
Remembering mental health advocate Carole Vesely

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Carole E. Vesely, a longtime advocate for the mental health community, died Thursday at the age of 74.

The woman whom community leaders often turned to following a traumatic event has died.

Carole E. Vesely, a longtime advocate for the mental health community, died Thursday. She was 74.

“I don’t think we can say enough to get the true effect of how enormous her impact was on Stark County,” said Tomika West, director of access for Coleman Professional Services, who worked with Vesely at Crisis Intervention & Recovery Center and then became Vesely’s supervisor at Coleman when Coleman took over many of the crisis center’s services in 2018. “.. She was very passionate about taking care of people and helping other people. She had a genuine concern for their well-being and their recovery.”

Michelle Smith, chief officer of Coleman Crisis Services, said Vesely will be remembered for how she dedicated her life to helping others.

“Her passion was to help empower people, to help them improve their lives,” she said. “She was very passionate about everything she did.”

In recent years, Vesely perhaps was best known for her work educating the community about the warning signs of suicide. She was the expert that school leaders consulted in 2018 after multiple local teens died of suicide.

Last year, the Stark County Educational Service Center awarded Vesely its Lifetime Educator Achievement Award for serving as the leader of the countywide school crisis recovery team and working closely with local school districts to provide consultation and training about suicide prevention and crisis recovery. She also helped school officials develop their crisis recovery plans.

“Carole was one of the most beloved members of our education community,” Stark County ESC Superintendent Joe Chaddock said. “Often working behind the scenes, she was instrumental during some of the toughest times we faced, and was an amazing asset to our students, districts and superintendents. She will be dearly missed.”

‘Critical piece’

Vesely, a Perry High School graduate, began her career in 1967 as a high school teacher in the Canton City School District.

She became a licensed social worker in 1983. While serving as an evening school counselor for the Canton City School District, she also worked for Stark County’s children protective services as an intake assessment worker, family preservation worker and new employee trainer. She left protective services in 1996 to become a risk assessment trainer for the Ohio Department of Children’s Protective Services.

During her 30 years at the Crisis Center, Vesely served as a hotline volunteer, community consultant, member of the First Response Team, facilitator of the Survivors of Suicide loss group, chair of the Stark County Suicide Prevention Coalition, a law enforcement trainer and a coordinator for the Stark County Crisis Intervention Team.

John Aller, executive director of Stark County Mental Health & Addiction Recovery, said Vesely was instrumental in establishing the Crisis Intervention Team training for area law enforcement agencies. The training helped first responders and law enforcement learn how to interact with people who may be undergoing a mental health crisis. More than 400 law enforcement officers in Stark County have received the training since the program began in 2004.

“She really was seen as a critical piece for law enforcement to help address stigma of mental health issues,” Aller said.

Aller said Vesely, a longtime adjunct instructor at Stark State College and a certified instructor at Stark State's Police Academy, earned respect for the way she maintained her composure even during the most difficult situations.

"She was dealing with some tough content material but was always bubbly and pleasant and had a calming sense about her," he said. "It allowed her to walk into high anxiety situations and be able to de-escalate them quickly."

A memorial service for Vesely will be held at 5:30 p.m. July 2 at Westbrook Veterans Memorial Park. Reed Funeral Home is handling the arrangements. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Coleman Professional Services.

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