

THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

Pendleton Place shifts its focus

At a time when South Carolina undeniably is in the midst of a crisis when it comes to protecting vulnerable children and helping troubled families, Pendleton Place for Children and Families brought some good news to the Greenville community earlier this month. The agency that was founded 39 years ago by the Junior League of Greenville as a safe home for foster children has completed a necessary transformation that leaves it more stable in the changing world of child welfare and better able to address the complete needs of children needing safety and families going through a crisis.

At its fifth annual benefit breakfast earlier this month, Pendleton Place leaders discussed the completion of the agency's transformation in a program titled "Faces Behind the Numbers: Counting Our Success Stories." For example, according to the Kids Count 2012 annual data, there were 1,278 abused and neglected children in Greenville County.

The numbers for South Carolina that Laurie Rovin, executive director of Pendleton Place, discussed a few months ago are discouraging. Our state remains 45th in the nation in child wellbeing, according to Kids Count, and DSS reported 3,393 children in foster care on Jan. 17. The number of abused and neglected children, as a recent Legislative Audit Council comprehensive report noted, has left DSS caseworkers overwhelmed, and many leave the agency because of frustration and poor pay.

Also, as Rovin noted, 27 percent of South Carolina children live in poverty, and 36 percent of parents lack secure employment. Many of the children in such unstable and disadvantaged homes end up involved in the state's child welfare services.

The number "4" also was discussed at the benefit breakfast. Carrie Cavanaugh, board president for Pendleton Place, said the agency now has four programs that fill gaps previously noticed in the Greenville community. Those programs are: Smith Supportive Services that includes a 10-bed girls home, as well as a community-based case management and mentoring program for teenagers and young adults. A third program is Family Bridges, which is a supervised family visitation and safe custody exchange program.

The fourth program is the Family and Child Assessment Center, which is a collaborative effort involving Greenville County DSS, GHS Children's Hospital, United Way and Pendleton Place. That last program focuses on finding the root cause when a child is removed from the home.

To stay relevant in the changing world of child welfare, Pendleton Place in 2012 completed a strategic plan, updated its mission and vision, and tweaked its name to make it clear it focused on the whole family as well as the child. Rovin wrote on these pages earlier this year that "Our work

is no longer centered on just the foster child; we want to focus on supporting and healing the whole child — and their family — whether they are part of the foster care system or not. Hence, our mission is to keep children safe and support families in crisis through prevention, assessment and intervention.”

Pendleton Place became nationally accredited in 2013. It announced its new programs and mission at its benefit breakfast last year. This year brought the good news from Cavanaugh that “Pendleton Place is in a healthy place in our transformation — in part because of your support. ...”

That, indeed, is good news and can serve as a model in a state where many vulnerable children still face danger in their homes, and the state often responds in an inadequate way. Last month, the Legislative Audit Council produced a scathing review of DSS that found the agency charged with protecting abused and neglected children was failing miserably. Employees had excessive caseloads, and caseworkers were leaving the state agency in droves. Many children were not seen within the expected time frame after a report of suspected abuse.

Pendleton Place has transformed itself in an effort to, as Rovin said at the benefit breakfast, “achieve impact and deliver outcomes for children *and* their families.”

More information about Pendleton Place, including how to donate, can be found at www.pendletonplace.org.



Laurie Rovin, executive director of Pendleton Place, helped guide the Greenville agency through a transformation of its services.

STAFF/FILE