



Winter 2025

# Connection

## CEO MESSAGE

As we begin 2025, Family Services of the Merrimack Valley is entering its 171st year of operations. WOW! That is an incredible milestone and one that fills us with pride. We could not have reached this point without the support of so many, including YOU.

With just over one month of 2025 behind us, it's clear that the importance of our work and the value of our mission is more critical than ever. We are all living through difficult times, but for the children and families we serve, the stakes are exceptionally high. So we're rising to the challenge and doubling down on our mission and our values. We are finding new and creative ways to offer emotional and practical support to families in need. With new programming or new service delivery models, we are committed to meeting the moment.

At this time, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you—our supporters—for your ongoing commitment to our organization and our mission. It is your belief in Family Services that enables us to continue to do this essential work day in and day out. Together, we've created a foundation of hope and compassion for so many, and for that, we are profoundly thankful.

Warmly,

Elizabeth Sweeney  
Chief Executive Officer



## LIFELINE RECEIVED ACCREDITATION

Family Services' **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** was recently re-accredited by the **International Council for Helplines**. What does that mean? It means that everything we do on the Lifeline, from hiring and training staff to supporting individuals at imminent risk of suicide, is done in alignment with best practices, ethical conduct, and evidence-based interventions.

Individuals and organizations throughout the region can rest assured that when they call 988 from Essex, Berkshire, or Franklin MA counties, one of our trained crisis line specialists will provide the critical support they need.

For more information about our Lifeline, visit [FSMV.org/Lifeline](https://FSMV.org/Lifeline).



# PARENTING PROGRAMS

## YOUNG PARENT GRADUATES

Congratulations to all of the young parents who recently graduated from Family Services' **Young Parent Programs!**

Data on economic and health outcomes for young parents and their children is not always hopeful. When a young person becomes pregnant in their teen years, their education is often derailed and the health of the young parent and their children can be compromised in many ways. But those outcomes are not a foregone conclusion. With support and resources, young parents can thrive in every area of their lives, and so can their children!

Family Services recently celebrated the graduation of several young parents from our Young Parent Programs. After months of hard work toward personal goals, these young parents have gained skills, knowledge, and wisdom beyond their years.

We are incredibly proud of your hard work and dedication. It has been our privilege to be a part of their journey and witness their growth. We know they and their children have bright futures ahead!



## MEETING BASIC NEEDS COMES FIRST

Family Services' **Family & Community Resource Center** (FCRC), located at One Union Street in Lawrence, is committed to helping families thrive. To do that, the FCRC provides vital basic needs such as clothing, baby care items, and nutrition assistance to families so that they have the capacity to pursue other goals like securing housing, jobs, and education for their kids.

To help us meet those basic needs, Family Services' recently received an amazing donation of clothing essentials from **Cradles to Crayons**, Boston. They delivered: 80 cases of diapers, 52 bundles of clothes, and boxes of children's books – all of which are being distributed to families in need.

In addition to the provision of basic needs, Family Services' FCRC also provides parent education classes, after-school groups for teens, playgroups, and support groups. Services are free and available to anyone living in Essex County. See contact info below to find out more.



One Union St, Lawrence  
978-975-8800  
Betsy Green, FCRC Director  
BGreen@fsmv.org



## ANNOUNCEMENT!

### New Support Groups Coming Soon

In its effort to reduce the incidence of suicide and support suicide loss survivors in Massachusetts, Family Services' Samaritans program is initiating new and expanded support groups.

#### Coming Soon...

- **Suicide Loss Survivor Virtual Support Group**  
"Safe Place" will be a virtual drop-in group that is peer-led, free, and confidential for adults (18+) who have lost a loved one to suicide. This group provides a safe place to grieve and receive support after a loss.

This virtual Safe Place group supplements the existing in-person group, which meets on the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Saint Michael Parish in North Andover. Prior registration is not required.

- **Suicide Attempt Survivor Support Group**  
This peer-led virtual support group offers a safe, non-judgmental space for individuals with a history of a suicide attempt to share their thoughts and feelings, connecting with others who have similar lived experiences. *Pre-registration for this group is required.*
- **LGBTQIA+ Support Group**  
Recognizing the unique circumstances and mental health challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community, the Samaritans will be offering a new virtual peer support group for adult (18+) members of the LGBTQIA+ community. This free, confidential space will be held for attendees to share challenges and coping strategies, and find community with peers.

All groups are free, confidential, and peer-led. Groups will meet bi-weekly (2x/month) on dates and times to be determined by participants. Anyone interested should use the contact information at right to share interest and suggest dates and times.



## Interested?

Use the contact information here to let us know and share the dates and times that work best for you!

e: [Samaritans@FSMV.org](mailto:Samaritans@FSMV.org)

p: 978-327-6671

w: [Stop-Suicide.org](http://Stop-Suicide.org)





## ESSEX COUNTY CASA

New CASA volunteer training happening soon!

SCAN HERE  
TO INQUIRE



Family Services' **Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)** program is seeking caring adults who want to lend their voice to a child in need.

CASA volunteers advocate for abused and neglected children in court. With in depth training and ongoing support and coaching from staff, CASA volunteers make a pivotal difference in the lives of our society's most vulnerable children.

Just listen to what our current volunteers have to say.....

*"It's hard to put into words the sense of fulfillment that comes from fighting for the rights of a child who's been neglected, abused, or abandoned."*

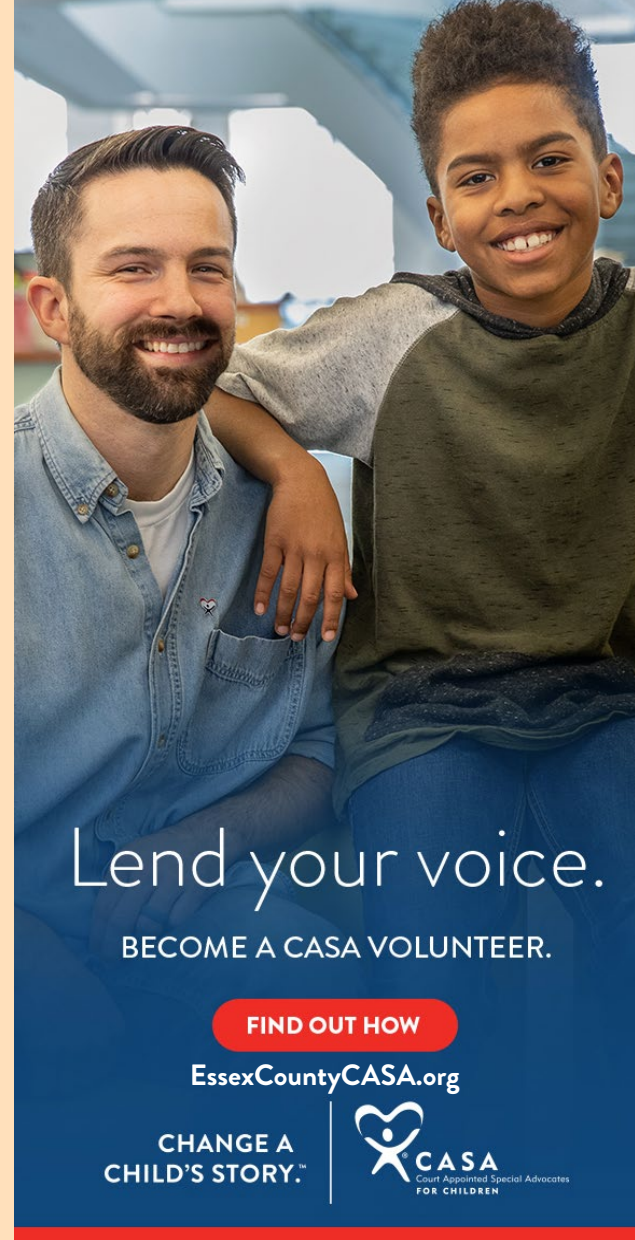
- Klara V.

*"There is no greater reward than to know that my efforts have contributed to a better life for vulnerable children."*

Kathy F.

*"It's deeply rewarding to be able to give a child a voice in determining their own future. Every child deserves to be heard and respected, especially during difficult and pivotal times."*

-Claire P.




Lend your voice.  
BECOME A CASA VOLUNTEER.

**FIND OUT HOW**

EssexCountyCASA.org

CHANGE A CHILD'S STORY.™

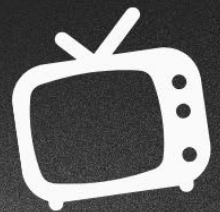


## SAVE THE DATE

**SAVE THE DATE**  
**THURSDAY, MAY 8, 2025**

A "Family Matters"  
Sitcom Gala

Black Swan Country Club  
Georgetown, MA





## BIG FRIENDS LITTLE FRIENDS

The holiday season brought a wave of joy and connection to our mentoring department, as our **Big Friends, Little Friends**, and **Amigos** mentoring programs hosted their 2024 holiday celebrations in December.

We were able to hand out over 100 beautifully wrapped gifts to children and families at our festive holiday event. We are deeply grateful to our amazing gift sponsors—**Christ Church of Andover, Netscout, and Kiwanis Club of Greater Lawrence**—who not only purchased gifts, but also lent their hands to make the event unforgettable. Their involvement brought laughter, festive music, dancing, and even holiday karaoke to our celebration.

Many of our mentees enjoyed the festivities alongside their families and volunteer mentors, creating an atmosphere filled with gratitude and the spirit of the season. The mentoring staff is sincerely appreciative of the remarkable support we've received both internally and from our broader community, enabling us to fulfill the gift wishes of the youth in our mentoring programs.

This celebration was more than just an event; it was a beautiful way to conclude the year, leaving us all with cherished memories and a renewed sense of togetherness.



## NEW MATCHES

Family Services' **Big Friends Little Friends** mentoring program has taken a bite out of its waiting list in recent weeks! Thanks to the motivation and commitment of many community members who are making the time to give back, we've matched eight young people in 2025 alone (see pictures of some of them below).

YOU can join this illustrious group! While we've been making lots of matches, the wait list remains over 60 young people waiting to be matched with a mentor. Visit [FSMV.org/Mentoring](https://FSMV.org/Mentoring) or scan the code below to be the difference in a child's life.



Scan to become a mentor!



Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit 151  
Mailed from 03079

430 North Canal Street  
Lawrence, MA 01840  
FSMV.org

Address Service Requested

## YOU have a role in saving a life.

To learn how you can support young people in crisis and prevent suicide, register for Family Services' next QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training.

QPR is a 1.5-hour training designed to teach adults who regularly interact with young people about the warning signs of a suicide crisis and equip them with simple tools to respond.

Trainings are open to anyone with an interest in helping young people and are delivered via Zoom.

March, April and May, 2025 dates available!



**FREE**



Chance to win \$100!\*

\*Upon completion of course work and all follow-up surveys

### 1 Question

Learn how to ask about a person's thoughts of suicide.

### 2 Persuade

Persuade the person to accept help and keep living.

### 3 Refer

Refer the person to professional health and other resources.

### Register Today

✉ [kpfeiffer@fsmv.org](mailto:kpfeiffer@fsmv.org)

☎ 978.327.6662

🌐 [FSMV.org/trainings](https://www.fsmv.org/trainings)

