

Uptown BPW made a \$1,000 donation to Centers for Children and Families specifically for the “Kids First Program”. **Ann Bradford EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** and **Robyn LaForge PROGRAM DIRECTOR** with Centers were present to receive the donation. As Community Projects Chair, I was accompanied by Stacy Nelson (President 2012-2013), Kuohui Suchecki (Treasurer 2012-2013) and Shirley Harris (Newsletter and Website Chair Extraordinaire) with the presentation to Centers. Here is a summary of the Kids First Program:

Kids First seeks to promote healthy families by reducing the pain experienced within families that are severely disrupted by custody issues brought on by divorce, abuse and/or neglect. Through parent education and supervised visitation / exchanges, families have the support they need to foster healthy and safe interactions. All economic levels are served and families who are facing financial hardships will continue to be seen. The families that use the Kids First program are experiencing severe conflict. When bonds are re-established, families are healthier as a result. All of the parents in the program have been restricted from seeing their child by the court, the other parent, or CPS. Many parents that are committed are given more time and responsibilities with their child after a given period of time with Kids First. Kids First provides supervised visitations and exchanges at The Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity in their Sunday School classrooms in Midland and First United Methodist Church in Odessa. A trained monitor and a video camera are present at each visitation. Local law enforcement officers are also present.

Because play is the natural form of communication for children, the visiting parent and child are provided with toys, games, art supplies and musical instruments with which to interact in accordance with the child's needs and wishes. Every attempt is made to foster a neutral, emotionally safe environment in which the parent and child may interact. Visitations routinely take place each week on Thursday evenings from 6:00pm-8:00pm and on the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Saturdays.

Kids First requires an individual monitor for every visit. Therefore, it is required to have between five and fifteen volunteer monitors for each visit time. Kids First currently has thirty trained monitors who volunteer on a regular basis. Some of them volunteer weekly, others once a month. This number reflects individuals from the Foster Grandparent program, church members from Holy Trinity and many Legacy Scholarship beneficiaries.

When families remain in contact with one another through our Kids First program, these families are healthier and there are many benefits to the community. If the families are dealing with less conflict, the likelihood of the police having to be involved is decreased. With the families seeing each other at Kids First, domestic violence, child abduction, child abuse and child neglect are all decreased in the community, therefore, a reduction in law enforcement involvement in these families can be anticipated.