RENEE SCHULZ, BS
by Jane Kennedy

Renee Schulz grew up in Marshfield, the youngest of four children, with siblings 18, 15 and 12 years older. When she was three, her parents divorced, and she was raised primarily by her mother, although her older siblings played a significant role in her upbringing. Despite the age differences, she has always been very close to her siblings and her mother and says, "My family made me who I am. My mother and I were like a team." Her experience having visits with her father gave her a special compassion for children of divorce. An abusive relationship in high school gave her a deep personal insight into the psychology and power, control, and threats associated with domestic abuse. This experience later informed her decision to devote her career to helping others escape abuse.

Renee took a psychology course early in her college career at UW La Crosse. This class prompted her to switch from a major in physical therapy to psychology and sociology. Recently out of college, she landed the job as Executive Director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of La Crosse. She established that organization as a 501(c)3 agency and developed fundraising efforts and personnel, program, and fiscal policies.

In 2004, Renee moved back to Marshfield with her children. Her mother, always a steadfast support, opened the News Herald on her first day home, looked at the Want Ads and said, "What about this job?" She pointed to an ad for Executive Director of Personal Development Center, Inc. (PDC). Although Renee had grown up in Marshfield, she had never heard of PDC. She landed the position and worked very hard to increase the visibility of the agency, which seemed to be "completely unknown, hidden."

When asked what inspired her to such a challenging career, Renee said, "I was always that person that people- family, friends, coworkers- came to in working through concerns or problems." Renee always loved advocating for others, loved children, and had a special empathy for families in trouble. Her goal, described in her resume is, "to utilize my skills and experience to ensure the availability of programs and services that support victims and children impacted by domestic and sexual violence locally and throughout the state."

Renee has been influential in Wisconsin as a victim advocate by serving on the Wisconsin Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse. She was the Council Co-Chair from 2012 to 2019, chaired the Legislative/Policy/Systems Collaboration Committee, and was the Legislative Liaison for the Council. She continues to serve as co-chair of the Council's Budget Committee. Renee has also been instrumental in leading the Wood County Coordinated Community Response Team (CCRT); the Central Wisconsin Sexual Assault Response Team (SART); and is a member of the Marshfield Area Coalition for Youth (MACY) and Marshfield Child Advocacy Center (MCAC) multi-disciplinary team, where she serves on the leadership committee.



Renee Schulz

Some of the challenges Renee has faced in her career include sustaining programs and services among an ever-changing funding landscape and sudden large funding losses; securing direct federal grants and ensuring adherence to all funding contract requirements; attracting and retaining staff; and maintaining agency policies and procedures that ensure safety and account for best practices in service delivery and state/federal funding mandates. She has worked alongside the Board of Directors to develop fundraisers and public relations efforts and has worked very hard to establish and maintain collaborations with community partners.

During her tenure, PDC has grown from a handful of employees to a staff of 14. She is responsible for adding many programs to benefit victims, and has overseen the building of the Orenda Center, a shelter for victims and their children. She is proud of having increased the visibility of the agency and for acquiring federal funding. She established a supervised visitation and exchange pro-

gram. She has worked tirelessly to keep victims safe and to keep her employees safe. She has established a presence in the school system and lots of transitional programs for victims for resources, education, housing, employment, and childcare. Her one regret is that the agency is still not able to meet all the needs in our community. She says, “Every day I fight to keep the doors open here.” Renee believes that her legacy is having made our community far safer through the programs she has developed and has established PDC as “a strong presence in our community” by forming collaborative relationships with other agencies and community partners.

I admire Renee Schulz and her life’s work advocating for victims of domestic abuse and assault.