

## Family Behavioral Health (formerly Family Preservation) Finds Solutions

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TACOMA — A banner hanging in the hallway of the former convent proclaims "Never Ever Give Up!" Another advises people to "color outside the lines because there is more room there."

This building, located next to Holy Cross Church in north Tacoma, houses Catholic Community Services' (CCS) Northend Family Center, and it is here that CCS Family Preservation Services is located. The banners reflect the passionate philosophy of this program to do whatever it takes for a solution to a child's or family's complex need.

In this now-restored building, Mary Stone-Smith began her career as a therapist for Homebuilders in 1974. Homebuilders, one of the nation's original family preservation services, was created in the Tacoma Northend Family Center, and was designed to strengthen families in order to avoid unnecessary out-of-home placements. To achieve this goal, therapists pledged to do whatever it takes to be responsive to families' needs, including working evenings and weekends.

From this early foundation, a variety of services -- family preservation, wraparound, crisis respite, and therapeutic foster care -- have evolved into a service area within CCS called "Integrated Family Preservation Services."

When Mary Stone-Smith took over the family preservation services in 1988, there were 20 employees and a budget of \$400,000. In just 13 years the budget for the services has increased to \$11 million. Now 200 people provide services to families who need help.

Stone-Smith attributes this CCS program's tremendous growth to its success in helping children and families with very complex needs.

"The people of Catholic Community Services work with one heart to provide unconditional acceptance and care to all of the children and families we are asked to serve," said Stone-Smith.

Family Preservation provides an integrated and flexible array of strengths-based services and supports centered on one predominant belief -- children need their families and families need their children, she said.

No family is turned away, even though problems may be acute.

"Each of us at Catholic Community Services is accessible to families in the same way we are available to our neighbors and friends," said Stone-Smith. She said that each family's needs are unique and the service is tailored to fit the family using a nontraditional approach. Meetings take place in homes or wherever the family desires to meet.

Co-workers said Stone-Smith brought to the job "compassion without walls." It is this deep caring for children that makes her effective at state meetings and with the legislators, said Don Koenig, director of Family Preservation CCS Southwest.

"She (Stone-Smith) meets people at all levels and can be stopped short in the middle of a million dollar discussion by hearing that a child has a critical need," said Barbara Boisvert, service director/Family Preservation. "She never loses touch."

Catholic Community Services' history can be traced to 1860 when the then-Diocese of Seattle established an orphanage in Vancouver, Wash. It has grown into the largest not-for-profit social service organization in Washington State, with 13 family centers stretching from Bellingham to Vancouver.

When a state mental health reform in 1989 required alternatives to placing children in institutions, CCS implemented a "wraparound" approach to services. This approach for assessment is a team effort, with the family involved in all aspects -- planning, assisting strengths, needs, and outcome.

The focus is on the child and family in the community, on building support systems to meet needs, on assets and capabilities.

" We build on strengths," said Stone-Smith. "We look at the whole picture." A team approach is used to find solutions. Extended family, other professionals such as doctors, school personnel and probation officers, may be invited to participate in helping find solutions. Stone-Smith said they try to serve children within the context of the child's biological family. Family Preservation team members will try to connect the child with a relative even if this relative lives in another state.

" Somewhere in this country there is someone who cares," said Kevin Campbell, intensive resources director for Family Preservation. "And, we find them."

Team members of Family Preservation search computer databases for children's relatives in this state and others. One such search turned up grandparents who were quite willing to take their grandchildren home and were overjoyed they had finally found them. In the last year, as many as 25 interventions have involved extended family from other states. The safety of the child is paramount in placement consideration.

" A tremendous amount of preparation work is completed before a child ever leaves," Stone-Smith said. "We pull together a team of professional and natural supports who will support the child and family in the new state." Staff members are generally sent for a visit a few months later to ensure that the child or children are still doing well.

Sometimes just having contact with extended family or family will make a difference in a child's life. An example was a teen-ager who was left by her mother when the child was 2. By the time the child had reached her teen-age years, she had been in as many as 40 foster parent homes because of behavior problems. When asked to help solve her behavior problem, the teen-ager said she just wanted to know why her mother had abandoned her.

After searching through thousands of names, Family Preservation found her mother in another state, serving time in jail. Other relatives were also identified. The mother was contacted, and she wrote her daughter a long letter to explain why she left. In the letter the mother stated she missed her daughter every day of her life. After the connection was made with her biological relatives, the child settled down in her foster home and completed school. A family contact made the difference. She will spend the summer with her newfound family.

During the last contract year, Family Preservation provided wraparound services to more than 200 families in the Southwest region and exceeded 93,500 service hours. "But what matters in the end is when families say they are doing better," said Kevin Campbell, the intensive resources director.