

Connection

Winter 2018/19

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

...At Your Service

The numbers are in! According to data provided by our Program Directors, in our recent fiscal year ending 9/30/18, Family Services of the Merrimack Valley served **7,269 people**. This figure represents HUGE growth over the past few years. Knowing the transformative impact that each of our programs have, I hope that everyone (including our staff, volunteers, Board of Directors, donors, and partners) feels proud of their involvement with Family Services!

As we wind down 2018, we continue to drive outcomes and expand our services. This year saw the expansion of our **Success Mentors** program at Lawrence High School and the Arlington Middle School, a new **Big Friends Little Friends** video campaign airing at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, and our ongoing role in the community relief efforts related to the Columbia Gas disaster recovery effort.



Some of the staff who make our impact possible: (L to R) Aida Castro, Inoelia Fernandez, Michelle Martinez, and Leah Feroce (top).

These positive outcomes would not be possible without the support we receive from YOU. As we celebrate our tremendous growth and close out a historic 2018, we hope you will consider the difference your generosity makes in the lives of so many here in the Merrimack Valley!

Elizabeth Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer

SPECIAL STATEMENT

...our role in the gas fire emergency

Family Services has been honored to join with the **Essex County Community Foundation** to help distribute much needed financial resources to residents of Greater Lawrence affected by the September Gas Disaster. In fact, ECCF's **Greater Lawrence Disaster Relief Fund** has given over \$10 million to affected residents!

With the generous support of the **New Balance Foundation** and the **United Way of Mass Bay and Merrimack Valley**, Family Services is also offering to help folks to address their mental health needs and the effects of this traumatic event. Family Services is now offering individual counseling and group support at no cost to residents during the months of December and January.

These free counseling sessions are intended to help affected residents learn strategies to cope with the emotional toll this event has taken.

To inquire about Gas Disaster related free counseling sessions, call 978-327-6632. *Availability is limited.*

Where the Heart Is...

This October, our **Family & Community Resource Center** relocated to its new home at **One Union Street in Lawrence**. It did not take long for the center to reestablish its role as a place to call home for many in Greater Lawrence. To learn more about the Center's programs and hours of operation, call 978-975-8800. Below is a glimpse of the Family & Community Resource Center's recent holiday celebration.



"I JUST WANT TO HELP OUT A KID"

"I have some time. My wife and I do not have any children. I just want to help out a kid," shares **Andover Firefighter Ian Timmons** on a recent Tuesday afternoon. And so here he is at Family Services' making good on his intention and being matched with Joel, a bright-eyed 4th grader who attends Lawrence's Arlington School. On that afternoon, the two were "matched" – the term used to signify their new status as **Big Friend** (Ian) and **Little Friend** (Joel). The meeting was a moment brimming with smiles for both the mentor and mentee.

With a wait list of over 100 local children seeking a mentor through Family Service's **Big Friends, Little Friends** program, Joel and his Mom have anticipated "match day" for some time. Same goes for Ian... "Over the years, friends always ask me to be a godfather to their kids. I've always wanted to do this. Now, here we are."

"When I grow up, I want to be a policeman," announces Joel to everyone on hand for the



meeting. With his new Big Friend the nine-year old will likely get a glimpse of the lives of those like Ian who serve the public.

Family Services is grateful to Ian for carving out some time, despite his long hours and demanding duties. To learn how you can become a mentor, call 978-327-6686 or visit FSMV.org.

"A GENUINE FEELING OF CARING"

Hundreds on Hand for Second Annual "Walk for Hope"

One of the intentions behind the Walk for Hope, created by a group of dedicated **Samaritans of the Merrimack Valley** volunteers, was to offer a space for healing and celebrating lives lost, but also to create a community of comfort and conversation about suicide. With the Second Annual Walk for Hope, which took place on October 20, hundreds came out in force to extend that spirit. As one walker pointed out "there's just a genuine feeling of caring here."

From extended families and bands of teams to puppies and pals, all were spirited up in a show of support for suicide prevention. "You

know when you get a hug from someone who lost a loved one here, it's a sincere hug – they know," shared one participant. "That's a person who has walked in your shoes." **THANK YOU** to everyone for pitching in for this powerful event.



THAT ONE VOICE

CASA Welcomes New Advocates

"I'm at a point in life where my children are older, and I have the time," shares **Heather Howe** of North Andover upon being sworn in as a **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** through our **Essex County CASA** program. "I love children, and I want to be that ONE voice which helps a kid establish a foundation," adds Ms. Howe (pictured above, left).



Nearly 700,000 children in the United States experience abuse or neglect each year. Instead of enjoying the natural rites of childhood and making happy family memories, they're attending court hearings, adjusting to new foster homes and transitioning to new schools.

Nationwide, some 77,000 trained volunteers have taken the CASA oath to "faithfully advocate for the best interest for the children with whom they are assigned." "This service is calling to me," said another new Advocate **Suzanne Miller** (above, center with new CASA Advocate and FSMV intern from **Merrimack College, Mary Theresa Cuzzupe**, right). "I look at all that I did for my own kids and feel that EVERY kid should have that."

SUCCESS MENTORS

Kicks Off 2nd Year at Lawrence High School

In the middle of his Freshman year, Manny (below, left) was thinking about dropping out of school. After joining the **Success Mentors** program and being matched with Elija (below, right), Manny is now back for his Sophomore year with improved grades and a place on the football team.

"We're inspired every day by the dedication of these volunteers and the transformation these students make" said Michelle Martinez, Success Mentor Program Coordinator. Family Services is dedicated to giving people the tools to overcome obstacles, for many young people, the most powerful tool is someone to look up to. To learn more, visit FSMV.org.



CAKE BOSS...

Meet Hannah Finn of the One Wish Project

Throughout her childhood **Hannah Finn's** Mom made certain that she and her brothers felt special on their birthdays. That family tradition made a big imprint on Hannah – an imprint that she now channels through her service as the founder of the Andover-based **One Wish Project**. The project, a labor of love, was launched in 2017 in conjunction with **Lazarus House**. It's original mission was to provide a special birthday experience to children and young teen residents by presenting the Birthday Girl or Birthday Boy with a custom homemade cake (baked by Hannah), party decorations and presents. Over time the project's scope has grown and they now partner with two additional shelters.



Family Services of the Merrimack Valley is beyond pleased to welcome the **One Wish Project** as a new fiscal partner! We recently caught up with Hannah as she makes her way through her Junior year at Andover High School... Among the topics covered, we asked her how the One Wish Project changed her life?

"The One Wish Project has opened my eyes about the extent of the homeless issues, even in our own community, and has taught me how important it is to try and help other in need. It's shown me what it means to be a leader and a role model for younger children who can also learn how to give back in their own ways."

Save the Date

WHAT: **Bowl a Strike For Kids!**
Family Services' annual event to raise funding to match young people with positive adult role models. This year's theme: 1980's fashion!

WHERE: Academy Lanes, Bradford, MA

WHEN: Friday, March 8, 2019
2 hour shifts from 4:00 - 10:00 P.M.

JOIN: Create a team, join a team, bowl on your own... Visit FSMV.org/Bowling to join the fun!

For more information on participating, becoming a sponsor, donating to the raffle, or any other question about Bowl A Strike for Kids, email Rosey at Rgonzalez@FSMV.org or call 978-327-6608.



430 North Canal Street
Lawrence, MA 01840
FSMV.org

Address Service Requested

Non Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lawrence, MA
Permit #210