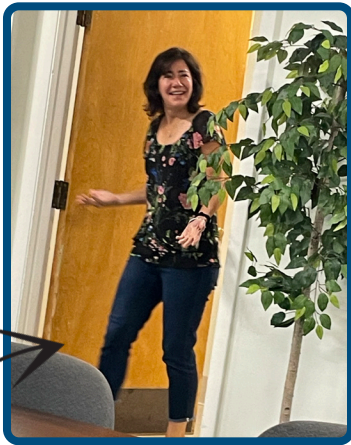


Connection

CEO MESSAGE



Here's me being very surprised by an anniversary party put on by our Board and Staff!

Recently, I celebrated my 30th Anniversary at Family Services! As I reflected on that time, I was struck by how my time here has embodied the mission of our organization. We aim to support and empower individuals as they strive to care for themselves and others, as they work toward education and career goals, and as they seek to be positive members of their community.

Like everyone, I am not

immune from needing that support myself, and have received it in spades from all my co-workers throughout the years. I am a better co-worker, friend and parent for having worked here, and I hope I've provided that to others as well.

Thank you to everyone who has made these years so meaningful. It has been an honor to be part of this team!

Warmly,



Elizabeth Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer



A SEASON OF GIVING

This is a wonderful time of year when people give gifts to family, friends and organizations that they love. We hope that Family Services' mission of care and support to our community's most vulnerable children and families will inspire you to include Family Services in your year end giving.

Contributions to Family Services supports individuals like Jenifer. Just a few years ago, at age 14, Jenifer was new to this community, did not speak English, and was overwhelmed with helping her family stay afloat. School was not a priority and college wasn't even a consideration.

Today, Jenifer is a student at Northern Essex Community College and thanks Family Services for making the difference.

In grade 9, Jenifer joined Family Services' Stand & Deliver mentoring program and was matched with a mentor, Karen (above). Stand & Deliver provides academic mentors to Lawrence students, supporting them with their schoolwork and providing a window into career success. Most importantly, mentors guide them through the difficulty of (cont. inside)



SEASON OF GIVING (Cont.)

... being an adolescent in a disadvantaged community and toward professional and personal achievement.

Immediately after being matched with Karen, Jenifer recognized the value of that relationship. *"She made me feel like I could do anything I set my mind to,"* Jenifer said.

As her confidence grew, Jenifer started to envision a future that included college. With Karen's support, Jenifer made a plan to get there. Karen helped with school work, facilitated scholarship applications, and helped Jenifer network with other college students and professionals.

Jenifer is now a sophomore in pursuit of a bachelor's degree in Nursing. As she graduated from the program, Jenifer reflected that *"Family Services has done so much for me. They helped me to improve my English, guided me through the process of choosing a college...I am so grateful."*

We hope Jenifer's story will inspire you to make this transformation possible for even more young people. **Will you make a difference with a contribution to Family Services** so that we can continue to support Jenifer and more students like her? Give at FSMV.org/giving or scan the QR code below. **Thank you!**

SCAN TO GIVE



"Jenifer is a wonderful example of how young people can achieve great things when given the right support and encouragement."

~ Karen,
Family Services' Mentor

YOUNG PARENTS

Parenting is not easy! When a young person becomes a parent during adolescence or early adulthood, the challenges are even greater. Completing their education becomes more difficult, going through the regular milestones of teenage life gets complicated, and managing relationships and self care can seem impossible.

Family Services' young parent programs help parents navigate all these challenges and more. Program staff work individually with parents to set and achieve goals, and work with young parents as a group to create a positive peer support network. And sometimes to just have a little fun!

Recently, Family Services' Young Parenting participants enjoyed a Thanksgiving celebration full of fun craft activities, good food, and big smiles.



Walk for Hope

On October 21, 2023, Family Services hosted its 7th annual Walk for Hope to raise awareness about suicide prevention and end the stigma surrounding mental health. We moved the event indoors last minute (thank you **Andover High School!**) due to weather, but no amount of rain could dampen our resolve. Once again we were joined by so many people, many of whom have been personally affected by suicide, and dedicated to making a difference.

Thank you to our generous event sponsors: **Enterprise Bank, Mike's Family, Kirk & McDonald CPAs PC, Morse Technologies, Windover Construction, Anna Jaques Hospital, The Savings Bank, R.C. Lafond Insurance, David Electrical, Cedardale Health & Fitness, and LMHS, PC.**

Funding generated from the Walk supports Family Services' Samaritans of Merrimack Valley suicide prevention and post-vention program, which includes trainings, support for survivors, and community outreach and education. Learn more about the Samaritans work here: [Stop-suicide.org](https://stop-suicide.org).

Support for Survivors

Family Services' Samaritans of Merrimack Valley program is dedicated to supporting individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide. The grieving process in the wake of suicide is often complicated by the stigma that surrounds suicide. If you have lost a loved one to suicide:

- you may find that even close friends can't talk about the death from fear of upsetting you;
- you may be overwhelmed by intense anger and worry about the rest of the family falling apart;
- you may discover that the pain and grieving does not stop, in spite of your determined efforts; or
- you may wonder if you will ever be able to live fully and joyfully again.

But... You are not alone! For more information about any of our support services, please call 978-327-6671 or email Samaritans@fsmv.org.



Safe Place Support Group for Adults

Safe Place is a suicide survivor support group for adults (18+) who have lost a loved one to suicide. Safe Place provides space to grieve, share difficulties, and find support from peers. Meetings are facilitated by a peer suicide survivor and are confidential and free.

Safe Place meets in North Andover on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at Saint Michael Parish at 196 Main Street.

Every child deserves the chance to grow up in a safe, nurturing and permanent home. This core belief is the driving principle behind Family Services' Essex County CASA program. If you share that belief and are ready to join us in making it happen, consider becoming a CASA volunteer. Although we recently trained a new class of volunteers (below), the need remains immense. Essex County CASA is able to advocate for only a fraction of the children removed from their homes and put in foster care each year. Scan the QR code below to see how you can get involved!



YOUTH DIVERSION

Family Services' Youth Diversion program is a resource for juvenile courts, law enforcement, and families to keep young people out of the juvenile justice system, hold them accountable for wrongful actions, and support them in taking steps in a more positive direction. Family Services has been implementing a pilot Diversion Program in Essex County since 2021 and is proud to announce a new partnership with **District Attorney Paul Tucker** (shown below).

Atty. Tucker and his team recently visited Family Services to talk about successes and challenges with the program and to increase access to Diversion opportunities for youth in Essex County. Read more about the impact of the program on the reverse side.



TRAININGS AVAILABLE

FREE!

Do you regularly interact with young people? Do you want to make a difference in the youth mental health crisis? Then these trainings are for YOU!

Family Services is pleased to offer Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) and Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) **FREE** for individuals and groups throughout the region.

Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) is a 2-hour suicide prevention training where participants will learn: how to recognize a suicidal crisis, how to persuade the individual with hope and support, and about resources available to those who are struggling. QPR is perfect for the everyday person and will teach skills necessary to save a life!

Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) is a 5-hour training designed for adults who interact with young people and teaches them how to help an adolescent experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge.

Scan QR code for more info and upcoming **FREE** training registration.



ATTENTION: If you are a teacher, school staff, coach, camp counselor, youth group leader, parent, or any adult who works with or cares about youth, **this training is essential!**

YOUTH DIVERSION (Cont.)

Dear Readers,

My name is Maria. Before the Diversion Program, I was struggling with mental health challenges, charges of assault and battery, terrible relationships with the people around me and overall, I was severely unhappy. I would say that the Diversion Program was my stepping stone. Through the Diversion Program, I was introduced to my job, and learned coping skills. Without the Diversion Program most of my progress would be non-existent.

In the first meeting with my Diversion Coordinator, Michelle Martinez, we went through all of the necessary paperwork and assessments, but also, she showed me that she wasn't there to judge me, instead she was there to help me. After Michelle found out that I like to write, she helped me find a writing internship in Lawrence, on top of that, she helped me fill out the application. Without her telling me about it, I wouldn't have been able to experience new things and have a job that helps me further my creativity and writing skills.

Today, I am a sophomore with decent grades, I have completed therapy, and continue to use the coping skills learned from the Diversion Program. I have learned to let things go when people hurt me, to not let the actions of others impact me negatively, and to focus on myself and my emotions before they get out of hand, and I truly wouldn't be here without the Diversion Program.

My job is going really good. I have made new friends and I recently just got my first paycheck! My job gives me a sense of responsibility and freedom. I work in creative writing and soon will perform one of my poems at an event. There have been and will continue to be so many new opportunities for me, thanks to this Program.

Thank you to Michelle Martinez and the Diversion Program for allowing me to show that I could be more than a troubled girl and for giving me opportunities that I never would have imagined I could have. And most of all, thank you for believing in me and my growth.

Sincerely, Maria

AMIGOS MENTORING

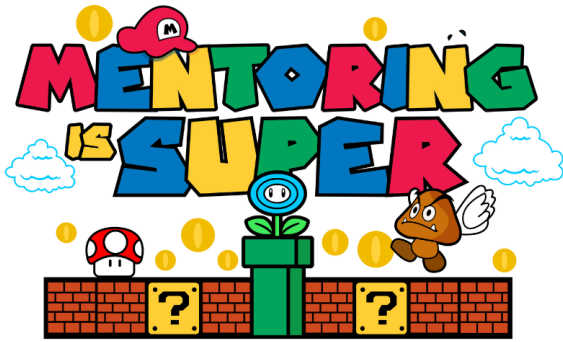
Young people who have been exposed to violence, gang activity, and who are struggling in school are at high risk for becoming involved in the justice system. But just as these circumstances create risk, other factors can protect young people from those negative outcomes. Research shows that one of the most impactful protective factors is mentoring! Having a caring adult role model has proven to improve short and long term outcomes for kids in school and in life.

Family Services has recently launched a new mentoring initiative that specifically aims to intervene in the lives of young people whose life circumstances may lead them to crime, violence, and gang involvement. This program is slightly different from our other mentoring initiatives in that it involves a higher level of engagement from mentors and includes wrap around services that address other concerns for the young person and their family.

"We know that kids at high risk for involvement in the justice system have additional needs in school and at home," says Leah Feroce, Family Services' Mentoring Director. "So this program is designed with more robust support services for the young person and their family."

We recently matched our first Amigos mentor and mentee (shown left). Angel "Ace" Vasquez and Wilbert (below), are both feeling lucky to be in each other's lives. Are you interested in mentoring? Email TLopez@fsmv.org.





SAVE THE DATE

BOWL A STRIKE FOR KIDS

- 📅 Friday, March 8, 2024
- 📍 Academy Lanes in Haverhill, MA
- 🌐 Bowler registration open and sponsorship opportunities available!
- ☎️ 978-327-6608

LEARN MORE:

FSMV.org/bowl-a-strike-for-kids-2024



We believe that every child, given the right support, can achieve great things.

If you believe that too, join us!

Bowl a Strike for Kids provides the funding necessary to match children with positive adult role models so they can succeed in school and set positive goals for their future. When you support mentoring, YOU change the lives of young people in a profound and positive way.

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