From the Director

where is the love?

As we come to the finish of another year, I’m reminded of how we here at Family Services truly wrap our arms around everyone in the Merrimack Valley.

What does that love look like? It looks like a 10-year-old boy with a newfound confidence holding tight to a dream of one day becoming an astronomer. It looks like a classroom filled with men and women consumed by their studies of the English language. It looks like a boy in the fifth grade being matched with a mentor, and then ten years later, poised to become a fashion designer. It looks like Donald and Josephine (pictured left with Family Services’ Outreach Nurse Sharon Thomson) living well as they age. It looks like “us”, and none of this would be possible if not for your support.

We send a powerful message when we give back. We communicate that we are all in this together. Not only does that compassion and generosity make a difference in the lives of others, it gives each of us an enhanced sense of well being that echoes far and wide. Thank you so much for helping us send a message of hope and confidence to thousands of children and families.

Elizabeth Sweeney, Chief Executive Officer

We All Want Families to Be Happy...

the shared mission of the greater lawrence fathers and family network

It’s a Thursday morning, and some 20 or so Merrimack Valley Program Directors and Social Workers are gathered with a shared passion... they want families to be happy. It’s that simple. The Greater Lawrence Fathers and Family Network, operated by Family

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As we approach the year’s end, we want to thank everyone who participated in our 2017 Annual Fund. Here are some of the smiles your generous support helps to make happen. If you have not yet made a contribution, please consider making a tax deductible donation before December 31.

“A Dream Come True
over 200 walkers unite for first annual walk for hope

“This event is something I have always wanted to do,” beamed an emotional Debbie Helms, Director of Family Services’ Samaritans of the Merrimack Valley program, as she rallied participants at the start of their first annual Walk for Hope. “We put this dream of mine together in two months, and it was a true team effort.” She went on to credit her Samaritans’ colleagues, Paige Young and Anna Peicott as well as the event’s 22 local sponsors, and a small army of volunteers and loss survivors for their commitment and help in making her dream a reality. “Never in my wildest dreams could I have expected this.”

A glimpse of that team effort is reflected in the above snapshot of Ms. Helms (center) joining forces with two loss survivor families, State Senator Barbara L’Italien and Family Services CEO Elizabeth Sweeney (at right) at the Walk’s start. Stay tuned for information on next year’s Walk for Hope.

Happy Families... (continued from page 1)

Services and funded by The Children’s Trust, is a group of men and women all highly engaged in the work of helping strengthen the sometimes fragile relationship between parents and children.

The group meets six times annually to network and learn how to better support fathers and families. Some of the organizations represented at the November meeting were; Healthy Families of Lawrence, Greater Lawrence Community Action Council, Children’s Friend and Family Services, and the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.

For the November 2017 meeting, the network took on the topic of “How fathers can build and foster healthy relationships with their children”. “You need to be intentional, and you need to practice,” urged Luis Estevez who facilitates some of Family Services’ parenting programs and served as the November meeting’s presenter. “Your child is a gift that you receive. Fathers need to be telling their children, ‘I’m your father, and I’m here for you,’ this is what commitment looks like.”

The Greater Lawrence Fathers and Family Network gatherings typically conclude with a generous exchange of information – an opportunity for everyone in attendance to pose some questions, communicate programming news, and most importantly learn from the real life experiences of the others on hand.

To learn more about the Fathers and Family Network, or other family programs, please contact Family Services’ Family Programs Director Betsy Green at: bgreen@fsmv.org or 978-327-6656.
A Community of Mentors...

On Tuesday, November 14, over 30 mentors from Family Services’ Big Friends Little Friends and Stand & Deliver programs gathered for an appreciation dinner at Family Services. In addition to mingling and sharing highlights from the year, the evening’s discussion touched on a few common challenges that those in attendance had faced over the course of a mentoring relationship. Attendees offered suggestions, reflections and ideas that might serve other mentors. Here are just a few of the tips:

**Staying Connected:** There may be times that are harder than others to meet your mentoring commitment. How can mentors navigate these transitions?
- Stay in communication: If you can no longer make a meeting, be honest about your situation, communicate promptly, perhaps using a quick method like text, and if possible, coordinate a substitute (in the case of the Stand & Deliver), or propose a few options for rescheduled dates (in the case of Big Friends Little Friends).
- Block time in your calendar: Communicate your mentoring time commitments with your supervisor, colleagues, or family so that they can help support your commitment.

**Aiming High:** Mentors are key resources for helping young people explore their future and set goals. In what ways can mentors inspire their mentee to aim high?
- Increase your mentee’s exposure to new experiences and options for careers and life goals.
- Establish goals and identify a starting point for each. Help your mentee learn about effective goal-setting by documenting, prioritizing, and making an action plan for his/her goals.
- Attitude is everything: Inspire a growth mindset where your mentee can learn from failure.
- Serve as a role model for your mentee by sharing your own path toward pursuing your life goals. Share not only your successes, but your failures.

To learn more about the resources Family Services provides to its mentors, stay tuned to our website at FSMV.org.

TEACHABLE MOMENT: how one mentor’s advice became a game changer

**Stephanie** has been a huge part of my life. When I met her I had no self esteem. No friends even. She became like family to me. ~ Kareem

**Kareem Cadet** met his mentor Stephanie through Family Services’ Big Friends Little Friends mentoring program. The goal of the program is to develop the positive potential of young people by providing them with support, guidance and friendship. Kareem was in the 5th grade when he sought out a mentor. Fast forward to 2017 when earlier this month Kareem, and his brand Cadet Couture, headlined an evening of fashion and art in Lawrence for a crowd of over 250.

I was matched with Kareem Cadet when he was 9. He marched himself to his school office one day and said he wanted a Big Sister to have fun and make things with! ~ Stephanie

She (Stephanie) told me that you have to believe in yourself before anyone else will believe in you. That was a huge lesson for me. ~ Kareem

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imagine this?

Imagine you wake up one day and you have nothing. Nothing. Not even a picture... Sadly, that has been the reality for the thousands of families displaced by Hurricane Maria, and arriving here in the Merrimack Valley daily. Thank you for your ongoing generosity in helping Family Services’ Family and Community Resource Center to provide winter clothing and food to the many families and children who were impacted by Hurricane Maria and are now arriving in Lawrence from Puerto Rico. At this point we are currently in urgent need of non-perishable food items such as:

**Canned Goods**  
- Rice  
- Cooking Oils  
- Adobo  
- Snacks  
- Cereals  
- Grocery Giftcards

Items for donation can be dropped off at the General Donovan School 145 Franklin Street in Lawrence, MA, between the hours of 8:30 and 3:30 PM, Monday – Friday. For more information, please contact Family Services' Family and Community Resource Center at: 978-975-8800.

Keep current with all of our news at [www.FSMV.org](http://www.FSMV.org), and on social media at: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.