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Lead Letter

A big partner offers services in New Town

The recently published guest column by Jim Crooks provided a terrific overview of Jacksonville's New Town Success Zone.

As lead agency for foster care, adoption and family preservation services in Duval and Nassau counties, Family Support Services is a longtime partner in New Town and continues to provide many programs and services.

We have been involved in Edward Waters College's Schell-Sweet Community Resource Service Center in New Town since June 2009, providing more than \$500,000 in services, staff and funding.

Family Support Services works with local agencies and community action groups to provide wraparound services for the New Town community through collaborative efforts and referrals as well as through programs and services offered directly by our agency.

We fund three staff positions at Schell-Sweet Community Resource Service Center: a family preservation specialist, a community resource specialist and a community development specialist. They provide a wide range of services including in-home programs such as budgeting and parenting training, resource referrals, youth activities, educational support, community events and more.

Family Support Services provides a GED-prep program to improve literacy and educational skills so that class participants can qualify to enter the GED program available at the community center.

We also offer D.A.D., a fatherhood initiative held the first Saturday of each month, as well as the Breakfast Learning Series, an educational program for parents and caregivers held the third Wednesday of each month. Both monthly programs are free and open to the public.

For the past two years, a teen program has been available at the community center through a partnership between Family Support Services and U-Turn Inc. Some 40 local teenagers participate in Teen Leaders of America, which focuses on leadership, education and career development while also providing outings and social activities.

In addition, Family Support Services assists with a food giveaway held monthly to help local families in need. Nearly 900 people have been assisted the first three months of this year alone, and thousands have been helped in recent years.

Family Support Services is committed to providing in New Town a safe haven with valuable services and programs, and much-needed assistance to families in crisis as a means to prevent abuse and neglect.

Our efforts at the Schell-Sweet Family Community Resource Center are an extension of the services we successfully provide throughout Duval and Nassau counties by serving families and children and focusing on prevention. *E. Lee Kaywork, chief executive officer, Family Support Services of North Florida*