Director's Message

By Shelly Willis, Executive Director

Just when we seem to finally understand the road map of life, a new path appears which brings us to an unexpected event. These events can be viewed as detours or they can be seen as life changing opportunities. I prefer to choose the later. I have hope.

Most of you know me as the Executive Director of Family Education and Support Services. I am also a parent who makes lunch, goes on field trips, and helps with crazy car pool schedules. There is nothing unique or special about me except that I know, without reservation, that I was given a special "life assignment" to inspire parents and caregivers to raise healthy children. I do this by sharing a messages of hope. Parenting can be overwhelming. There are times we wonder if we can go on. Even for the best of us on our best day we can be pushed, pulled and tried to our very last string by the feelings of powerlessness that go along with parenting. A two year old can truly bring the best of us to our knees--yet we endure.

In fact- we have endured for years. We refuse to give up because they are our children-- all of them are our children. Yours play with mine, they will grow up and work together in our community and ultimately--they will be taking care of us--in this very community. It is in all of our best interest to consider how are the children? They will be doing better. We will investigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences and we will share our knowledge with you. We will learn about resilience and how to best promote it with our children so that they grow into healthy adults who live, love and learn how to best raise their children in our community. This inspires me, this gives me hope, and .. perhaps it will give you hope too. I hope you will join us in the next year as we work to inspire hope and learn more about how to raise healthy children.

Happy New Year to all of you and your loved ones!
More than 60 children and youth enter Voices of Children contest

Every year the Washington State Relatives as Parents Program conducts the Voices of Children contest for children being raised by their grandparents or other relatives. FESS is privileged to coordinate the contest, and our judges always have a hard time selecting among the many wonderful submissions. Winners are selected for three different age categories. This year’s winner in the 5-7 year old category was seven-year-old Kathleen, whose essay is reproduced below as it was submitted:

It is really AWSOME good to live in my Grand-parents. I love my Grandparents. They are Awe-some Grandparents. I hope that I Don’t miss a thing at school. I'm glad I have a house to live in. I have to pets whitey and Leri a German Shepard. He makes sure cheks on us every morning. They teach us responsibility for our staff nice clean and fit every things looks nice good Awsome I have a tooth I can do better at math and I can read Better my Birthday is June 2007 I'm going to Be 8 years old I will still Be older then my sister shes and living with Grandma and Grandpa. I don't have to keep secrets any ore like mom told me to. I Don't have to Lie anymore I still have Bad Dreams But I no that I'm safe at Grandma and Grandpa's house. I have to go on a visit to times a week I miss a lot of school these days. I'm happy because we make special pancakes together on Sunday with eggs and bocker sasige with Love. That taste really good.

Kathleen
Thank you to our donors

Many, many thanks to all of our donors and volunteers. In June through November 2015 (not including the auction), the following individuals and groups contributed money or supplies to FESS:

Child Care Action Council  Jubilee Service Group
Nancy Koptur  Callie Martin
Children’s Family Service  Heartsparkle Players
David Rothschild  Sarah Rowswell
Elizabeth Smith  Carol Valley
Shelly Willis  Peg Wehrle
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Women’s Club of Olympia  Mark Gosney
Andrew Kapust  Toy Kay
Worlds Humanitarian  Jane Oldham
Vetter Dental Group  Capital Medical Center
Kathryn Cole  Art and Sherry Haro
Paula Casey
Consider the Children Helps Parents in Four Counties

The class we now call Consider the Children has gone through many changes over the 20 years we have been offering it: we have changed our name, moved several times, and revised our literature to reflect changing definitions and challenges of the modern family. Today we offer the class in Thurston, Mason, Pierce, and Lewis Counties. We have served over 36,000 clients in the years we have been offering the class! But our primary mission is unchanged: to help parents and primary caregivers develop communication and other skills that will help their children as they transition through separation or divorce.

We always ask our clients what they have learned, as well as what improvements we could make.

Here are some comments we have received from one recent class:

“I’ve learned that I’m not the only one going through this.”

“I will try to deal with anger, and realize that anger always covers up another emotion.”

“I learned how to separate my emotions towards the other parent while the child is present.”

“I will try to gain my children’s trust so they can come to me any time they need to talk.”

“Great work making us feel safe and not like we are bad parents.”

“My ex is just my child’s other parent! It will pass: just open my ears and listen.”

“I will try to talk with my kids about what they do with their mom.”

“Communication is key to incorporating an interactive relationship with my ex and children.”

“I enjoyed the role plays: very good way to see facial and vocal expression.”

“I will try to learn how to react when my child is unhappy or disappointed.”

“The children are the most important, above any negativity I have towards my ex.”

Seeds of Hope Auction Another Great Success

Many thanks to all the donors and folks who attended our Seeds of Hope auction in October. Thanks to your generosity, we raised over $30,000 for the provision of quality parent and education services for ALL families in our community!
Spotlight on staff: Carrell Simmons
By Fessin’ Up editor Deb Ross

Carrell Simmons has been with FESS or its predecessor agencies for about 15 years. While I was interviewing her for this article, long-time staffer and instructor Howard Winkler stopped by the office. He said, without prompting, that Carrell is the "voice and spirit of this place." I’d agree. Carrell and her husband Phil moved back here 25 year ago from Indiana. They have two daughters and two grandsons.

Carrell's official responsibilities are to answer the phone, to keep records, to make daily bank deposits, and register clients for classes both on the phone and in person. But her real job is less cut-and-dried. Years ago she was given a stone with the word "Listen" engraved on it. Carrell has kept that stone on her desk ever since. She has a policy of never saying "no" to people. Instead, she may say "I don't know the answer, but I'll find out," or "Let me see what we can do to help you."

"We get people who are in an emotional time," Carrell observes. "I'm not in that space but I understand it -- both of my daughters, for example, went through painful divorces. When our clients seem at the end of their ropes, I can tell them to know their situation will ultimately improve, even if they first have to go through tough times."

Carrell has seen the FESS program grow from a tiny office of three to an agency with many programs, each "one more hat in the community to help people." She's excited about the new Parent Child Advocacy Program that FESS will be launching soon (stay tuned!).

Thank you, Carrell, for your many years of service!
Family Education and Support Services
1202 Black Lake Boulevard Suite #B
Olympia, WA 98502

Phone:
(360) 754–7629

Toll free:
(877) 813–2828

We're on the Web!
Visit us at:
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