DIRECTOR’S NOTE
...We’re in this together

It is during times like these that I am proud to be a part of Family Services, working to advance equity and support families across Essex County. For over 165 years, Family Services has addressed the most pressing challenges facing our communities. Today, we are facing a grave threat to our health and economic stability, which is disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable among us.

At Family Services, we know the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-term effect on the mental health of individuals, both young and old. From isolation to anxiety, the Coronavirus has touched almost every area of our emotional wellbeing. **Addressing these invisible wounds is exactly what Family Services does best.**

As you will see in these pages, we are rising to the challenge, employing creative and compassionate solutions to help children and families overcome these obstacles and achieve their full potential.

We know that each day is bringing new challenges. We also know that together we will meet every obstacle with ingenuity, compassion, resilience, fortitude, and integrity.

**When we stand together, there is hope.** In times like these, we are reminded of how interconnected we all are. Thank you for being part of our community.

Warmly,

Elizabeth Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer

BY THE NUMBERS
...We’re not slowing down

Although Family Services staff began working remotely in mid-March, as the following numbers show, we certainly did not slow down!

- **1,120** wellness calls to clients
- **88** Chromebooks provided to students in need
- **4,000** telehealth and emergency in person mental health sessions held
- **128** remote workshops and trainings held
- **1,291** families provided with items for child and baby care (diapers, wipes, formula, gift cards)
- **7,125** calls answered on suicide prevention helpline

*Our staff serves the community with a smile!*
CELEBRATE SUCCESS

Family Services is so proud to honor and celebrate the men and women who participate in our parent education programs - they are some of the most inspiring people we know.

This past spring, our Siempre Papa fatherhood program graduated 13 fathers (via Zoom). This eight-week program focuses on skills to help empower men to be better fathers and partners.

Family Services was also excited to graduate 21 parents from our Young Empowered Parents program in June! As one young mom stated, “I am grateful and happy I became a client for [Family Services]. They are literally my family in my eyes. All of them are so nice and kind and I just pray to keep the experience that was given to me for life so I can continue doing better for me and my son.” - Lemari

Family Services welcomes Danielle Emig (right) as the new Director of its Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program.

Danielle has been a volunteer with the program since 2018 and in that role has advocated for children in several cases. Danielle has a Master of Public Health from Boston University and most recently served as the Director of Business Development for a data sciences group at the Boston University School of Public Health.

“I am thrilled to be joining Family Services as CASA Director. It has long been a goal of mine to work more closely with vulnerable populations. To have the opportunity to pursue this as a career is a dream come true for me.”

CASA recruits, trains and supports volunteers who advocate on behalf of abused and neglected children throughout Essex County. Each year, over 90,000 children in the Massachusetts are involved in the state’s child welfare system. Instead of enjoying the natural rites of childhood and making happy family memories, they’re attending court hearings, adjusting to foster homes and transitioning to new schools. These children need a voice, and that’s why CASA is here.

Danielle hit the ground running, beginning a training class for 14 new CASA volunteers who will be sworn in as Advocates in August.

To learn how you can become a CASA volunteer, visit EssexCountyCASA.org.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

Our Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) works continuously to respond to the needs of the community. Recently, the FCRC held a Diaper Drive to collect formula and diapers for our clients and the response was overwhelming! With the generosity of the community, we were able to provide more than 848 families with these necessary items in collaboration with the Lawrence YMCA.

Additionally, in cooperation with the UMASS Lowell Nutrition program, the FCRC launched a series of live online cooking demonstrations! Our clients received the recipe and ingredients in advance of the session and then connected with others online for the opportunity to prepare a healthy family meal! A fun, and delicious night for all!
YOUTH MENTORING

Family Services supports 290 youth-mentor matches that give kids positive adult role models to look up to. Since March, 2020, those relationships have had to go virtual. But mentors like Amanda Becotte understand that kids need mentors now more than ever.

Becotte is a mentor to 17 year old Nanyeli Perez, a rising Senior at Lawrence High School. Together they participate in Stand & Deliver, a Family Services’ academic mentoring program conducted in partnership with Raytheon Missiles & Defense.

In a virtual environment, Becotte continues to help Perez navigate life’s challenges and stay on track to achieve her goals. That is no easy task for a young person who, besides keeping up with school work, is also responsible for helping care for her 7 year old sister and 79 year old grandmother, and maintaining an after-school job.

Becotte, who has mentored Perez for two years, is staying connected with her through frequent calls, texts, emails and video chats. She also records and sends personal messages to remind Perez she’s not alone in the crisis. “If it’s tough on us, it must be even harder on them,” said Becotte. “It’s so important we be there for them … and ease their minds a little. It’s the least we can do.”

With Becotte’s urging, Perez entered the early college program in her junior year. “She’ll reach out to me whenever she needs help on her high school or college classes — sometimes it’s on a Friday night or a Sunday morning,” Becotte said. Typically, the pair will work together virtually on homework, allowing Becotte to give Perez guidance on the next step.

Once Perez completes her associate’s degree in chemistry, she plans to transfer to the University of Massachusetts-Lowell to earn a bachelor’s degree in biochemistry, and then pursue a master’s degree. Whatever her path, we’re sure Nanyeli will go far!

Prior to the pandemic, Amanda & Nanyeli met weekly at Raytheon in Andover for some fun and some school work.

SAMARITANS OF THE MERRIMACK VALLEY

As we continue to navigate through this uncertain time, we know that the toll the pandemic is taking on mental health is enormous. Family Services cannot treat a fever, but we can help people manage anxiety, cope with stress and maintain self-care. One way we do this is through our Samaritans of Merrimack Valley program, which aims to reduce the incidences of suicide in the Merrimack Valley and throughout Massachusetts.

Our Samaritans staff is doing an exceptional job as they re-imagine and deliver quality programs and services to the community:

- The crisis helpline has seen an increase of over 100 calls per week on its crisis helpline. The helpline volunteers are working harder than ever to answer every call and provide caring, compassionate support.
- Safe Place groups are now offered on a virtual platform in both Beverly and North Andover. The Safe Place group is a suicide survivor support group for adults (over 18) who have lost a loved one to suicide.
- Trainings have been provided to 205 professionals on suicide prevention and intervention.

To find out more about the Samaritans services, visit FSMV.org/Samaritans. See reverse side for information on the Samaritans 4th annual Walk for Hope.

Confidential crisis helplines are available to anyone who is lonely, despairing, suicidal or needing someone to listen.

This service is available daily from 8:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. by calling: 866-912-HOPE (4673) or 978-327-6607
JOIN US and make a difference

Walk for Hope
October 11-17, 2020

The world may look a little different right now, but one thing has not changed: our commitment to reducing the incidence of suicide throughout Essex County.

Because we can not gather together, this year’s Samaritans Walk for Hope is everywhere—on every sidewalk, track and trail! This virtual Walk for Hope will take place October 11-17, culminating in a live online event on October 17, at 9:30 a.m. We invite you to join with family and friends in small groups while others in the community do the same.

▶ To register visit: fsmv.org/walkforhope
▶ For more info, contact: DHelms@FSMV.org

Online Gala Auction
September 14-20, 2020

Although we couldn't gather for our annual Spring Gala, our work continues, the needs increase and we remain committed to supporting families! So, we're going virtual! Help us raise $20,000 through our online auction so that we can continue to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families, who are struggling now more than ever.

The auction will run September 14-20. Our auction items will delight and surprise! Tell everyone you know... the bidding begins on September 14!

▶ To register visit: fsmv.org/onlineauction
▶ For more info, contact: Rgonzalez@FSMV.org

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