then we also do caregiving couple weekends, and we structure them a little bit differently to be able to really support our caregivers where they're at.

Tania Anderson

4:16

And, how many of these weekends do you end up doing in a year?

Rory Lawrence

4:19

So each year, this year, we will do around 400 respite weekends. So the we'll serve 400 couples on or single parents on respite weekends, and we partner with about 20 hotels in bed and breakfast, either in Central New York or Western New York.

Tania Anderson

4:37

That's fabulous. So that's the first bucket.

Rory Lawrence

4:39

That's the first bucket,

Tania Anderson

4:40

What's the second bucket

Rory Lawrence

4:41

And the second bucket? I'll kind of go in order. And so the second bucket is our community bucket, and that has just this huge range of opportunities for families. And so everything from we have some really incredible Halloween events coming up, so that's something for the whole family. Or. We do a Santa event every December. We typically do like a summer picnic, and then we do events that are just for the parents. And so the last couple of years, we've done a Valentine's Day date where parents can go, and we rent out a movie theater, and they get to go watch a movie and have a meal. And we've really started to work with local organizations as well. So, things like people can go to a Syracuse crunch game or the Syracuse symphony or Syracuse stage, and so our caregivers really just have an opportunity to experience all

different things locally. And again, it really provides that community piece. And I think one of the themes that we often see is that our caregivers go and they don't have to worry about anything. Oftentimes, when they're out, you know, in the store, they're out in public, there's all these different layers that they have to think about before heading out with their children. So I have a son who is in a wheelchair, and so that's always front of mind when we're going to do anything. And so with our events, we really work to just take all of those pieces away so families can just arrive and have a wonderful time and just feel loved and cared for

Tania Anderson

6:11

Wonderful Okay, so that's bucket number two.

Rory Lawrence

6:14

That was bucket number two. And so bucket number three is our wellness bucket, which is our newest bucket, and our wellness programming and services really actually kind of came at covid, the time of covid, because the services that we had been pouring into for years and years, all of a sudden kind of stopped, because we weren't able to send caregivers away on the weekend. We weren't able to gather everyone, but we were having conversations with our families, and they were just feeling so overwhelmed and exhausted, and we really just started to think of, how can we keep pouring into them? And so that's really where our wellness programming came from, and now that has really grown. And so one of the pieces of our wellness program is that we partner with an incredible local mental health practice, and they provide support groups and one on one counseling for our families. And then we also work with other local partners, and we offer different workshops, and that could range from an all day workshop where we might have a number of different speakers or presenters, to sending our caregivers to a workshop that's already happening at a local location. And so again, it's really just this idea of offering all these opportunities to our caregivers and realizing that different things are going to resonate with different people, and it's just a new tool for their toolbox.

Rory Lawrence

7:00

And with this latest piece, with the wellness which is the newest piece. What sort of response are you getting?

Rory Lawrence

7:42

We're getting just a huge, wonderful response from it. And I think the piece that our caregivers are really liking the most is that they're able to try things that they may not have thought of before,

Tania Anderson

7:53

Like what?

Rory Lawrence

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So for instance, we've done things like breath work sessions or a sound healing session, which was completely new to me as well. And we have a local partner that offers those at her shop, and we've had families instantly reach out and say, Oh my gosh. I can't believe how relaxed I was. I can't believe that I now have learned this new technique that I can do this breathing exercise when I'm waiting in line to pick up my child from school, or when I'm getting ready for an IEP meeting and I'm feeling really anxious or stressed out, and it only takes a couple of minutes,

Tania Anderson

8:29

Wow, that's great. And for this wellness bucket of activities, also no charge for those?

Rory Lawrence

8:34

No charge for those!

Tania Anderson

8:36

That's great. And then I think you've often in November had a specific event is that the caregivers event?

Rory Lawrence

8:42

Yes, so November for us is always an exciting month because it's national family caregiver month, and so we always work to have just different opportunities for our families. So we do have our Caregiver Wellness Day coming up in November, and we'll have a number of speakers that will be doing different workshops throughout the day, and we're just really excited to be able to pour into local caregivers that day.

Tania Anderson

9:06

That's great. And I would imagine, just like with the respite weekends, that when you have the social events and these wellness events, probably there's always the important stated

agenda, but just as important is that other agenda, where people are networking and learning from their peers.

Rory Lawrence

9:22

Yes, I think that because become this like unspoken, like shining star of the events, and one of the things we continually hear is that it's almost like being a special needs parent is speaking a different language, and all of a sudden you walk into the room and everyone is speaking the same language as you, and it just takes this instant weight off of your shoulders, and you're really just able to be vulnerable and authentic and have the conversations that maybe you don't feel like you can have in other spaces. And I think just having that comfort level at. All of our events has just been such a lovely thing that I don't know if any of us realized was going to resonate so deeply.

Tania Anderson

10:07

I'm actually not at all surprised by what you just said, because people say the exact same thing about ARISE at the Farm where which is a very welcoming and inclusive space, and for some of our families that are there, that may be the only space where they do feel that level of comfort and engagement and inclusion. And you know, arise as an independent living center. We're all about the inclusive model and the peer model and the peer support. And we've got people that work here that may not have the exact experience as you, but enough similar that we speak that language. So I'm glad you have also had that benefit for your work as well.

Rory Lawrence

10:45

It really is amazing. My son has done the ARISE and Ski program for years, and my husband and I always say that's exactly how we feel when we walk into that area of the lodge. Is instantly you just feel welcome. They're your people, your children. Feel excited and welcomed, and it's just such an incredible feeling.

Tania Anderson

11:06

I wish our whole world was like that, don't you?

Rory Lawrence

11:09

I do wish our whole world was like that. It's, I was talking to our daughter the other day, and we were saying, you know, it's these small changes, and it's, we get to change the world in this way, we get to show other people what it can look like.

Tania Anderson

11:25

Absolutely, absolutely. I'm thinking about, you know, as a the mom of a child with a well, she's a young lady now with a disability, that it's often very difficult for caregivers, parents, family members to to get away, and there's a practical barrier about child care. How do you How do your families navigate that?

Rory Lawrence

11:49

Yeah, absolutely. We that child care is probably one of the largest barriers that our families face as well, and to be completely honest, that is part was part of the drive to us expanding our programming and services with some of our community events and with some of the wellness events, and really trying to offer some things that maybe are only a half a day, or some things that might be during the daytime when people's children are at school. So we've really tried to kind of shift and pivot to accommodate some of those things or offering virtual services. So for instance, our mental health services are all virtual. Okay, we've have, like a mom that jokes that she goes into the garage and sits in her car to do her mental health sessions, because that way she can still, you know, be at home with her child, but she's then still able to pour into herself. So, we know it's a barrier, and we've really tried to as best we can pivot and offer options, even for our families that really face the challenge of child care.

Tania Anderson

12:52

Because it's real, isn't it? Yeah,

Rory Lawrence

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It absolutely is. I mean, it's not easy for, you know, my husband and I to find time to get away and or even just to find someone that you trust and you care for and all of those things. It's all very scary.

Tania Anderson

13:08

It is scary. And I think we talked a little bit about this, and then you're like your son uses ARISE and Ski. I would imagine there's a tremendous amount of overlap between the folks that are connecting with arise the folks that are connecting with David's refuge and some of the other agencies that are out there in the community, are you also saying that to be true?

Rory Lawrence

13:29

We are. And I think the piece that I've really loved over the last you know, couple of years is how all the organizations like you and I having this conversation today that we get to connect and talk to one another and say, Okay, we're all caring for the same group of families. How can we continue to partner and work together and care for them in the best way possible? And I think it's really incredible to see how that is growing.

Tania Anderson

13:57

That's great. I'm thinking, I'm going back to sort of the barrier piece, and I'm thinking about, do you ever encounter that one of the largest barriers is that caregivers think they don't need any support?

Rory Lawrence

14:12

Yes, I think we do see that. We're starting to see a little bit of a shift in that from our side, and I think sometimes it's just participating in the programming and seeing it resonate so deeply with the parents and them realizing, yes, I do need this, but when we welcome new families into the David's refuge community, that's always one of the first things we say is like, it's okay to take time for you. It's probably the last thing on your list, but it's okay, and maybe it's five minutes, but learning to pour into yourself means that you get to choose to bring the best version of yourself to your family each day. But it's hard. It's hard for all of us, and so we just keep saying it

Tania Anderson

14:59

Right! And of course, there's a cliché that we hear all. Time about the oxygen masks that's dropped down from the airplane. You put it on yourself before you put it on your child. You have a better cliché that you use. Or should we run with that one?

Rory Lawrence

15:02

I think we should run with that. Because, honestly, our founders used to walk around with an oxygen mask. That was their that was how they started everything. So that's one of our favorite.

Tania Anderson

15:18

Very good, very good. So if people want to learn more about David's refuge, your link to the ARISE web page, ARISE inc.org, and then what is your website?

Rory Lawrence

15:27

Our website is Davidsrefuge.org, and all our info is right on there.

Tania Anderson

15:32

Wonderful. So, thanks so much for your time today.

Tania Anderson

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Thank you so much for having us great.

Tania Anderson

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Thank you!