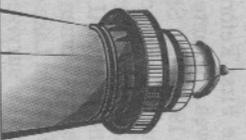


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Barnabas helps Nassau County women in crisis

Last year Barnabas helped more than 3,500 households in Nassau County, according to a news release. Its dedicated staff and nearly 200 volunteers distributed free food from its two food pantries in Fernandina Beach and Callahan, arranged crisis support such as rent and utility assistance, and delivered health services such as medical, dental and mental health care.

"Our Food Pantry helps feed over 120 people a day in Nassau County, with more than one-third of them children. And we stabilize nearly 700 households in crisis each year," said Linda Ellis, Barnabas chief program officer, in the news release.

"However, last year we wanted to expand our mental health services to help women, specifically, who've gone through a major life event and want support, encouragement and ideas for a healthier life."

Last year Barnabas received a \$110,000 grant from the Women's Giving Alliance, an initiative of the Community Foundation for Northeast Florida. WGA is a group of diverse women who pool their philanthropic giving to make a lasting impact on the lives of women and girls. The Barnabas Women's Health Initiative in Nassau (WHIN) was launched in January. It helps women, age 18 and older, move beyond their immediate crises.

"The goal of WHIN is to help women improve their well-being by focusing on their strengths and resilience," said Ellis. "However, it differs from other community agency services because we're developing strong peer support groups and using alternative therapies, which incorporate life skills and self-reflective journaling. We'll soon be launching our art therapy and physical exercise,

two more vital parts of our program."

Barnabas has partnered with Micah's Place, Gracie's Kitchen, Family Support Services, Nassau County Sheriff's Office and Starting Point Behavioral Healthcare to extend the reach of the WHIN program, including offering journaling groups for domestic violence victims at Micah's Place and life skills groups for incarcerated women at the Nassau County jail and for women in the community who meet weekly at Barnabas.

Mary Grice, a licensed clinical social worker, is the WHIN program counselor and provides one on one counseling and in addition, leads weekly life skills groups. Nadine Vaughan, Ph.D., a psychologist experienced in trauma recovery, leads groups on journaling as a way back to a healthier self.

"From its inception in January to June this year, 84 women,

ages 18 to 60 years old, have received help," said Grice. "After the first six months of implementation, we've seen a significant improvement in the coping skills of the women we have served."

Women who attend the weekly life skills groups at Barnabas, Micah's Place and the county jail are benefiting from an evidence-based workbook series, named Life Skills, created by The Change Companies, a national publishing, consulting, training and media company specializing in behavior change.

Grice has been facilitating the life skills group at the county jail and explains that the women are underserved, feel worthless and hopeless, which has affected their decision making.

At a recent weekly life skills group, the women, two of them currently living in a homeless shelter, unanimously agreed the private meeting room at

Barnabas is their safe place to share their lives with the other women.

"We're all carrying a heavy load on our minds from the things we've gone through and still go through. This is our safety zone. This group lets us release some of it and get stronger," said one woman.

Another participant said she was enjoying the "me time" during the weekly two-hour sessions so she could focus on herself. As caregivers, mothers or otherwise providing for others, she expressed the importance for all women to take time for themselves to regroup after life-changing trauma.

When asked what they wanted to tell other women in crisis in the community who learn about the program and want to get help, they said, "Come on in! Even if you just listen for a few weeks, there's time for everyone to speak when they're

ready. We're here because we want to be here and we help each other feel better about ourselves."

If you or someone you know would benefit from the WHIN program, contact Linda Ellis, at (904) 261-7000 ext. 131. There is no charge for services received from the WHIN program.

For more information about Barnabas' other programs and services, including the food pantry, crisis assistance services, Gerri's Corner, medical and dental programs, and the New to You resale store, visit BarnabasNassau.org or stop by 1303 Jasmine Street in Fernandina Beach.

Barnabas ranks in the top 1 percent of all U.S. nonprofits. Barnabas received the highest 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, for the 9th consecutive year, for exceptional fiscal and organizational management.