Director's Message

By Shelly Willis, Executive Director

On behalf of our staff, Family Education and Support Services wishes you an enjoyable, healthy, and happy new year!

As we come to the close of 2013, and prepare to reflect on our accomplishments, as well as our challenges, I want to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to a very special woman.

Recently our agency and our community recognized the loss of Margie Reeves. Margie dedicated more than 60 years advocating on behalf of children and families across Washington State. She worked tirelessly to assure that children have early and sustainable access to safe and nurturing places to live and learn, and that families have the training and assistance they need to raise their children. Margie served statewide as a member of the Governor's Task Force on Child Care and the Children's Budget Coalition and was State Advocacy chair for Public Health and Safety Networks. Along with her husband Bruce, who survives her, she was a founding member of several non-profit organizations, alliances, and coalitions in our community; she and Bruce were instrumental to our beginnings at Family Education and Support Services.

I first met Margie in 1984 when I began my career in early childhood education. She took me to the "Hill" (our legislature) and showed me how to testify, introduced me to the process of communicating with elected officials, and the value of advocacy. She guided me through obtaining my first certification in Early Childhood Education and forever after has served in the roll of mentor. Margie was a supporter of Family Education and Support Services since our very beginning in 2000 and I will always be grateful for her guidance.

Margie made a commitment to making things better and saw the best in other people because they looked for it.

The loss of Margie Reeves leaves us both saddened and inspired. Her dedication, wisdom and sense of humor was a gift to many of us who work with families. She was a remarkable woman who made a significant difference in community and in our State.
Winter blah battles

The normal ups and downs of life mean that everyone feels sad or has "the blues" from time to time.

But if emptiness and despair have taken hold of your life and won't go away, you may have depression. Depression makes it tough to function and enjoy life like you once did. Just getting through the day can be overwhelming. But no matter how hopeless you feel, you can get better. Understanding the signs, symptoms, causes, and treatment of depression is the first step to overcoming the problem.

Wintertime, and the holidays associated with it, can be a particularly hard time for those prone to depression. Two important causes include Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), and triggers associated with holidays.

Seasonal affective disorder

Many people feel sad when summer wanes, but some actually develop depression with the season’s change. Known as seasonal affective disorder (SAD), this form of depression affects about 1% to 2% of the population (perhaps more in this northern part of the globe), particularly women and young people. SAD seems to be triggered by more limited exposure to daylight; typically it comes on during the fall or winter months and subsides in the spring.

To combat SAD, doctors suggest exercise, particularly outdoor activities during daylight hours. Exposing yourself to bright artificial light may also help. Light therapy, also called phototherapy, usually involves sitting close to a special light source that is far more intense than normal indoor light.

Holiday Blues

Holidays can be particularly difficult, even for those not prone to clinical depression. We are "supposed" to feel joyous, spruce up our homes, and enjoy family and friend gatherings when in fact we may just want to take the whole period off. Here are some tips from experts on taking care of yourself during the holidays:

- Plan ahead - schedule time for yourself and understand depression triggers
- Avoid family conflict
- Forget perfection
- Learn to grieve: the holidays can be particularly difficult because they bring up memories of those we have lost. Understanding this can help us to deal with it better.
- Don’t cut back on needed sleep
- Get help - from family, friends, or therapists
- Stay in shape - don't neglect your exercise routine; and finally -
- Focus on what matters
ZUMBA© rocks at FESS!

Thanks in part to our wonderful community leader, Dr. Diana Yu, FESS’s FREE Zumba© classes have grown tremendously since they started this spring. Classes are offered every Wednesday from 6:45-7:45 PM at our facility at 1200 Black Lake Boulevard. All are welcome to this family-friendly activity - if you bring children, please make sure the activity is appropriate (music is loud and the group is large).

We have recently welcomed students from NOVA school to daily Zumba© classes as well - a fun group!

Tanya Murray "Woman of Distinction"

FESS is very proud of Board Member Tanya Murray who was honored as a “Woman of Distinction” in our community by the YWCA at a ceremony in November at the Red Lion Inn. Tanya serves as our Fundraising chair and will be coordinating our SEEDS Of HOPE auction on May 3rd at the Red Lion in 2014 (see our article on page 5).

Congratulations, Tanya!
A Father’s Tribute to Nurturing Fathers Program

The following letter was recently sent to the founder of the Nurturing Fathers curriculum, Mark Perlman. Many thanks to Keoki, our Nurturing Fathers instructor, as well as Mr. Perlman, for changing lives of families in our community.

Yogi Berra once said, “In baseball, you don’t know nothing.” With three kids in their teens, the eldest a senior in high school, I’d say the same thing about fatherhood. Its rewards are great, but it’s also simply the most humbling element of my life. How could it be any different?

My kids are developing, complex, fragile (and mercifully resilient) beings looking to their mom and me for clues about how to be in the world. We fathers are complex too, and frail more often than we like to admit. We carry heavy loads of cultural expectations that insist we be more confident, more certain, and stronger than we know we are. Instruction manuals are nonexistent, as the cliché goes. Some of us had fabulous dads as role models, some had dads who were object lessons in how not to parent, some had no dads at all. Every honest father must look at himself in the mirror with some regularity and say, “I don’t know how to do this.”

Over the summer, I had the privilege of taking the Olympia Family Education and Support Services’ “Men as Fathers” course, which uses your Nurturing Fathers Program curriculum. The course did me tremendous good. For the ten guys in our class, the curriculum was a probing, logical, and systematic approach to really dig into what fathering means to us, what we value, and how to be caring and true nurturers as the primary men in our children’s lives.

It wasn’t always easy. The course asked us to explore some tender territory at times, but it was exploration that helped us all. I left some nights emotionally exhausted, but in a good way. And I felt safe in a room full of men who could relate to me without judgment and who genuinely encouraged one another.

Nobody required me to go to the program, but I had the chance to hear the facilitator, Keoki Kauanoe, speak at a luncheon and I knew I needed more of what he could offer. Some of the guys were required to be there because of the justice system; some were in custody disputes. We came from all walks of life—blue collar and white collar; various ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds. The diversity in that room enriched the learning experience for me, and I think the others would say the same thing. We quickly learned that we had the two most important things in common:

1. We loved our kids.
2. We were willing, week after week, to come and ask for help to be better dads, and to help one another.

At bottom, those two things were all that mattered for the cohesion of the group. At the end of the 13 weeks, as we stood before our families to celebrate the completion of the program, I was struck by something else. The program had helped me embrace both the humility and the privilege of being a father. More than anything, I knew I wasn’t alone and I’d had 3 months to practice asking for understanding, advice and friendship from other men who also stood in the shoes of being a dad—especially at those times when those shoes seem impossibly big to fill.

Thanks for creating a great curriculum. All good wishes for the future of the Nurturing Fathers Program.
Please save the date May 3, 2014 for our second annual Seeds of Hope auction to benefit the programs and services offered at FESS. With your help, we are able to provide education and support to every parent, regardless of their ability to pay: programs such as Impact of Domestic Violence on Children, Kinship support, Clean and Sober Parenting, Consider the Children, and Nurturing Fathers.

Thank you to our donors

Many, many thanks to all of our donors and volunteers. In September, October, and November 2013, the following individuals and groups contributed money or supplies to FESS:

Pacific Psychological Associates  Camille Hale
David Rothschild  Judith Roderick
Nancy Koptur  Rosa Venancio
South Puget Sound Area Service Committee  James and Susan Raymond
Carrell Simmons  Total Systems Integrators, Inc.
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Anita Pennington  Generations Credit Union
Gail Dahlhoff  Tanya Murray
Janice and Timothy Suess  Marilyn Nelson
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Money Tree  Corrine McDonald
Joan Swanson  Karma Boardman
Lucky Eagle Casino  Patricia Chavez
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Ann Jackson  Olympia Family Theater
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