

# The FREEMAN

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## 'THERE IS HOPE'

*SALS home helps get addicts back on their feet*

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Charles Auer/Freeman Staff

Kevin Schaefer, John E. Arneson and Patrick Reilly discuss SALS Sober House during a Thursday interview.

## W AUKESHA —

We see the headlines every day: “Man charged with heroin possession,” “Addiction on the rise.” John E. Arneson and the rest of the staff at Sober Alternative Living Services are attempting to change the end of the story.

“I opened this place with rose- colored glasses,” said Arneson, who has been the SALS executive director since 2004, when a friend opened his eyes to the lack of transitional housing for recovering addicts in Waukesha. At first Arneson opened his arms and wallet to any addict who wanted to stay at one of his two properties, but after almost going broke, he realized he needed more structure.

“We’ll take anyone who’s ready, willing and able to work on their sobriety — no one’s forced to be here — but they have to be clean, and they have to want to be here. It can’t be just mom and dad wanting them here,” Arneson said. Residents can come and go as they please, but they must submit to drug and alcohol testing and absolutely must remain clean and sober, he said.

Fast forward to 2014, when SALS has grown to four men’s homes — two in Waukesha and another pair in Milwaukee. A women’s home is planned for Milwaukee in the near future.

Arneson and his staff have helped more than 1,000 men get back on their feet through giving them a place to stay for anywhere from a few months to a few years, helping them find employment and prevent relapses. That’s where professional recovery coaches like Kevin Schaefer come in. “It’s just like a coach on the sidelines of a basketball court. The team needs a plan of attack,” Schaefer said. “Addiction is about isolation but recovery is about being open and honest.”

That’s what Justin, who asked that his last name not be used, has learned in his time at SALS. Justin used opiates for four years until his parents found drug paraphernalia in his room and suggested a rehabilitation facility in Oshkosh. After treatment, he did well for a while, but then his cravings started increasing. He struggled finding employment. He felt defeated.

“Treatment is only as good as the 30 days it is,” Schaefer said. “The real world is tough.”

Justin sought out SALS after hearing about it through the rehabilitation facility in Oshkosh.

“It’s better than living with my friends because there are others here with that same mindset of trying to remain sober,” said Justin, who recently got a job after his coach, Schaefer, physically took him to job interviews and encouraged him through any rejections.

Placement Director Patrick Reilly said in the old days, all SALS residents were alcoholics, but nowadays anyone younger than 30 that comes through the door is addicted to opiates.

“Heroin is easier to get than beer,” he said. “Here, we provide a safe environment, and it’s these guys that make it worth it.”

Schaefer said the hard work, tears, late-night phone calls and stress are all worthwhile when he sees a resident overcome his demons. And that’s the story people need to hear. “Everyone’s talking about the epidemic, but the one thing we’re not talking about is hope,” Schaefer said. “There is hope.”

For more information, or to donate, visit [www.salshouses.org](http://www.salshouses.org).

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Kevin Schaefer wears a “One Day At a Time” bracelet.