

ON THE HORIZON:

Family Services plans for a new Domestic Violence Shelter



family
services



When the Domestic Violence Shelter opened in Winston-Salem in 1978 it was the first shelter of its kind in North Carolina, and one of only two similar shelters between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. First operated by the YMCA, the shelter was autonomous for a few years before Family Services became the primary operator in 1985. Over the last 46 years the shelter has moved through four locations, each one carefully selected to provide private, safe refuge for domestic violence survivors and their children.

The current location is larger than previous shelters, but at nearly 100 years old the building is in desperate need of repair and re-outfitting to better serve its guests. Put simply, “we need a new facility,” says Victim Advocate Case Manager Pat Dean, who has worked with the shelter since it first opened its doors. She describes issues the staff has encountered over the years: Challenges with plumbing and HVAC, issues with the foundation, and high susceptibility to water damage all plague the shelter. Additionally, the design of the facility is not trauma-informed, and rooms are not ideal for guests. “They are small and not accommodating for a woman with three children, for example,” explains Dean. A workaround has been to cut a door between two rooms, creating a suite with more living space.

Family Services President and CEO Traci Ross was surprised when she first visited the shelter. Already apprised of mounting maintenance expenses, she expected to step into an inviting, albeit old, home. Instead, she found dormitory-style living and interior furnishings that felt sterile—“the opposite of welcoming and safe,” she recalls. Quick to praise the shelter staff for doing a tremendous job with the resources available to them, Ross points out that the need is now too great to ignore. “Victims deserve a home,” she says.

The shelter, last renovated in 1988, will soon see an opportunity for change.

“We’re in the planning phase of a new campaign,” shares Chief Operating Officer Michelle Speas, “one that will allow us to start from scratch and move forward with

designing and constructing a brand new facility.” The Family Services Board of Directors has already approved the campaign, and cabinet members have been recruited for an initial meeting earlier this spring. A quiet phase will then be underway, with public campaign details to be announced in the spring of 2025.

Last year, a grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust helped to lay the groundwork for the new campaign. It provided funding for Family Services to interview 30 domestic violence survivors about their experiences with short- and long-term housing. From this field work, a plan began to take shape. The campaign will support the building of a new facility, but it is the hope of Dean, Ross, and Speas that services for those staying at the shelter will also be bolstered. Many shelter services are supported by federal and state grants, but having more room in which to deliver them can be beneficial as programmatic funding requests are made. “And we intend for the structure itself to give us more room to deliver existing services,” adds Ross. A computer lab will assist in job searches. Larger spaces for children’s programming will meet the needs of the shelter population.

Dean hopes the new facility will also create the space (both physically and through programming) to welcome survivors back into the work of the shelter. “They were actually the ones who started this movement,” she explains. “I’d like to make it more inviting for them to come and go. I want them to remember they have a voice, and not to feel limited to speaking up occasionally in a survivor’s group. They’ve been told so much that they can’t do anything. I want them to feel peace, comfort, and connection to the shelter.”

There is a long road ahead to raise funds for, build, and open a new shelter. But momentum is growing and excitement is palpable. “This is a once in a lifetime build for our community,” says Speas. “The work is just beginning, but will be transformational. The new shelter will change lives for years to come.”



“They come to the shelter from unimaginably difficult circumstances, and this should be the first place where they start to recognize their value. Our current shelter makes this challenging. We need to do better, and it’s time to come together as a community.

-Traci Ross, Family Services President & CEO

To discover ways to support the Domestic Violence Shelter, whether as a volunteer or through a financial gift, please contact Michelle Speas at Mspeas@FamilyServicesForsyth.org.

GROGAN SOCIETY REFLECTS ON 10 YEARS OF TRANSFORMATIVE GIVING



Named for agency founder Annie Grogan, the Grogan Society has been the cornerstone of Family Services' annual giving program for ten years. It brings together individuals and organizations deeply committed to addressing the educational, physical, social, and economic needs of families in the Winston-Salem community.

"Grogan Society members are our biggest advocates and the lifeblood of the work we do," says Chief Operating Officer Michelle Speas. "They have been at the forefront of our most successful campaigns and initiatives—not only as donors but as partners." Speas joined Family Services in 2011 to build the agency's philanthropic arm. Surprised by how few people knew about the agency's work, she introduced the community to Family Services. Volunteers hosted informational meetings with individuals and coordinated small group gatherings—a core group of supporters eager to contribute financially to support Family Services programs developed. The Grogan Society was born.

Over the years, the giving society has boasted a high retention rate, currently at 91%. The membership threshold is a \$1,000 unrestricted annual gift. In recent years, Family Services has established a new investment level for young leaders, under 40, who make an annual unrestricted gift of \$500. The Grogan Society introduced organization memberships this year. There are currently 34 member organizations and 190 individuals. "Members come from all different stages of life, with unique reasons to support our work," says Manager of Individual Giving Joy Truluck. "There are some special stories behind their contributions."

Membership is deeper than financial support. It's also about making community connections and creating opportunities for members to advocate within their own networks for the agency's mission. The Grogan Society hosts two socials annually and members receive special invitations to ribbon cuttings, open houses, and receptions with keynote speakers

and leaders. Virtual events are held for those who don't wish to attend gatherings in person. "We want members to feel deeply appreciated," says Speas, "because they are."

Grogan Society members are dedicated to Family Services' mission to create a community where everyone can thrive. The Grogan Society's support spans all Family Services programs—a benefit of unrestricted giving. "The impact is significant, and our Directors determine our clients' greatest needs right now," says Truluck. "For example, for a family of five fleeing for safety, that could mean replacing personal belongings or transportation to a doctor's appointment. Unrestricted giving supports the best outcome for our clients and gives compassionate staff the latitude to do their best work. We are grateful."

The Grogan Society has evolved over the last decade, helping Family Services meet the community's needs every step of the way. As we enter the next decade, the unwavering support of its members has a significant impact on all Family Services programs and is deeply appreciated.

Interested in joining the Grogan Society? Learn more at FamilyServicesForsyth.org/Grogan-Society



Children's Advocacy Center welcomes new Director, Ernest Britton

Earlier this year, Ernest Britton took the helm as director of the Children's Advocacy Center (CAC). He joins Family Services following a long career in law enforcement, working in child exploitation and human trafficking crimes for the City of Atlanta.

Britton brings to Family Services extensive experience supporting victimized children and their families. As a Special Victims Unit Sergeant in the Atlanta Police Department, he was responsible for training officers to implement forensic interviewing—a style of interviewing that is also used by CAC staff. The department's outdated approach to interviewing children in the same style as adult victims was ineffective, and Britton was at the forefront of standardizing the interviewing approach to provide better outcomes for children. He also served a critical role as the primary instructor of statewide officers who were part of the Georgia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. In that capacity, he taught officers how to correctly portray themselves as children online and conduct legal investigations in order to catch predators.

In 2018, Britton received the Child Advocate of the Year award from the Georgia Center for Child Advocacy. Of the award, the Atlanta Police Department said, "Sgt. Britton has spent many years seeking justice for child victims of sexual abuse and human trafficking. He always uses a victim-centered approach when conducting investigations by building multidisciplinary teams to work with children and their families [and help them] to move forward from these horrific crimes."

"I still wanted to work with kids and be involved in protecting them," says Britton of his career shift. "But I was ready to make a transition. This position allows me to pursue new

ideas and things I'd like to work on to make the system a little more accessible for children and families." Britton's wife—a Winston-Salem native—and his colleagues encouraged him to pursue the role. And he has found the work to be incredibly rewarding so far.

His immediate goal for CAC is impactful: "I want to be sure we are very responsive to our stakeholders," explains Britton. To do this, he's working to establish rigid training for forensic interviewers and staff members, and to create guidelines around said training. "The more we focus and hone our techniques, the better and more responsive we'll be," he adds.

It's also important to Britton that the Children's Advocacy Center welcomes all child victims, not just a particular segment of the population. "I want to expand," Britton says of the future, "to make sure we are working with every entity that deals with child trauma."

As Britton settles in, he's looking forward to making introductions—particularly with Family Services' long standing community partners. There is always work to be done to support the most vulnerable members of our population. Britton is ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work.

COUNSELING SERVICES: A COMMUNITY OF SUPPORT FOR CLIENTS AND CLINICIANS



The counseling team at Family Services has experienced an impactful few years. Increased demand for services during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a long waitlist. Moving into this year, the list has returned to a manageable length, even while continuing to receive between 80–120 new counseling referrals monthly.

The team of eight therapists sees roughly 500 individuals—children and adults—annually. Clients submit a self-referral or are otherwise referred from other Family Services' programs or from community partners. "We have a reputation in town for providing high-quality counseling services for a multitude of concerns, including relationship issues, depression and anxiety, mood disorders, and especially trauma," explains Administrative Director of Clinical Services Courtney Perry. "And we are also intentional about providing a low barrier of entry for services." Roughly one third of clients are on a sliding scale for payment, one third are using Medicaid, and one third utilize private insurance.

Clinicians are dedicated to offering comprehensive support to clients while maintaining their own well-being. Lead Child Trauma Clinician Marinda Freeman reflects on the challenges of the mental health field, emphasizing the importance of self-care: "Having worked in this field for many years, I understand the complexities it entails, especially when working with clients who have experienced varying levels of trauma. Additionally, many of our clients face significant economic challenges as well as racial and social injustices, making their healing journeys particularly intricate. However, they are resilient individuals whom we genuinely enjoy supporting." This leads to a sense of purpose and fulfillment—not only for Freeman, but also for her colleagues.

"The team is highly collaborative," shares Lead Clinician James Mitchell. "There are many opportunities for mentorship and guidance. Every clinician has supportive individual

supervision and group sessions on a weekly basis." This time is used to request feedback on particularly challenging situations with clients and to share mistakes or areas of improvement for future clients. "We're addressing significant and complex trauma, so it's important to continually discuss well-being and keep case loads manageable in order to meet the high demand of our clients," says Perry. Everyone is encouraged to take their allotted paid time off and disconnect from work during non-working hours. "It is part of the culture to hold each other accountable not only in the way we serve clients, but in the ways we care for ourselves, too," she adds.

The team in place is strong, but they can still only take on so many clients at a time. Each academic year, graduate student interns join the team—individuals who are in their second year of a Master's program to become licensed therapists. This alleviates some of the staff's burden by enabling the agency to serve more clients. In turn, interns are given top-notch training with a diverse team of experienced clinicians. "This is an important way that Family Services contributes to the field in general," says Mitchell. "We help train the next generation of therapists while showing them the rewards of working with under-served populations."

Despite challenges that come along with higher demand than resources, Counseling Services is determined to welcome the community into their care as often as possible. Freeman sums up this commitment succinctly: "If you come to receive services from us, you're going to get what you need. And if we can't meet that need, we'll help you find someone who can."

Learn more about Counseling Services at Family Services: FamilyServicesForsyth.org/Counseling

Department of Justice grant will support Family Services' anti-trafficking work

Family Services has received \$375,667 from the Department of Justice as part of the Anti-Trafficking Housing Assistance Program. The grant, which was given to only four organizations across the nation, will be distributed over three years.

"This grant allows us to expand many of the initiatives we were already leading, to enhance our services, and to bring significant training and technical assistance to equip not only ourselves but also our collaborative partners in the community," says Director of Interpersonal Violence Services Rachel Parker. These services are in high demand in a community that has seen an uptick in interpersonal violence (IPV) in recent years. In 2021, local law enforcement reported a combined 10,311 domestic calls for service that had an IPV associated charge. Family Services currently supports 45% more IPV victims than five

years ago. Human trafficking victims are eligible to stay in the Domestic Violence Shelter and receive counseling and other services.

"Human trafficking, at its core, is an exploitation of vulnerability," Parker explains. "It searches for force, fraud, and coercion. And it can present in a myriad of different ways." Human trafficking falls into two primary categories: sex trafficking and labor trafficking. While labor trafficking likely affects more individuals than sex trafficking, more resources are often allocated to investigate sex trafficking. Both occur in Forsyth County, though are often underreported.

Work has been outlined for each year of grant distribution. The first year's focus, which is now underway, is to enhance training and technical resources around both human trafficking categories. "It's important that training covers all types of trafficking that are present in our community," says Parker. Family Services case managers participate in Freedom Network USA training to ensure that best practices are applied in the local community. The IPV services team will also focus on enhancing their knowledge around identification and response services. Training will be developed for partners in Forsyth County's Continuum of Care—a collective of individuals and organizations that seeks to end homelessness through trauma-informed programs that offer a low barrier of entry for the homeless population.

The following year, training will be executed and key IPV positions, supported in part by the grant, will continue serving trafficking clients. Acknowledging the value of feedback from trafficking survivors, opportunities for feedback will be developed and incorporated into overall protocols. A landlord outreach strategy will be developed to assist in rapid rehousing initiatives that support survivors of trafficking and their children.

During the third and final year, ongoing activities from years one and two will wrap up, the landlord outreach plan will be activated, and a sustainability plan will be implemented.

"Our clients don't come to us and say, 'I've been a victim of human trafficking,'" says Parker. "They've been hurt and they're not always recognizing that a system of exploitation has been used against them." It requires the Family Services IPV staff to be hyper-vigilant, which is a difficult space in which to conduct their work each day. She continues: "We incorporate trauma-informed practices with our staff. It's a long-term enhancement and investment that is critically important to their wellbeing and to the wellbeing of victims."

The approach to anti-trafficking work within the local community is multi-pronged and requires financial resources, ongoing partnerships between organizations, and passionate individuals to continue serving this vulnerable population. "With this grant, Family Services will be able to complete important work that underscores our position as a Community of Solutions," says Parker.





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COMMUNITY PARTNERS CREATE MEANINGFUL INTERACTIONS FOR CHILDREN AND SENIORS CENTER



The Intergenerational Center for Arts and Wellness opened in Winston-Salem in late 2023, the first community center of its kind in the nation. Helmed by Senior Services, the Center brings together more than 20 community partners who are creating programming and services not only for seniors, but also for people at every stage of life. Family Services is operating six Head Start and Early Head Start classrooms within the 62,000 square foot facility—four open now and two to open before the close of the year. In just a short time since the classrooms opened, meaningful outcomes have already been delivered for both children and adults.

Though the classroom enrollment and general curriculum are the same as other Head Start locations, students at the Center additionally have the unique opportunity to engage with seniors through regular intergenerational activities. Interactions between children and seniors have been well-documented to improve physical and mental health wellness for older adults, with benefits for children as well.

A 2018 report from Generations United found that 94% of Americans agree that older people have skills and/or talents that can help to address the needs of younger populations. Similarly 89% of Americans believe the same about children addressing the needs of elders. This symbiotic relationship is important to nurture, and speaks directly to Family Services' mission. "It's part of our mission to be a community of solutions," says President and CEO Traci Ross. "We already have an excellent education program. It wasn't a question that we would want to come on board to help expand this crucial intergenerational work."

Many of the interactions between children and older adults are executed through collaboration with other on-site community partners. "This is something new that hasn't really been done before," explains Vice President of the Child Development Program Vivien Stearns of the collaborative approach to services for seniors. Education Manager Melissa Blum agrees that this is of paramount importance: "Sawtooth [School for Visual Art] can facilitate art projects with the kids and seniors, and Winston-Salem State University can send us interns from their occupational therapy program to assist in identifying fine motor or sensory delays in the classroom," she explains. "In this space, we can put our minds together and work collaboratively in a way that benefits everyone."

Recent events include an Easter egg hunt and a curated time for seniors to paint the children's nails and read books to them. A cowboy rodeo fashion show is on the horizon, and a summer camp is in development with Winston-Salem State University.

Stearns thoughtfully explains the blossoming relationships between children and seniors at the Center: "My father used to say that being around youth made him feel younger, made him feel more capable. Being part of creating that experience for the seniors in our community has been beautiful to see. It puts a smile on everybody's face."

To learn more about the Intergenerational Center for Arts and Wellness, visit GenerationsCenter.org. To learn more about Family Services' approach to child development, visit FamilyServicesForsyth.org/Child-Development.

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