DIRECTOR’S NOTE...
This is what success looks like!

Summer arrived at Family Services of the Merrimack Valley with a host of end of the school year celebrations. These grand finales offered program participants and their families opportunities to reflect on the accomplishments of so many hard working students.

Our Stand & Deliver mentoring program enjoyed a very productive year with over 100 students being honored at capstone celebrations. Special thanks to our program partners: Raytheon, Pfizer, Charles River Lab, New Balance, and Schneider Electric.

In early summer our Essex County CASA program welcomed 12 newly minted volunteer advocates, and in a June graduation reception, our Siempre Papa program honored 13 fathers as they re-committed to bringing their best selves to their parenting responsibilities. Also in June, I had the fortune of being on hand to witness the conclusion of the first year of our new Success Mentors program at Lawrence High School.

These positive outcomes would not be possible without the support we receive from the community. A special THANK YOU to our friends at 100 Women Who Care North of Boston. The organization recently awarded Family Services $10,600 in support of our programs and services.

When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” — Fred Rogers
Here, they are truly part of ... a Family

Eulogio is a single father in Lawrence. He speaks little English. His bright smile rarely dims despite the daily challenge of raising a son all alone in a culture that is new to him. Just after arriving in the Merrimack Valley, Eulogio took a bad fall and broke his leg. That detour further added to his struggles. But, it also prompted him to seek out the support of other parents.

Now, each Wednesday morning Eulogio gathers at Family Services’ Family & Community Resource Center in Lawrence with other local parents and caregivers to exchange experiences and to root for one another through the Parents Helping Parents series. In that company, he has found a home and makes it a point to attend each and every meeting – even arriving an hour early!

“Most people that come here feel very alone. They are new to this country and are maybe working two jobs,” offers Luz Tole- do, a former teacher and the program’s volunteer facilitator (pictured above). “They have issues that come up with their kids, and they have no place to turn for help.”

Eulogio, and to all the other parents who continue to show up in order to be their personal BEST!

The Family & Community Resource Center is Moving!

On September 24, 2018, Family Services’ Family & Community Resource Center will be moving from its current location at 530 Broadway, and open its doors at its new location at 1 Union Street in Lawrence (behind the Essex Art Center). The phone number for the FCRC remains the same: 978-975-8800.

“My name is Ian, and one day ... I’m going to be an artist”

Did you know that Theodore Geisel (a.k.a. Dr. Seuss) was born and raised right here in Massachusetts? Springfield, to be exact. That bit of history is just one example of the many facts that 10 year old Ian has to share. Ian spends much of his free time recreating the illustrations of Dr. Seuss – mostly using a computer. “One day, I’m going to be an artist,” he pronounces. A delightful young man about to enter 4th grade, Ian is one of the many children on our Big Friends Little Friends wait list just hoping to be matched with a caring adult.

A Big Friend who enjoys creative projects, trips to museums and libraries would make for an ideal match with Ian. To learn more about Ian and the many other children who hope to be paired with a mentor, please contact our Big Friends Little Friends program at 978-327-6668.
Each month Family Services plays host to a gathering of professionals with a shared mission... to share best practices for local dads as they parent their children. The group, known as the Fathers & Family Network, is comprised of program directors and other providers from organizations such as Head Start, Healthy Families, The Department of Children and Families, and Children’s Friend & Family Services. For them, these monthly meetings are not to be missed as they provide a platform for learning and also an opportunity to exchange common obstacles and plot solutions.

“Our role is to support these Dads on a community level in their role as co-parents.”
~ Family Programs Director, Betsy Green

In honor of the finish to another productive year supporting fathers, the network recently welcomed a panel of seven men (including Ramon pictured above with Family Services’ Dionis Mezquita) to their June meeting. The panel shared moving personal experiences and the lessons they’ve learned through fatherhood programs and how that type of community support continues to serve their growth as parents.

The Fathers & Family Network is generously funded by The Children’s Trust.

Social & Emotional Fitness

The smallest and simplest of decisions can have tremendous life consequences. This truth fuels the social and emotional fitness lessons offered through Family Services’ ARISE program.

This summer, a group of teens chose to make healthy decisions and emotional growth a priority - and for that we applaud them! They are our ALL STARS.

"With so many other things to do in summertime, I love that the room is full and that these kids continue to join us for this programming," beams Family Services’ Program Coordinator Diana Cortes.

As during the academic year, the group meets to heighten their knowledge related conflict resolution, the benefits of positive body language, anger and time management, effective negotiation skills and a host of other current challenges facing teens today. No summer recess for this Monday – Friday crew!

“Life skills are not hereditary; they must be taught. With this in mind, we dedicate ourselves to building social and emotional fitness in youth and young adults.”

Here are just a few of our ARISE Summer “All Stars”
We have this image that suicide is something that only happens to a certain population. One of the things we were reminded of this past year, with the deaths of well known celebrities, is that suicide plagues all people. In the words of our Samaritans of the Merrimack Valley Director, Deborah Helms. “Suicide never happens out of the blue. You never know what the world feels like from the perspective of someone who is battling deep depression and contemplating suicide.”

Our WALK FOR HOPE happening on Saturday, October 20 is not just another event to raise funds. It’s an occasion for one and all to unite and mobilize in spreading awareness around suicide and its prevention - and to support individuals who have lost a loved-one. Please join us by walking in the event itself, sponsoring another walker or volunteering at the event. To register, or learn more visit: fsmv.org/suicide-prevention/walk-for-hope/.

Don't miss a thing! Follow Family Services of the Merrimack Valley on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.