

“Healing the Brokenhearted”

Shirley J. Newton
Volunteer Historian

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INTRODUCTION

(Shirley J. Newton, Volunteer Author)

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Abigail's Arms Cooke County Family Crisis Center was founded in 1983 as Cooke County Friends of the Family. From a small, determined group of dedicated volunteers -- who established the county's first *women's* crisis hotline in the Cooke County Courthouse basement - - it has matured into today's professionally-staffed Crisis Center and Emergency Shelter that serves and temporarily houses (free of charge) survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and other violent crimes, who take advantage of the opportunity to leave their abusers and begin a new life.

The dedication of the founding members is evident in the stories of their experiences over the 40 years since the establishment of the original agency. It is not always possible to interview founders of a charitable organization. This history of Abigail's Arms is based on the recollections of the persons interviewed, most of whom had to reach back in time to recall the events they recounted. It is a first attempt to record how Cooke County's Crisis Center came to be, through the generosity of ordinary citizens and the prayers and dedication of volunteers and agency staff who refused to give up their goal for a safe, protected emergency shelter for victims of abuse.

Abigail's Arms...Healing the Brokenhearted

(Shirley J. Newton, Volunteer Historian)

Founding

ROBIN BROWN remembers the day he accepted **Jane (McLeroy) Lawson's** invitation to join Friends of the Family's Board of Directors. Neither Jane nor Robin could have predicted that this dedicated volunteer would remain on the agency's board for 28 years, as board member from 1988-1999, and President of the Board 1999-2015.

"I have always had a passion for improving respect for women," Robin said, explaining his commitment."

Jane was offering him an opportunity to help abused women find a way to gain that respect. From 1987 until he retired from the board in December 2015, Robin dedicated himself to fulfilling that ambition. His natural talent for dealing with people of different temperaments and backgrounds contributed to his expanding role as peacemaker among the strong-minded volunteers.



Robin had been aware of Friends of the Family since its founding in 1983. This free service available to abused women, had its beginning as an idea presented by the Cooke County League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan group interested in assisting voter understanding of political issues concerning League members and the public. The League organized a survey, interviewing Cooke County residents. Among the questions: "Does Cooke County need a crisis hotline for women who have been sexually assaulted?" and "Will Cooke County residents actively support it?" They were surprised at the number of responders who knew someone, or knew of someone, who had been sexually assaulted. The overwhelming response: "Yes, we need a women's crisis hotline, and we will support it!"

It would take two years.

By 1983 the League had accomplished its goal. Nine women volunteers formed a coalition, founding Friends of the Family of Cooke County as a 501 c (3) charitable organization. Denton County Friends of the Family mentored the Cooke County volunteers and guided them through their initial founding. Abigail's Arms and Denton County's Friends of the Family continue that relationship today, sharing information and working together to provide the best care for the victims who seek their help.

Cooke County lived up to its 1981 enthusiasm by funding the initial hotline expenses and staffing the hotline response team with local women volunteers who alternated shifts during each 24-hour period. Cooke County Commissioners provided free office space in the courthouse basement for the county's first women's crisis hotline responders.

The first nine hotline volunteers formed the initial Friends of the Family Board of Directors:

Ann Bangford

Johan Bozeman

Pauline Cotter

Julie Davenport (Deceased)

Nancy Hoedebeck

Jane (McLeroy) Lawson

Nancy McCain

Elva Watson (Deceased)

Shirley Weems

In 1983, the board executed its first major decision, hiring the first Executive Director, **Becky Leonard (1983 -1987)**. Becky concentrated the group activities on the hotline's original purpose: helping sexually assaulted women and their families. It didn't take long for Cooke County residents to realize that, at the other end of a phone call, real help was available. Daytime hotline volunteers alternated shifts. After 5:00 pm volunteers went about their daily lives as usual, alternating their evening schedules through rollover hotline connections installed in their homes, assuring callers that 24-hour help was always available.

Patty Haayen, Volunteer Hotline Responder
Founding Member of Friends of the Family
First Hotline Response Team



Volunteer **PATTY HAAYEN, one of the original founding members**, performed a special service during her entire eight years as a hotline responder. When no one else was available to respond to an often-frantic caller, Patty made certain that a call for help did not go unanswered. Her 24-hour rollover hotline became a symbol of the care that Friends of the Family/Abigail's Arms continues to offer.

Drawing out the caller's reason for calling was not always easy. Still reacting to the abusive situation, fear of retaliation by her abuser often prompted the victim to consider hanging up without revealing her name. Patty became skilled at calming the distraught caller and encouraging her to describe what had happened. She eased the caller's uncertainty about reporting the abuse by calmly suggesting ways to offer immediate help:

“Let me know if there is any way we can help you right now.”

“Are you in immediate danger?”

“May I get in touch with someone for you?”

“What can you tell me?”

“What do you need?”

If the caller needed immediate help and gave her name, Patty arranged for a police officer to pick the victim up and take her to a hotel or a private home, where Friends of the Family had special arrangements for temporary housing. The following morning, a volunteer picked up the caller from the temporary location and took her to the office for counseling and to decide whether she wanted to remain in temporary housing, seek housing with a friend or family member, or return to her home. Returning home was not always an option; too often, the abuser's anger escalated after learning that the victim had dared to air their problems and seek outside help.

The United Way of Cooke County and Friends of the Family worked together to help the victim recover from the trauma of the experience and prepare her to leave a bad situation. Patty was also a volunteer responder for United Way's twenty-four-hour suicide hotline. A special link through a United Way rollover connection to her home made it possible to immediately turn the caller over to United Way if she decided the victim was desperate enough to seriously consider suicide. After eight dedicated years (1983-1991) Patty retired from her Friends of the Family volunteer service but kept her United Way suicide hotline.

Growth

LINDA DRAPER joined Friends of the Family's Board of Directors in 1985. Like many of the agency's volunteers, her commitment spanned several years. Her active participation in the Board's decisions gave her an insight into operating problems faced by charitable organizations and how fund shortages could affect the services available to clients. She also recognized the important role that Robin Brown had filled when he accepted Jane (McLeroy) Lawson's invitation to join Friends of the Family Board of Directors. His ability to resolve important differences among Board members, particularly when the differences would affect the agency's operations, earned him the unofficial role of arbitrator during his 28 years with Friends of the Family.



Linda was involved in an important change in the services offered by the agency, introducing a perpetrator-based program called BIPP. Battering Intervention and Prevention (BIPP) focuses on aggressors, teaching them how to recognize and change their behavior. The 18-24-week program is not easy. It specializes in violence intervention and prevention of battering behavior used to control another person. Participants are required to indicate what they have learned from each session by completing paperwork which has to be returned at the next meeting. Family violence is a learned behavior, and not all abusers are men. BIPP reported the following figures for the period of September 2016 to August 2017: Of 471 participants, 418 were male and 53 were women. An average of 85% of BIPP participants are court-ordered to attend.

As the agency's reputation grew, the need for additional staff, volunteers, and office space became obvious. When Linda joined the Board in 1985, Friends of the Family had moved from the courthouse basement to a more suitable central location: two rooms in the Cooke County Campfire Girls' small building on Weaver Street.



The 24-hour hotline was still staffed by volunteers. They were not professionals, but their experience during the first four years had taught them how to respond to different types of callers and situations; how diverse abusers can be in their methods to gain and keep control; and

how difficult it is for an abused person to make the decision to break away from that abusive pattern. As the volunteers worked with the first responders (police, deputies, ER personnel, doctors and hospital personnel), the relationship grew to one of mutual respect -- an alliance that acknowledged the significance of volunteer morale and physical presence for sexual assault victims as they endured the necessary doctor and hospital examinations and police/sheriff department questioning and processing. The reassurance and calming effect of the volunteer's presence convinced everyone involved that all victims should be offered this additional service, especially if they have no family member or friend to accompany them. Few choose not to accept.

Volunteer training, experience, and reliability developed into additional victim services. Local attorney Larry Sullivant arranged training for volunteers wishing to serve as court officials, legal auxiliary personnel, and medical assistants in order to better identify, relate to and provide comprehensive service for the victim. The presence of the volunteer in the courtroom and knowledge that additional help was available often reinforced a victim's confidence that she could begin a new life, free of the abusive pattern that she feared she might have to wake up to each day.

In 1987 Child Specialist, **Cindy Etter (1987 – 1989)** joined Cooke County Friends of the Family as their second Executive Director. Her favorite subject: children. She trained volunteers to introduce a special age-related awareness program into the community's school system. From kindergarten through senior year, youth were taught to recognize abusive behaviors and how to cope with them. They also understood that this special program (WHO: "WE HELP OURSELVES") meant that help and advice were available if or when needed. The Cooke County Coalition Against Sexual Assault was formed with Friends of the Family, court officials, law enforcement personnel and medical assistants in order to better identify victims and provide comprehensive services. A therapist was hired contractually to lead weekly support groups for victims of sexual assault.

Funding



The year 1987 also yielded another major decision for the Board of Directors. Growth – and a reputation for success in helping victims learn how to rebuild their lives – had caught up with the now four-year-old Friends of the Family. Two rooms in the 15-year-old, already crowded Campfire Girls building could not accommodate the additional staff needed to serve the increasing number of abuse victims desperate for help. It was time to relocate. In 1989, Friends of the Family purchased office space at 114 N. Dixon Street and began fulfilling its goal of adding adequate space, professional staff, and volunteers. Government grants made it possible to expand the agency's services.

HELEN LOCH, VOLUNTEER
RAISED \$23,819.00 FOR OPERATING EXPENSES

Board member **Helen Loch** dedicated her energies to steering a fundraiser. Grants alone are rarely sufficient to cover operating costs. The Board supported Helen in holding a raffle to raise money for the agency. This was Helen's first fund-raising experience. Her energy, dedication, and determination to make certain Abigail's Arms could meet its financial obligations generated \$23,819. At that time, it was the agency's most successful campaign. She shared the story of her own involvement, quoted as follows from her June 8, 2018, interview:



“My participation as a volunteer with Friends of the Family came as a result of a number of friends' involvement in supporting the organization. At the time, it was also widely known in the community as a supportive organization for troubled families. After I became a board member, I became more informed about the services Friends of the Family offered, such as the hotline, counseling, and support services to ones in need. For a time, I served as a volunteer instructor of ‘stranger danger’ to county elementary school students. Bob Day (deceased) and Robert Kalina (deceased) served on the Board at the same time I served. Both were assets to the Board in a huge way.

The funding aspect of being a board member came later, as all of the board members became aware of the need for additional funds. We all felt that Friends of the Family was administered wisely and provided much-needed services to sections of the population which were in dire need of support. Families had been torn apart with lack of anger management and drug and/or alcohol abuse issues leading to families suffering from these issues. I had no prior experience in fund-raising. The Friends of the Family board met and discussed possible options for fund-raising projects. As a group, we came up with the idea of having a drawing with the prize being a vacation trip to Hawaii. We sold tickets priced reasonably so that many different people widely throughout the county could easily participate in supporting Friends of the Family. Our goal was not only to raise money, but to educate the county about the need for Friends of the Family and its mission. We held that money raising event for a number of years.

This project was successful every year it was held. The county communities were most generous in supporting this project. We put advertising in the paper and on the radio, (sold) tickets at merchant venues and at residential door-to-door encounters. Although I don't remember the amounts generated for this project, it was a considerable amount at the time and went a long way to keep Friends of the Family solvent."

Though she didn't recall all the details of the fund raisers – such as the dates held and funding generated – Helen did share an undated, original letter from her computer, e-mailed to team members:

"Dear Wonderful Volunteer Team Members:

First of all, THANK YOU for all of your prompt efforts in being on my CCFF raffle ticket selling team. Our team sold almost 1,000 tickets, which is twice what we were asked to do. I love having team members who are self-starters. It sure made my job easy. (Talk about going above and beyond.) The raffle netted \$23,819.00, which is the most we have ever raised. We sold 4,103 tickets out of 5000 printed. We never could have achieved the goal without your efforts."

Local churches, United Way, businesses, individuals, and the City of Gainesville had met the funding challenge, recognizing Friends of the Family's impact upon the community. The \$23,819.00 successful raffle was a tribute to volunteer Helen Loch and her determined commitment. Additional funding became available from the state. As state legislators recognized the increasing growth of crime and the need to provide financial help to agencies capable of helping crime victims to rebuild their lives, they responded with relevant legislation. In 1989, two major legislative acts – the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) -- began funding nonprofit programs serving victims of crime throughout the state of Texas.

Alicia Woodard, Executive Director
(1989-2008)

Alicia Woodard, who served from 1989-2008, was hired by Etter as the third Executive Director. Alicia was a new graduate of Baylor School of Medicine. This position was her first after obtaining a degree in Sociology. Thanks to funds from VOCA and VAWA, growth was possible for Friends of the Family. The agency could now hire staff and provide more in-depth services. Under Woodard's direction, Friends of the Family expanded their service focus to include all victims of crime, including domestic violence. Alicia hired a full-time Play Therapist, Amy Ott, who worked with adults and children exposed to trauma. Additional positions included a Case Manager who supported victims and provided courtroom education, and a Volunteer Coordinator to manage the now 50+ volunteers and train others interested in helping.

From its humble origins as a network of hotline volunteers helping their community, Friends of the Family was evolving to a more comprehensive organization. The agency had already established a working relationship with the County Attorney and other local government departments. Without the cooperation of the police and government officials, it would not have been possible to offer the services necessary to help the victims turn their lives around. The mutual cooperation was informal, but invaluable, as a way to understand the situation by gaining the confidence of the victims and hearing the facts from inside the investigation.

Victim services continued to be free and available 24/7. Staff and volunteers alike were trained to interact with clients and assist them from the initial point of victimization through medical services or SANEs (Sexual Assault Nurse Examinations), law enforcement interviews and court accompaniments. Before the completion of our existing emergency shelter, victims who needed emergency shelter had to be referred to nearby facilities available under programs in Sherman and Denton.

The Cooke County Coalition Against Sexual Assault remained intact and met every 6 months. As Friends of the Family began more inclusively serving victims of all crime, the

Coalition also grew. The team expanded to include family violence victim assistance and other local agency representation. Child Protective Services (CPS), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Adult and Juvenile probations and Adult Protective Services (APS) were added. The team began meeting quarterly as they realized how the need for their leadership had increased.

College Internships

As Friends of the Family's expertise and reputation grew, college students gained an opportunity to serve their internships with the agency.

University Social Studies student, **Megan Anderle**, began her internship in 2002 and was hired after graduation to serve as Counselor/Case Worker. She had two small children of her own. The emotional impact of dealing with children influenced her decision to leave the agency after one year. Her dedication to helping victims of abuse did not end with her decision to leave her staff position. She remained a volunteer for the next seven years.



Aaron Davis has had a long, intermittent commitment to Friends of the Family and Abigail's Arms. It began when he chose to intern as a volunteer with Friends of the Family while earning his bachelor's degree in Family Studies from Texas Woman's University. He has served in multiple positions with the agency, including his present staff position as Financial Director (2024). Aaron became the Executive Director in 2008. During his tenure, Cooke County Friends of the Family (CCFF) and the Abigail's Arms prayer group merged into Abigail's Arms Cooke County Family Crisis Center. He recalls how his initial college internship grew into a full-time staff position with Abigail's Arms:

“I had the opportunity to complete my internship with Friends of the Family. I knew about Friends of the Family from my research looking for an internship position, and that was my first experience with Friends of the Family, working as an intern for one semester in the early 2000s. I was hired, upon completion of my internship, as Case Manager. I have also held positions in the agency as Volunteer Coordinator, Executive Director (2008-2011), and during a brief hiatus while completing my master’s degree, I served on the Board of Directors. Through all these opportunities, to see change in the lives of women and children has been my motivation for involvement with the agency.

I began my role as Finance Director after Kim Cook was hired as the new Executive Director in 2011. My family had moved away from Gainesville in 2010, but I remained the ED until my replacement was found. I was part of the committee that hired Kim in 2011. After that transition, I was asked to remain on staff since the shelter project was gaining traction and the finance responsibilities had become a role of its own.

A separate Board, named Abigail’s Arms, was formed with the sole purpose of establishing a shelter in Cooke County. The Friends of the Family Board still operated and focused on the Friends of the Family purpose, while Abigail’s Arms’ sole focus was the shelter. As things began to transpire, Friends of the Family wanted to assume the Abigail’s Arms name as the Friends of the Family name was sometimes confusing; people thought we might help with bills, etc. as we were Friends of the Family.

As Director, I attended both board meetings, and it was thought that we needed to merge the agencies together, which would merge the boards. My concern (and that of others) was that we would have a board that would have over 25 members and the board would be too large to function. Karon Sullivant and several other board members were pushing for the shelter and that is why they stayed. I don’t recall any severe board member differences, but rather it was an effort to consolidate; and some, with their busy lives, were okay with moving on. Regardless of who was on the boards, I think all members wanted the shelter to be built. It was just who was willing to hang in and put forth the time and effort to make it happen. As Director, I felt it was a pretty smooth transition and merger.



Jess and Bernice Cason owned property on Rice Avenue and planned to donate the location to Abigail’s Arms to build the shelter. Many neighbors around the proposed site attended the City Council meeting to voice opposition to a shelter being located in their neighborhood. As a result, the city denied the permit to build the shelter

there. Those were some tense moments, but I recall Mr. Cason after the meeting stating ‘Well, we will just go find another piece of property that I own to build the shelter.’ That other piece was the property where the shelter is located now.

From my perspective, the prayer group was instrumental in completing the new facility. The group recognized the need for prayer and wisdom during this time, as the task seemed so monumental and expensive. The group was determined to see this through as the need was so great. The prayer group (although small) met weekly to pray for direction and guidance in moving forward. Although sometimes difficult to see the end result, we knew that the Lord could provide a way forward...and He did! Even after the project began, there were times that our faith was tested; but again, through continued prayer from the same initial prayer group as well as many others, the Lord provided a way to complete the project.”

Time to Step Down (1987-2015)

Robin Brown attributes credit to volunteer Karon Sullivant for the transition from Friends of the Family to Abigail’s Arms, the agency’s impact upon our community, and the safe transition of the lives of the victims who sought its help. Robin shared his appreciation with the following comment:

“The agency’s building on Aspen would not exist today. It was Karon who led the effort. Karon and her group started the fund-raising. My job was to



keep people on the Board. When the decision was made to build the full-time shelter, the decision was also made that we needed to begin with an identity change in our community: the origin of the new identification ‘Abigail’s Arms’. The name was suggested by a Friends of the Family staff member who was familiar with the story of King David’s third wife, Abigail (1 Samuel 25).

Twenty years ago, even with the government grants, we still had one glaring handicap. The grants made it possible to add staff, provide counseling, and a temporary location. But we had no permanent shelter where the victims could stay until able to begin their new lives. We would run out of money for the free hotel rooms, and the victims would have no place to go – back to the abuser. We needed a safe place where victims can be nurtured, permanently removed from danger, and (have) time to rebuild their lives, time to find jobs, time to support themselves.

Karon Sullivant was the catalyst for Abigail’s Arms. In 2009 the board began raising money for a shelter. We held a kick-off campaign and luncheon at the Civic Center and announced our plan to initiate a capital campaign. This was a big decision. Some of the Board members wanted out; they did not want to ‘go down’ with its potential failure, concerned that it would be impossible to succeed under the current economic conditions.

In 2015, it was time for me to step down. I served as mediator for 28 years. Karon Sullivant agreed to replace me as President under our new identity, Abigail’s Arms. I resigned in December 2015, under good terms and circumstances, realizing that it was time to rest from my role.”

Karon Sullivant
Board Member 2008 – 2015
Board President 2016 – 2018
Fundraising and Development 2018 – 2024
Board Member 2024 - present

“In 2005 a small prayer group began meeting for guidance in developing a shelter project,” Karon recalls. “Through the prayers of this group plans were developed, and a Board of Directors was set up to meet monthly. A business plan was developed, and the legal work was done by Derrell Comer to become a 501c 3 tax deductible organization. The name of Abigail's Arms was chosen based on the story of Abigail in I Samuel 25.



I was asked to join the Board in March 2008. In the summer of 2008, the Cooke County Friends of the Family and the Abigail's Arms boards merged with a common purpose to continue to provide services to victims of domestic violence and seek funding to build a shelter in Cooke County. Discussions continued to develop a fundraising plan. A committee was set in place for fundraising. That committee began meeting regularly, gleaning from the expertise of other fundraisers. Some fundraiser events were held by third party groups.

After months of planning, the chairman of the capital campaign moved so the position was left vacant. The then Executive Director, Aaron Davis, asked me to step in. I reluctantly agreed because I had no experience in fundraising.

We continued to develop the committee. We had Board members at first: Robin Brown, Lucy Sutton, Christine Weinzapfel, Brenda Kitchen, Leslie Nichols and myself ... later named the WE CARE Team.

In 2009, Jess and Bernice Cason donated the land for the shelter.

We quickly discerned that there were those in the community who were resistant to the idea that this community needed a shelter. A video and brochure were developed in preparation for the campaign kickoff.



The following year and a half were spent in community education and awareness. We began making countless presentations. We spoke to any group who would give us a few minutes: churches, civic groups, community groups, individuals, and business management. Little by little as we spoke, after we finished there would be at least one woman who would come up to us and whisper 'Thank you for what you are doing! There wasn't a place when I needed one.' As we continued with our presentations, we would have multiple people coming up afterwards to express those same sentiments. This gave us the encouragement to continue with our plans to raise the needed funds. Our Board was committed to paying for the construction as we built the facility.

Grassroots fundraising continued: BAAMP Camp, Mary Kay events, Janine Turner event, local restaurants hosting percentage days, Bidding for Good Online Auction, Mary Fay Jackson's Holiday Homecoming concert events. Presentations continued to be made.



Then on December 9, 2011, the Groundbreaking Ceremony was held with Board members Diana Eichenberger, Marilyn Melton, Brenda Kitchen, Patti Hunnicutt, Sharon Forney, Dorothy Lewis, Gloria Parrish, Christine Weinzapfel, Lucy Sutton, Jason Brinkley, Leslie Nichols, Robin Brown, Karon Sullivan, Ronnie Stephens, and Executive Director Kim Cook.

Fundraising continued collectively and individually. June was declared Cooke County Domestic Violence Awareness Month with Paint the County Purple, and the first Cooke County Country Carnival sponsored by the Ministerial Alliance was held.

After months of plans approval, compliance with city ordinances, etc., on July 17, 2012, the foundation for the shelter facility was poured at 4:00 a.m. John Beck was our Construction Manager along with Jess Cason and Board Member Dorthy Lewis. We realized that we needed to expand our fundraising team to include some community members. Thus, we invited Jan Cain, Kim Otto, June Enderby, Rene Lyon, and Kelly Lane to join us. By the end of 2012, our fundraising reached the million-dollar mark.



Fundraising continued as did construction throughout 2013. Many of the wonderful subcontractors provided in-kind donations, Meadows Foundation awarded a \$100,000 grant. Donations continued to come in and an anonymous donor gave us the boost we needed to finish the project. By early 2014, construction was being finished and we waited for the final permits to open the facility. On June 1, 2014, the Abigail's Arms Cooke County Family Crisis Center was opened. Our fundraising goal was three part: build the facility, furnish it, and provide for the first year's operations. Thanks to the generosity of this community and the work of an amazing team, we raised just over \$2 million to open debt-free.

In December 2015, Robin Brown stepped down as President of the Board and rotated off the Board. I was honored to be elected to serve as President beginning in January 2016.

Our Executive Committee was VP Leslie Nichols, Secretary Jan Cain, and Treasurer Christine Weinzapfel. No project or agency can run efficiently without a group of committed, hardworking individuals, and I was privileged to serve with this group and the other Board members. At the close of 2018, I rotated off the Board after having served for 10 years.

Knowing that the lives of many families have been changed and impacted by Abigail's Arms is a blessing. I'm grateful to have had a small part in providing hope for those clients.”

**Kim Cook, Executive Director
(2011-2019)**

“I was drawn to the description of an agency in the process of building a new Emergency Shelter for victims of domestic abuse. I’d worked with families in crisis for many years but had never been a part of an agency that was building from the ground up. I joined the agency in August 2011 after several interviews with the search committee of Abigail’s Arms. At that time there were 5 employees. My immediate role was to support the Board as they continued to conduct a capital campaign raising money to build the new shelter. Despite earlier challenges, Cooke County had now embraced the idea of impacting the lives of broken families by constructing a crisis center.



I recall asking the Board about the reason the agency wanted an emergency Residential facility. The response was profound...

*‘If we can have a shelter for lost and abandoned animals,
we should also have a shelter for women and children.’*

The Board had been collected for the specific purpose of building the new shelter. As the fundraising team (thoughtfully named ‘We Care’) pressed ahead toward their goal, I offered ideas for additional funding options. We contracted with a grant writer to focus on expanding our efforts outside of the county. Aaron Davis (former Executive Director) committed to orienting me over the next month in my new position. However, I immediately recognized his value, as he’d previously led the organization for over a year remotely. Even though he and his family relocated, Aaron came into the office once a week to handle bills and ensure employee payroll

was handled. He'd managed the complex process of monitoring the grant awards the agency had been receiving for salaries and daily operations. I knew that if I was to be successful in guiding the growth the Agency was about to see, I needed Aaron by my side. He could continue grant compliance, payroll, and other financial responsibilities from home. I would handle everything in the office. The Board unanimously agreed.

I reached out to colleagues, and friends from Dallas helped to provide training for the staff. They needed to be ready to run a program they'd never seen or experienced before:

1. Prevention – to work in the schools and teach youth about ways to prevent the onset of violence.
2. Intervention – to mitigate harm families had already experienced and help them navigate connecting to the resources needed for restoration.
3. Aftercare – to support survivors after their crises, minimize danger and reduce the risk of their returning to unhealthy environments.

For over 30 years, we served survivors with the intention of creating and continuing a comprehensive and cohesive approach to their care. It was intentional; to continue in that direction. Today we are fully vested in helping families heal physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The services offered now are specifically designed to walk survivors through their journey, from victimization to restoration.”

Ginger Johnson
2013 to 2024



“After 23 years in law enforcement, I accepted a position with Abigail’s Arms in 2013 as a Sexual Assault Case Manager and was tasked with completing our Sexual Assault Response Team (Later named Sexual Assault Interagency Forensic Team – SAIF Team). In the fall of 2013, the team officially completed the requirements and began serving adult victims of sexual assault in Cooke County. With collaboration from the District and County Attorney’s offices, local Law

Enforcement, the Department of Family and Protective Services, SANE Nurses, North Texas Medical Center, North Central Texas College, and Abigail's Arms staff we could now support victims of sexual assault locally.

During this time the Shelter was on the verge of being completed and my duties adjusted to helping with the move to the new building as well as navigating collaboration with outside agencies. The finishing touches for safety and security were a priority for the team and I had the pleasure of working with John Beck and the contractors as they worked out the best way for us to keep clients and staff safe.

In June of 2014 we accepted our first clients. We quickly saw that children coming into shelter needed child focused services and Kim tasked me with researching how we could bring those services to Cooke County. The plans for the shelter had included an interview room, expecting to have a need for adults to be interviewed for domestic violence cases. We now wondered if child interviews were an option as well. As I navigated ideas for bringing child specific services to Cooke County I connected with Child Advocacy Centers of Texas. Through this coalition we became certified as a Child Advocacy Center in October of 2016. As the agency increased in staff and with the addition of another program, I was given the honor of becoming the director over the Child Advocacy Center Programming as well as supervising our Battering Intervention and Prevention (BIPP) facilitator and the volunteer program. This also coincided with the agency leasing a second location in 2018 as we had gained enough staff to require additional offices.”

Child Advocacy Center, BIPP and
Volunteer Engagement housed at 301
Broadway.



In June of 2019 we celebrated 5 years of providing shelter to families in need!



Abigail's Arms Programs and Services (2019)

Programs: Emergency Shelter, Nonresidential Services, Child Advocacy Center, Primary Prevention, Battering Intervention and Prevention, Volunteer Program, Development (fundraising, data integrity and IT services) and Internship Program

Services Provided to Victims of Violence

- ✓ 24-hour Crisis Hotline
- ✓ Case Management
- ✓ Victim Advocacy
- ✓ Forensic Interviews
- ✓ Sexual Assault Exams (SANE)
- ✓ Multidisciplinary Team Coordination
- ✓ Individual Counseling
- ✓ Support Groups
- ✓ Play Therapy
- ✓ Protective Order Screening
- ✓ Crime Victims Compensation Applications Assistance
- ✓ Police/Medical Accompaniment
- ✓ Court Accompaniment
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Resource and Referral
- ✓ Volunteer Training and Education
- ✓ Community Education and Presentations
- ✓ Legal Advocacy

CONCLUSION

Abigail's Arms of Cooke County Family Crisis Center, its professional staff, its caring volunteers, its donors, and fundraising public, remain a vital part of the Cooke County Community. Its impact on the lives of abused persons, past and present, should be recognized and acknowledged. Its history -- from the original 1983 founding as Friends of the Family through today's fully-owned facility -- is the story of how a community cared enough to fund a protected temporary shelter (free of charge) for abused persons who have the courage to change their lives and the lives of their children.

A recognition notation from Shirley Newton –

As a result of my research, there is a realization of Robin Brown’s influence (impact) upon the growth of the agency and its successful reaching of the shelter goal. The importance of his guidance and shaping of such a diverse group of personalities for 28 years was recognized and applauded by each interviewee. *It has to be unusual for a volunteer to remain with a fledgling charitable agency for 28 years.* In his interview he furnished a wealth of information and names that made it possible to fill in the gaps in the history and the persons involved -- from the League of Women Voters survey to his retiring from his 28-year volunteerism.

I believe it is important to recognize his importance in “keeping things together” throughout the difficult periods over the years.

I wish to show appreciation and a special recognition of Robin Brown as a tribute to him and his steady volunteerism, devoting so many years of his life to helping those whose lives have been changed because, in his own words: “I have always had a passion for improving respect for women.” (quoted from the first paragraph of his interview)

Thank you, Robin!



Retirement Appreciation 2015
(l to r) Kim Cook, Gloria Parrish, Diana Eichenberger, Robin Brown



Ms. Newton worked tirelessly on this project for several years, reaching out to those we named and expanding that list through her many interviews. Ms. Shirley tried to reach everyone, and interviewed as many as she could. She always stressed over leaving someone out. As her health declined, we assured her we would see that this project was completed and made available to those who were interested in the history of the Agency.

Thank you, Ms. Shirley Newton, for your dedication to documenting the 40-year history of Abigail's Arms Cooke County Family Crisis Center (formerly Cooke County Friends of the Family).

To close this history with our 10-year celebration for the Emergency Shelter, we are updating the current program information and services provided.

Abigail's Arms Information, Programs and Services (2024)

Mission Statement

Abigail's Arms Cooke County Family Crisis Center's mission is to provide a safe space for families in crisis, to educate and empower individuals, and to create awareness in our communities.

Vision Statement

Empower families to live a life free from violence.

Values Statement

At Abigail's Arms we **empower** others, have **compassion** for all, are committed to **integrity**, and respect **diversity & inclusiveness**.

Facility Locations and Hours of Operations

Client Services Offices – 201 Harvey Street, Gainesville, TX 76240

- Non-residential services are provided as follows:
 - Monday through Thursday: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm,
 - Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm or by appointment



24-Hour Emergency Shelter - 1600 N. Aspen St., Gainesville, TX 76240

- Residential services available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- 24-Hour Emergency Hotline available 24 hours a day

Programs

24-Hours Emergency Shelter/ Residential Services

Our shelter is a warm and welcoming environment, for individuals and families. We have 10 dorm style rooms, with shared kitchen, living and play areas. Clients are supported and encouraged to move forward and become stably housed and self-sufficient. Case management, counseling, support groups, and educational opportunities are available to each client free of charge.

Child Advocacy Center (CAC)

The Child Advocacy Center is committed to the well-being of children living in our communities. Our mission is to provide a place where justice and healing can begin through interagency cooperation and community education. Family advocacy, counseling, life-skills training and educational opportunities are available to each client free of charge.

Crime Victim Advocacy and Support (Non-Residential)

Providing resources, support and advocacy to victims of crime through one-to-one assistance with Crime Victims Compensation, legal accompaniment and advocacy, case management, counseling, support groups, and educational opportunities are available to each client free of charge.

Victim Outreach and Community Education (VOCE)

The Agency leads the charge of raising awareness regarding victims of violent crime including domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and stalking. We provide various educational opportunities for community members and groups in Cooke County.

We seek to build up youth through group engagement, individual support, and leadership programs in the many school districts in the county. We aim to offer a variety of curriculums that cover healthy and unhealthy relationships, bullying, body safety, boundaries, e t c . We encourage youth to be agents of change within their own relationships, which in return changes their schools and communities.

Services Provided to Victims of Violence

- ✓ 24-hour Crisis Hotline
- ✓ Case Management
- ✓ Victim Advocacy
- ✓ Forensic Interviews
- ✓ Sexual Assault Exams (SANE)
- ✓ Multidisciplinary Team Coordination
- ✓ Individual Counseling
- ✓ Support Groups
- ✓ Play Therapy
- ✓ Protective Order Screening
- ✓ Crime Victims Compensation Applications Assistance
- ✓ Police/Medical Accompaniment
- ✓ Court Accompaniment
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Resource and Referral
- ✓ Volunteer Training and Education
- ✓ Community Education and Presentations
- ✓ Legal Advocacy

Answered Prayer...
Construction and Completion of the Emergency Shelter





