

My name is Patricia Balke and I have been serving as the Executive Director for the Wisconsin Association for Runaway Services for the past 39 years. I cannot express how humbled and honored I am to be included among the recipients for the NSPN lifetime achievement award, recognizing the accomplishments and achievements improving the lives of youth and families across decades.

After 39 years I have had the honor of working with some absolutely amazing and caring individuals. The compassion and strength of those who dedicate their lives to this work has carried me to this point and will carry my work forward now.

I would like to take a moment to thank, my previous Assistant Director, Joli Guenther. She has assumed leadership of the organization since my retirement this year. She has been a gift to me and to anyone who is lucky enough to work with her. She's a wonderful person and has made my life and the work of WAHRS so much better for the support that she has provided me over the past 24 years. I am grateful to leave my work with WAHRS in her hands.

I also need to acknowledge the work of those that have dedicated themselves to direct service...from staying in shelters with young people, to serving on the frontlines during the pandemic. The long hours, contributions, sacrifices, and skills of these individuals are often unrecognized and without them my work would have been meaningless.

There are also those who know my history in losing my own young child when she was only six years old. This horrific experience has also shaped my work in recognizing the value of our children and the need for us to support them as they grow into young adults. We cannot abandon them and must help to provide a voice that ensures that they have the care and support needed.

You may also be aware of my current struggle with a terminal cancer, which caused my exit from this work earlier than anticipated. Thank you for honoring me with this recognition at this time while I move into a focus of time shared with my family and loved ones. I am honored to hand this work to you and know that the connection and compassion of those who have chosen this work will carry on behind me.

Sincerely,

Patricia Balke