



By Toni Garrard Clay

Breaking the Cycle

Family Peace Project provides refuge and resources for domestic violence victims

It's often been said the measure of a society is found in how it treats its weakest members. If that's so, then the Family Peace Project makes all of us better.

Since being founded in 1996 by a group of Henderson County residents wanting to help domestic violence victims in our area, the Family Peace Project has made a difference in the lives of thousands of women and children. One of those women is Bonnie (whose last name we've withheld to protect her privacy), a domestic abuse survivor who came to the Family Peace Project when she had nowhere left to turn.

"The Family Peace Project absolutely saved my life," said Bonnie. "Marlena believed in me until I could believe in myself. I was broken in body, mind and spirit. They clothed me, fed me, gave me a roof over my head. I got my life back, a life I hadn't had in years. I'm blessed."

Family Peace Project Executive Director Marlena Taylor describes the organization as a safety net, providing a place of refuge as well as resources for those who have suffered violence in their own homes.

"We help meet the needs of families as they transition to a shelter system or with getting their own apartments or moving in with families.

"Sometimes it's a matter of providing gas money to get them to a safe environment. Or I can get someone set up in a hotel over the phone and then go meet with them there to assess their needs."

The Family Peace Project also provides things such as personal care items, food, financial assistance, school supplies, and Christmas and birthday gifts to those in need.

"We often partner with the East Texas Crisis Center," explained Taylor. "We provide complementary services when we do so, each helping in a specific area so the client benefits.

"The Crisis Center has legal advocates who work with a battered person to navigate the legal aspects of the situation, while we provide childcare or food or toothbrushes — whatever is needed at the moment."

The Family Peace Project has two different facilities: a single-family home and a multiple-family home.

When both residences are full, Taylor and her staff work with other shelter systems in the area or seek alternative accommodations.

In 2011, the Family Peace Project provided services for 249 adults, who brought with them a total of 416 children. Of the adults, 128 were first-time assistance recipients. About 20 families — typically women with their children — receive assistance each month.

A few years ago, the organization opened up the Family Peace Emporium, a boutique-style resale shop that is open to the public Thursday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the back side of the Family Peace Project office at 720 E. Corsicana Street in Athens.

“The Emporium has been critical to us,” said Taylor. “It’s helped us draw deeper when it comes to supporting our families.”

In addition to acting as a much-needed source of income for the Family Peace Project, the shop also provided clothing, at no cost, to 116 families last year.

Among the items available at the Emporium are clothing for men, women and children, toys, books, shoes and handbags.

“People who shop here regularly score great items,” said Taylor.

The Peace Project is also a recipient of grant funds, donations from the United Way and area churches. In addition, fundraisers such as the recent waffle breakfast are critical. A golf tournament is currently in the works.

“I can’t stress enough the importance of individual gifts,” said Taylor. “Even 20 or 25 dollars a month makes a difference. It really does. It can be a start to getting someone out of harm’s way.

“The other day \$75 was the deposit on an apartment. Fifty dollars can keep someone’s lights on.”

As you might imagine, the need for funding, volunteers and mentors is constant at the Family Peace Project, which is a non-denominational, Christ-centered organization.

“The more awareness there is about family violence, the closer we can get to breaking the cycle,” said Taylor. “We shine a light in a dark place. It’s been amazing the things I’ve seen, the lives that have been transformed. It’s not easy work, but I’ve seen miracles.” 🇺🇸

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— Marlena Taylor, (pictured above)
executive director of the Family Peace Project

For more information or to make a donation either of funds or items for the Emporium, call 903-677-9177. To make a tax-deductible donation, you may go by the Family Peace Project in person or send a check to PO Box 1723, Athens, TX 75751. You can also find them on Facebook.

