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English 2010

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## Life Start Village: Transitional Housing for Women Escaping

### Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Report by Ashley Donnelly

#### Introduction

Women with children escaping a domestic violence situation struggle in more ways than simply finding a place to live. Education, job placement, permanent housing and psychological counseling are all needed for a woman to become self-sufficient. The Violence Against Women Act II promotes the creation of long-term housing while promoting collaborations between shelters and housing providers in order to provide a safe place for these victims. A transitional housing program such as Life Start Village is vital to helping families escape or avoid homelessness because it promotes job training, sobriety, self-sufficiency and positive interpersonal relationships.

#### Research

My research included analyzing three written sources and the website for The Family Support Center. The first source is an article from “Domestic Violence and Children,” a journal focused on discussing ways to lessen detrimental effects on children who are involved in state welfare systems, such as homeless shelters or foster homes. The article, written by Lucy Salcido Carter, Lois A Weithorn and Richard E. Behrman, is entitled “Domestic Violence and Children: Analysis and Recommendations.” Specifically, it discusses the many effects of domestic violence on children

including psychological effects, current laws, abuse prevention and both the common and the preferred public system responses.

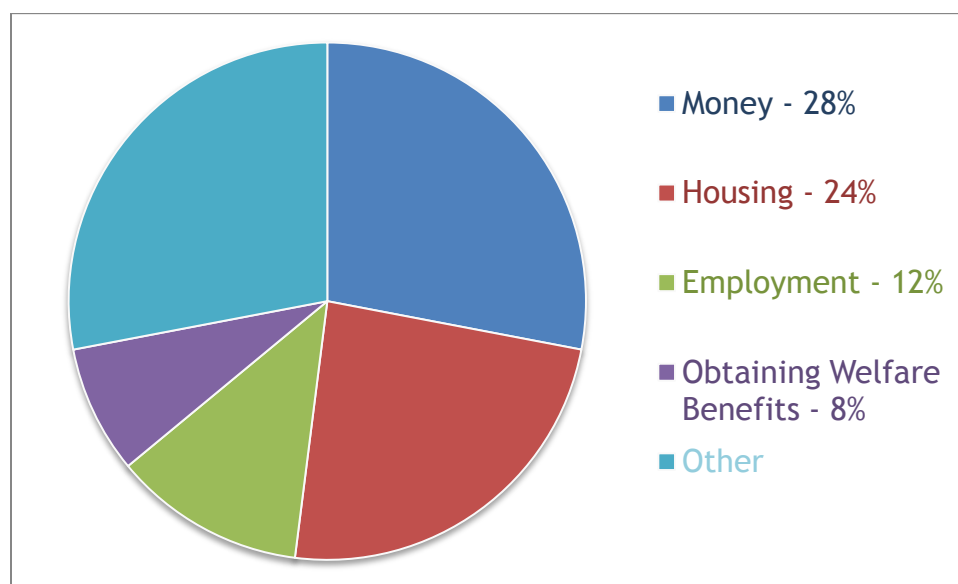
The second source used was an article from the “Child Welfare” journal which reports on very similar issues as the “Domestic Violence and Children” journal mentioned above. The article, “The Psychosocial Context Of Homeless Mothers With Young Children: Program And Policy Implications,” describes data gathered from a study conducted in various urban locations in the Southeastern United States. The study was conducted as a voluntary interview with single women with dependent children just as these families entered a homeless shelter. The article was written by Paula W. Dail, Ph.D. while she was the acting director for the Center for the Study of Poverty at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

The third source was a copy of the Violence Against Women Act of 2005 (VAWA II), written in the first session of the 109<sup>th</sup> congress. Along with explaining its public policy, the VAWA II cites some facts regarding domestic abuse and transitional housing for women suffering this abuse. The fourth source was the website for The Family Support Center (FSC), including its pages describing Life Start Village (LSV), the pages explaining FSC's various other programs available for mother involved with LSV, and the LSV's Phase I and II Residential Agreements, which list the rules and guidelines mothers must follow in order to remain a part of the LSV program.

## Discussion

Until fairly recently, the homeless population has been made up almost entirely of single men. The homeless population has slowly grown to include women, and up to 75% percent of the homeless in metropolitan areas are single women with young children (Dail.) Many of these women have reported their housing situation as being caused by a crisis, the most common being domestic violence and/or drug or alcohol abuse (Dail.) These mothers have reported that they are homeless because they do not have any close family or friends who are available to help with housing, or that they have run

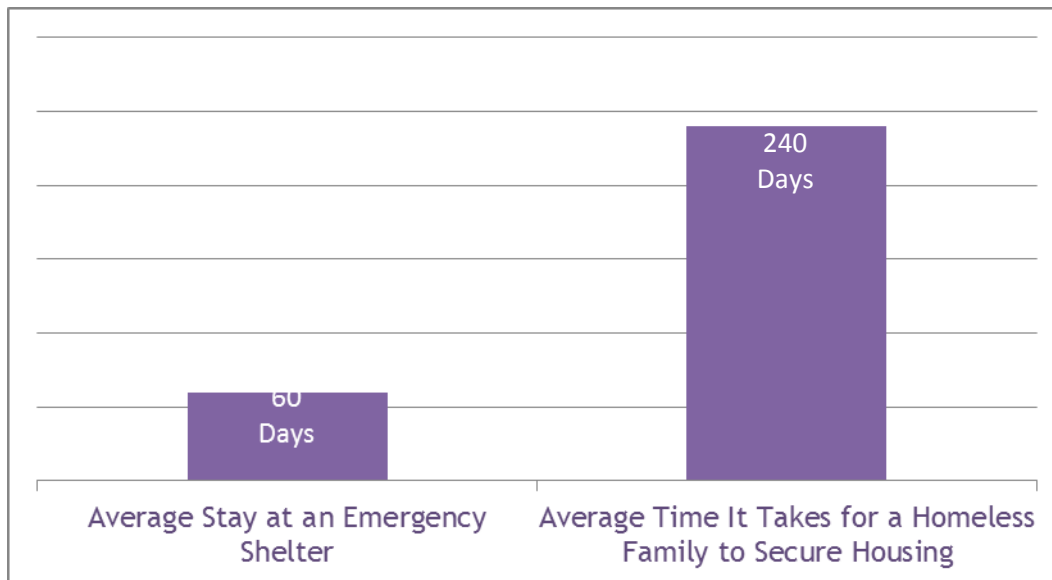
out the few close family or friends they could stay with (Dail.) Meanwhile, 32% of requests for shelter by families are turned down due to lack of room in the shelter (*United States*) which could lead to mothers returning to their abusers. These mothers reported that the most pressing need for assistance in order to become self-sufficient included money (28 %), housing (24%), employment (12%), and obtaining welfare benefits (8%) (Dail.)



*Homeless families' two most pressing needs for assistance are money and housing.*

Exposure to domestic violence and shelter life both have detrimental effects on children. This can include aggression, low self-esteem, phobias and depression (Carter, Weithorn, Behrman.) In their article, “ Domestic Violence and Children: Analysis and Recommendations,” Lucy Salcido Carter, Lois A. Weithorn and Richard E. Behrman state that “[m]ost children rely on one or both parents to provide nurturing support in the face of crises and emotionally challenging situations, but ongoing exposure to violence can sometimes hamper the parents' abilities to meet these needs.” Children will overcome the difficulties of domestic violence after they have been out of the environment, especially if their mother is self-sufficient and emotionally available and stable as well. The ability of the mother to escape a domestic violence situation, escape homelessness and become self-sufficient is critical in ending a

cycle: a childhood exposed to violence likely leads to increased aggression and/or depression which could lead the child to become a future abuser or abuse.



*Transitional housing offers a transition between shelters and permanent housing.*

The average stay per shelter is 60 days, yet the average time it takes for a family to secure housing is 180 to 300 days (Dail.) Many families must switch shelters after their time there has run out, and constantly moving locations is not a simple task. Transitional housing programs, such as the Family Support Center's Life Start Village, provide a safe, nurturing and constructive environment for both mother and child. This up to two-year program has two phases of dorm-like housing units, each with strict rules and requirements, which the mother “graduates” through until she is able to become fully self-sufficient and gains the option of purchasing a rent-to-own condominium in the third phase (*Life Start Village.*) This program also offers childcare classes, support groups and job training and placement. The LSV requires that the woman have a full-time job within a year of entry. The rules of the first two phases of LSV include sobriety on the premises at all times, which is important for the many mothers struggling with such issues. It also prohibits any overnight visitors as well as having a curfew and limit on how long the mother can leave their child with childcare, which promotes both

independence from a partner and responsibility. There are daily chores for the dorms and nightly dinners in the shared kitchen, both of which promote trust and interpersonal relationships which many homeless mothers need as they have experienced few positive relationships or close friendships in their lives.

The Violence Against Women II Act has a few goals regarding ending homelessness for victims of domestic abuse while preserving their access to and cooperation with the criminal justice system. It strives to create long-term housing solutions that benefit and create a healthy community. It also strives to promote strong cooperation between victim service providers, homeless service providers and housing providers in order to seamlessly and permanently assist these needy families. The fact that the United States government has successfully attained these goals with such programs as the Life Start Village shows that, although many issues and problems are still prevalent, they are successfully being treated and many families have been and will continue to be helped.

### Conclusion

It would be very difficult to eradicate homelessness, no matter the cause. The many contributing factors for homelessness for abused women, ranging from substance abuse to lack of familial support to unemployment, usually build upon and exacerbate each other the longer they are without a secure home. The accumulation of these factors can eventually trap a person in the homeless lifestyle. Those with children especially need assistance from a program which can help in securing a steady income while providing a strong support system so they can escape such a lifestyle. Women who have suffered abuse need special assistance and a “leg-up” in order to learn the skills to improve their lives. They not only need job training and a physical home to stay in, they also need therapy, support for sobriety, childcare classes, positive socialization and much more. In most cases, these women are taking care of dependent children who also suffered through abuse and need therapy and a strong parental figure, which is of course the strongest reason that they deserve such assistance. The Violence Against Women

Act provides the guidelines and funding for programs, such as FSC’s Life Start Village, which offers such support in order to ease the transition into a secure situation for both mother and child.

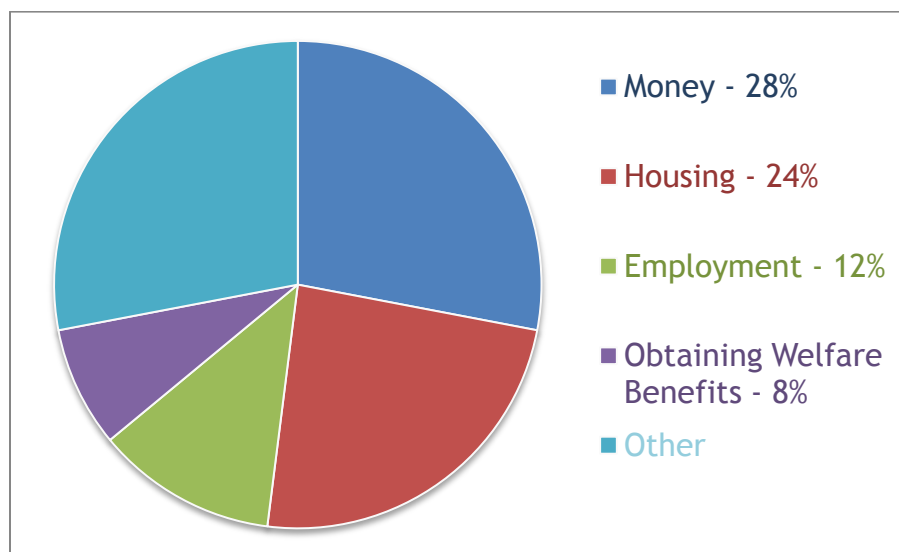
### Fact Sheet

#### Domestic Violence and Children

- The effects of domestic violence and shelter life on children can include aggression, low self-esteem, phobias and depression
- Children will overcome the difficulties of domestic violence after they have been out of the environment, especially if their mother is self-sufficient and emotionally available and stable as well
- A childhood exposed to violence likely leads to increased aggression and/or depression which could lead the child to become a future abuser or “abusee”

#### Domestic Violence and Women

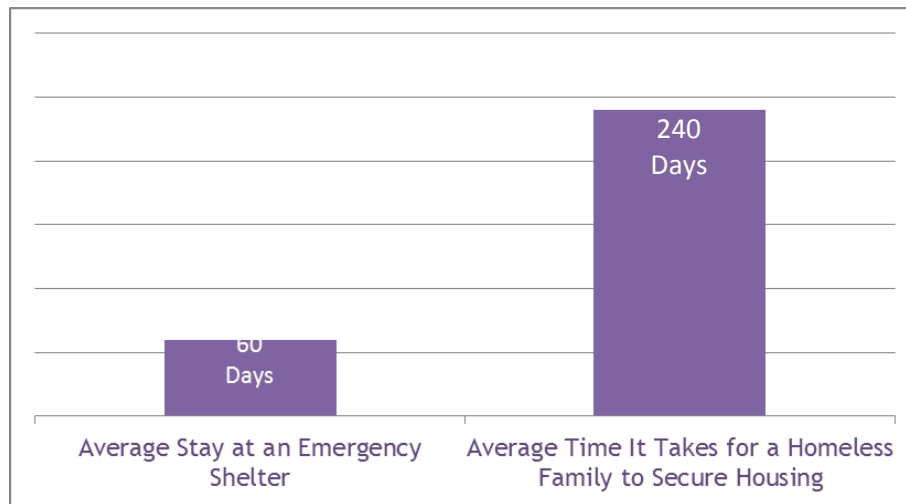
- Up to 75% percent of the homeless in metropolitan areas are single women with young children
- Many of these women have reported their housing situation as being caused by a crisis, the most common being domestic violence and/or drug or alcohol abuse
- 32% of requests for shelter by families are turned down due to lack of room in the shelter
- These mothers reported that the most pressing need for assistance in order to become self-sufficient included money (28 %), housing (24%), employment (12%), and obtaining welfare benefits (8%)



*Homeless families’ most pressing needs for assistance are money and housing.*

### Transitional Housing

- The average stay at a shelter is 60 days, yet the average time it takes for a family to secure housing is 180 to 300 days
- Provide a safe, nurturing and constructive environment for both mother and child
- Offers childcare classes, support groups and job training and placement
- The LSV requires that the woman have a full-time job within a year of entry
- The rules of the first two phases of LSV include: sobriety on the premises at all times, prohibition of any overnight visitors, a curfew, a limit on how long the mother can leave their child in childcare and daily chores



*Transitional housing offers a transition between shelters and permanent housing.*

### Violence Against Women Act II

- Creates long-term housing solutions that benefit and create a healthy community
- Promotes strong cooperation between victim service providers, homeless service providers and housing providers in order to seamlessly and permanently assist these needy families
- Although many issues and problems are still prevalent, they are successfully being treated

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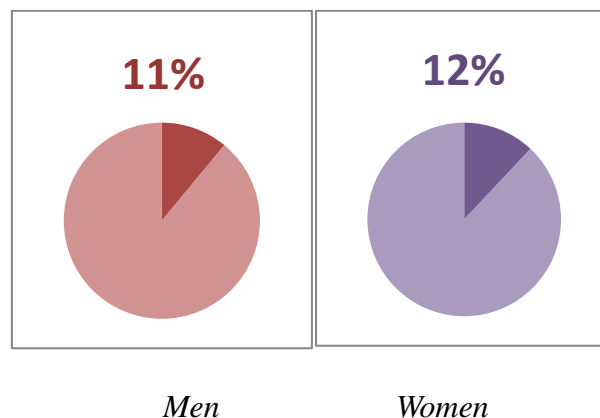
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### Commentary on Domestic Violence Against Men

The first Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994, a second and third version were reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. On February 2, 2012, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted on VAWA and it was passed out of committee (Terkel.) VAWA provides funding for programs and guidelines which seek to prevent and assist those affected by domestic violence (DV) and other types of violence against women, such as rape or stalking. It also provides guidelines to protect these victims by helping with access to such things as restraining orders and family-friendly homeless shelters. I argue that, although VAWA is necessary and has helped countless women and children escape danger, there have also been many men and children who are unnecessarily harmed. VAWA should also offer services for men who are abused by women while acknowledging statistics regarding female perpetrators of partner abuse. VAWA should also support or recommend marriage counseling with separation of the couple as well as individual counseling. I fully believe that it is necessary for these issues to be addressed while keeping the same level of assistance that VAWA already offers to victims of domestic violence.

Studies have shown that women are just as capable of physical and emotional abuse as men are. In two separate surveys conducted in 1980 and 1986, almost equal amounts of men, 11%, and women, 12%, reported being “physically aggressive toward their spouses at least once in the past year” (Ridley & Feldman.) Another study interviewed 272 couples and found that more women than men reported being physically aggressive toward their partners before marriage, 44% vs. 31%, as well as at 30 months of marriage, 32% vs. 25% (Ridley & Feldman). Self-reported statistics are hard to verify, but

the “differences between men and women's rates held true when the data were based on a combination of self and partner reports” (Ridley & Feldman.) All of these studies found that most of the aggression was committed in situations where both parties were participating and where the violence was comparably less severe, such as grabbing or pushing (Ridley & Feldman.) Additional research also shows that women commit DV with similar motivations as men, including to express frustration, to control or out of a desire to retaliate (Muller, Desmarais & Hamel.) Most of society and our courts have such harsh reactions towards men who commit DV because, even though both genders can be aggressive, it has been found that men are usually able to inflict much more physical harm than the woman (Ridley & Feldman) although both are affected equally by psychological abuse (Muller, Desmarais & Hamel) and all types of abuse negatively affect any children involved.



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“Domestic violence may be viewed as a mode of resolving or processing conflict when other modes of pursuing individual or group interests break down due to faulty conflict management processes, skills or options” (Ridley & Feldman.) This seems to imply that family counseling can attempt to heal some of the contributing factors of domestic violence, no matter the perpetrators' sex or

the severity of abuse. Of course, none of this excuses either persons' actions or suggests that either gender is in need of less assistance in overcoming their and/or their partner's abuse.

Some psychologists advocate separation with counseling but not necessarily divorce in mild or infrequent DV cases because it lessens certain abuse rates concerning children. The rate of child abuse in single-family homes is 27.3 children per 1,000 while the rate in two-parent homes is 15.5 per 1,000 (Goldman, Salus, & Kennedy.) Furthermore, a healthy and positive relationship between child and father strongly contributes to the child's development and overall lowers the risk of abuse (Goldman, Salus, & Kennedy.) Of course, cases of severe abuse by one or both parents towards each other and/or the child may appropriately call for separation; no one should be pressured to stay in any relationship if they feel they must leave.

Although the Violence Against Women Act is a revolutionary and essential piece of legislation, there are ways to improve it. VAWA must give families with mild DV or DV caused by treatable conditions resources so they can stay together and work to resolve DV situations when possible, which can increase the mental health of all involved and prevent future occurrences of violence. It does need to continue offering services to those who cannot stay in their current DV situation as well. Overall, VAWA needs to be able to provide help equally and without discrimination to men suffering through DV, whether they are perpetrators, victims or both.

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Letter to The Editor

In response to the article, "Backlash Against VAWA," by Molly Dragiewicz

I argue that VAWA is doing amazing with its current job as far as abused women are concerned, but what about abused men? VAWA is necessary and has helped countless women and children escape danger, there have also been many men and children who are unnecessarily harmed and separated. Why can't VAWA also offer services for men who are abused by women? There are known statistics regarding female perpetrators of partner abuse. Although VAWA states that it offers men the same assistance, why do so many report being turned away from shelters and help lines? I believe that although an abusive man may technically be physically more capable of serious injury, both genders are equally capable of violence and emotional abuse. Are you saying that these male victims deserve less help simply because there are less of them looking for help?

Another study interviewed 272 couples and found that more women than men reported being physically aggressive toward their partners before marriage, 44% vs. 31%, as well as at 30 months of marriage, 32% vs. 25% (Ridley & Feldman). Self-reported statistics are hard to verify, but the "differences between men and women's rates held true when the data were based on a combination of self and partner reports" (Ridley & Feldman.) These statistics do not explain the reason for such violence, but they do show that there is a real need for this DV to end (no matter who perpetrates it!) in order for both people to function and have a positive effect on their children and *our* overall society.

Of course, *none* of this excuses either persons' actions or suggests that either gender is in need of more or less assistance than the other when overcoming their and/or their partner's abuse. I simply believe that both sides are capable of, and thus may need assistance in dealing with, domestic violence. No matter what gender someone is and on what side of the DV they're on, they deserve equal access to help.

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## A Review of The Family Support Center



The overall goal of The Family Support Center (FSC) is stated clearly on their website: “The Mission of the Family Support Center is to protect children, strengthen families and prevent child abuse.” You may ask how one organization can attempt such a daunting task, but the FSC does a remarkably comprehensive job. Their many programs work together to offer a wide array of services intended to help parents, children and the overall family coexist, learn and heal together.



The FSC offers many classes and learning groups. They help those dealing with a variety of unique issues, including but not limited to: anger management, autistic childcare and dealing with issues relevant to step-families. I will highlight a few of their programs which I believe are very important because of their effectiveness, variety and their uniqueness in our society.

They also offer what is called “Family Mentoring,” which is a free program for overwhelmed parents. A Family mentor visits the home and helps create personalized solutions to family problems and issues such as: parenting through a crisis, child growth and development, gaining reasonable expectations of children, developing healthy communication skills, budgeting and other home management, parenting teenagers, problem solving and compromise, and creating effective reward or consequence systems. It seems that most parents have trouble with at least one of these issues, and many struggle through them without knowing there is help available because they think they are alone or will be judged harshly for needing help.

The FSC also offers a “Crisis Nursery” which gives free childcare to children under 12 years old for up to 72 hours. These programs are offered in the three FSC-owned homes located in Sugarhouse, Murray and West Valley. These nurseries are ran by rotating shifts of clinically trained “houseparents” operating under the guidance of the on-site Crisis Nursery Director. This program seeks to help in cases of crisis in order to prevent child abuse and neglect. Whether the parent needs time off for such reasons as stress reduction, sickness, job issues, appointments or any other crisis or potentially abusive situation, they can feel safe leaving their children with the Crisis Nursery. Also, some parents to be able to take a respite from stressful family or childcare situations. The Crisis Nursery can be just what is needed to prevent that parent from taking their stress or overwhelmed feelings out on their children in the form of child abuse or neglect. I believe that this is an extremely important program, and that offering such services with few

questions asked can promote a parent taking their child here instead of leaving them alone or putting them in a stressful or potentially dangerous situation.

When a parent feels overwhelmed, needing respite *and* assistance when dealing with a child suffering through issues caused by either adoption or autism, they can take advantage of the FSC's Adoption Respite Care or their Autism Respite Care. These two programs are similar in that they offer personalized assistance, to parent and child, from a trained and qualified Respite Provider while offering the parents and child much needed breaks from each other. Each program has Respite Providers which are trained in either adoption's or autism's specific problems and issues and which work closely to build trusting relationships with each family member. This respite serves as an opportunity for the Respite Provider to teach each family member methods on how to effectively coexist and strengthen their family relationships.

An "Impact Class" teaches about surviving the impacts of sexual abuse, including how each age group experiences and overcomes these impacts. This group discusses effects of abuse, how to effectively cope with such abuse and how to create and participate in a healthy support system. The goal of this class is to "educate and normalize the impacts of sexual abuse for the survivor and their families" (FSC Website.) There is also an Adults Molested As Children (AMAC) support group where survivors relate, support and understand their struggles in order to overcome such abuse. Sadly, this AMAC group is currently offered to women only and I firmly believe that a male only group should be created because men must also have unique issues to overcome regarding sexual abuse. These programs help families heal along with the abuse survivor. Support groups help both the survivor and their family discuss their feelings in a supportive and sympathetic environment.

The FSC also offers other programs such as general one-on-one counseling for all ages, a

“LifeStart Village” which offers free housing to single women with children, and intimate small-group daycare. Unless otherwise noted, all of the FSC's programs can be paid for by insurance or Medicaid, or they can be billed using Utah's sliding pay scale which assesses the patient's ability to pay by taking into account their income and family size. I feel that this is one of the most important and helpful facets of the FSC's programs. It seems that the families that suffer the most stress and the most potential for abuse are those who are struggling financially and struggling with.

The fact that the FSC offers the free childcare and childcare classes/mentoring shows their desire to effectively help families in genuine need. I was definitely hard-pressed to find any flaws in the FSC's programs. They seem to take the qualifications and training of their counselors and childcare teachers very seriously, which in turn makes me take their efforts very seriously and give them great respect. I believe that, by offering such diverse, comprehensive and affordable programs, the Family Support Center definitely lives up to their name by truly supporting families while fully achieving their mission of “protecting children, strengthening families and preventing child abuse.”

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### Rave of The Family Support Center

The Family Support Center is the most groundbreaking and life-changing organization currently affecting families in Utah. It offers every mode of support imaginable, from counseling to childcare classes. The only flaw in their existence is that so few people know how to participate in and support this amazing organization. Their affordability is what makes them so valuable in our society because it offers childcare and classes for people who are unable to afford it but need it just as much as, if not more than, others. They offer short- or long-term childcare and childcare advice without judgment while creating meaningful and lasting relationships with parent and child. Many parents are unable to properly care for their children not because they don't wish to, but because they lack the knowledge to. This is where the FSC steps in and changes lives.

The FSC is able to offer assistance to parents that need it the most. On their website, they state that, "Some of the factors that lead to abuse and neglect of children are when parents feel isolated, lack appropriate parenting skills, have unrealistic expectations for children, experience high economic stress, have more children than the parent is prepared to nurture, have children with developmental irregularities, or experience chronic illness." All of these factors can be addressed by the various programs offered by the FSC.

Parents suffering from the lack of appropriate parenting skills or have unrealistic expectations for their children can be assisted by the FSC's various childcare classes. These

classes teach on a wide array of subjects including autism care, raising teenagers or appropriate and effective discipline. Parents who feel isolated or are dealing with a high amount of economic or other stress can take advantage of the FSC's one-on-one counseling program or its various support groups. If they are suffering through chronic illness or need to take time to find a job or attend school, they are able to place their children (under 12 years old) in the FSC's Crisis Nursery for up to 72 hours for free. The FSC offers many support groups, childcare mentors and childcare classes regarding special needs children, such as those suffering through autism, issues with adoption, sexual abuse or discipline.

All of the FSC's employees, be they group-counselor or Crisis Nursery "houseparent," are trained and certified in their relevant fields in order to provide high-quality, personalized assistance. People who need any type of assistance regarding childcare (or even parent-care) can successfully go to the FSC regardless of their economic situation. I feel that this is an incredible benefit to our society as a whole, as healing families will heal and assist our society as a whole. The family Support Center truly succeeds in supporting families that need it the most.

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### Reflective Letter

I feel that I learned a lot about equally analyzing both sides of an argument in this class. This was really important and helped me develop a lot of my ideas more fully when I was aware of all of the surrounding controversies and ulterior opinions about the subject. I also loved practicing writing about one main subject but adapting it to different writing styles. It really helped me understand that I need to work on being able to write about more personal, casual topics and that I have strengths in writing very academic-type essays. This is shown in the report vs profile essays. I liked being challenged to try to change my style and wording depending on what genre I was using, and being able to practice this instead of only writing reports. That really reminded me why I love writing so much- because of all of the different writing genres available and also my ability to adapt to them with practice.

I also felt that I did a lot of reading and annotating of sources for these projects. I learned to adapt the reading/notating techniques I learned from my last English class but for a faster-paced deadline. Being able to quickly source and understand key parts of any document, while understanding its reliability, is a skill that I really developed in this class with the report and commentary essays. I also learned that finding enough resources for the essay is very important before deciding on a topic. There were a few times where I couldn't find enough information and either changed the topic after I started or stuck with the same topic and didn't do a great job on it.

Something that I enjoyed was the peer review process. Having someone else read my essays helped me understand what parts weren't clear. There were parts that I understood because I had done so much research on it, but I hadn't provided enough context for the reader to understand what I was referring to. There were also parts that could become unclear to the reader because I had been so immersed in the essay that I couldn't notice how confusing it seemed. Sometimes when I write for too long without a break or review, my words become jumbled and unclear and I don't even notice until I reread it or someone else reads it. Reviews were also helpful for me to get ideas from other peoples' essays on both effective and ineffective ways of writing and conveying my ideas and facts.

The revision step was extremely helpful to me because I don't usually take a lot of time to look over my work that long after I've written it, even to rearrange the paragraphs or sentences. I feel that it is important because sometimes my thoughts are organized in a certain way but when I reread my essay, I realize that the thoughts need to lead into each other more smoothly for the reader. Also, being away from the information for awhile and then coming back to it helps me put myself in the reader's shoes as far as context, organization and sentence structure are concerned. This step was also difficult because, although I thought I had revised certain parts as much as I could, I had to step away from my opinion on my work and accept most of the readers' suggestions and edits. At first this was very difficult but it became easier once I tried to re-word my writing while also reiterating it from the suggested perspective or angle.

Overall, I enjoyed getting practice with citation since I have only really done it in one other class. I was doing it wrong in my other classes before I took English and I didn't even realize it. It's actually very easy for me now since I've had so much practice and I enjoy using cited quotes and in-text citations now because it makes the paper much more clear and credible.

I also enjoyed studying the many facets of my chosen community organization such as: the laws it deals with, the specific problems it encounters and the people who run it and what qualifications they have. Understanding a topic this deeply truly helped me to write about it in an effective and thorough way because I cared about it but also had a lot of knowledge about them to draw from which made my papers turn out more complete and credible.