

Gail Sasnett: Creating a 'legacy' for local families

By Gail Sasnett

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Photo submitted by Gail Sasnett

A wall is painted at the SWAG Family Resource Center in Southwest Gainesville.

A small team performed an extreme makeover project for the SWAG Family Resource Center, 807 SW 64th Terrace, on the Friday and Saturday before Mother's Day.

This project was the culmination of a three-month leadership development program sponsored by The Legacy Center, an adult educational company located in Raleigh, North Carolina.

The team created a multipurpose room including a library, young children's play and lounge area; added a table and chairs and a counter for workstations; provided storage solutions to better utilize space; removed clutter from main areas of the center; provided comfortable chairs in the waiting area; created a relaxing lounge area in the youth room and painted the walls in three fourths of the center.

In doing this, they created a comfortable, safe place for children to come and do homework, get tutoring, read books and work on the computer. Through this project, The Legacy Center's Leadership Team transformed the environment at the SWAG Family Resource Center into a space that is beautiful and much better meets its current needs.

Making this project unique is that The Legacy Center leadership team of six individuals must completely design the project from start to finish, cannot use any of their own

money, and must involve the community to do 75 percent of the work and have it all complete in one weekend. As the project leader, I brought the idea forward to the team.

This transformation was supported by local individuals and businesses through volunteers and donations of money and items to show the children and families that the community truly cares about them and their experience. The Gainesville community was amazingly generous.

In 2013, its first full year of operation, the SWAG center served 11,704 patrons. By 2015 this number had grown to nearly 15,000 patrons. The center was in need of a makeover to upgrade the facility and better serve its clients.

In addition to helping meet crisis needs (such as emergency food, utility and rent assistance) through one-on-one consultations and connecting individuals with existing community resources, the center also provides both after-school and summer programming for children, and holds monthly family enrichment activities, community dinners and other special events that promote family and community.

The overall goal at the resource center is to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect by providing families with the tools needed to be successful. Since opening this center, there has been a 58 percent decrease in the number of verified child maltreatment counts for the community it serves.

The SWAG Family Resource Center was started by a small group of women advocates who saw a need in their community and acted to address it in February 2010. By June 2012 they had partnered with the Partnership for Strong Families and the county commissioners and opened the SWAG Family Resource Center. To learn more about the partnership's resource center model, please visit www.pfsf.org/resource-centers/.

The Legacy Center provides powerful public and corporate workshops and individual personal coaching for people to produce extraordinary results. The group is committed to assisting people in living a life with no regrets and in creating leaders who make a profound impact on our planet. If you are interested in more information, call 919-678-6000.

— Gail Sasnett is assistant director of public programs for the University of Florida's Bob Graham Center for Public Service. She is completing the Legacy Center Leadership training.

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