

100 DAYS OF FAITH

An Update on the Faith-Based Initiative
of NWF Health Network



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In early 2023, **NWF Health Network** (NWFHN) – following the lead from Governor and First Lady DeSantis – announced the creation of the position of Faith Liaison as part of a larger initiative to embrace and expand our faith-based relationships in the region we serve.

The goals of the Governor’s faith-based initiative – and correspondingly, those of NWFHN – are to **enlist, enable, empower, and expand** the work of volunteer faith-based and community-based organizations and serve as a primary point of contact for faith-based institutions and community organizations in Florida and our region respectively.

As noted by CEO Mike Watkins:

“We proudly stand with Governor and First Lady DeSantis to expand our efforts in this arena. The Florida panhandle has long relied on the strength, generosity, and compassion of persons of faith and this initiative compliments that sentiment.”

This report represents a status update on the first 100 days of the NWFHN initiative, a unique and innovative partnership.



IMPACT

It is important to note that NWFHN had already established relationships with **over 100 current faith-based organizations** throughout the region and in partnership with the vast network of providers under the NWFHN umbrella.

Since the launch of this initiative, the impact has been both tangible and measurable. In conjunction with these faith-based initiatives as well as other targeted programs, the number of foster families have increased. NWFHN has hired several individuals deeply connected to the faith community across our 18-county service area. These connections have led to recruitment of families wanting to and are now serving as foster parents.

IMPACT (CONT.)

And make no mistake, our local faith leaders have helped make and continue to help make a very real difference in the lives of the families we serve.

But more than the numbers or the metrics, here is a small sampling of what our faith-based partners have to say:

“We have been proactively trying to rescue vulnerable children for many years, the last four years intensively. We have **never** had an organization support us, help us, or provide opportunities to make a real impact like NWFHN has done. We have high trust in your leadership team, your board members, your vision, and your processes. Thank you for partnering with us as this God-valued work!”

Rick Hazelip, Connections Pastor
First City Church

“We started this ministry with a big idea, and our congregation latched on to it. Seeing the items and funds donated to this ministry is so beautiful and tells us that our church body **loves and supports this community**. My favorite part is relaying stories of delivering our care packages to the foster families. Our church members listen, smile, sometimes cry, and ask how else they can help. Our hope and goal has always been to **provide support and resources** that will encourage more foster parents to bring children (and teenagers!) into their homes. By serving in this ministry and partnering with NWF Health Network, **we’re seeing that happen.**”

Kelley Close
LHMC Foster Closet Organizer

“Generations Church is proud to partner with NWF Health Network to support our foster care community through our GC Families ministry. We believe it is the Church’s role to defend the fatherless and to care for orphans and widows in their time of distress. GC Families is actively involved in supporting children and families to bring wholeness to the body of Christ. Our goal is to **educate, equip, and encourage families** to lead Christ-centered homes and to build a stronger community of faith. Through our partnership **we have been able to meet many needs of children and foster families in our community** and shine the light of Jesus to those in need.”

Melissa Dancel, Families Ministry Director
Generations Church

EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

It cannot be overstated that the love, commitment, and dedication to service is already making a very real difference. To that end, we have:

- Created the position of Faith Liaison and Marcia Mathis was appointed to that slot.
- Connected with and signed-up for communications with Governor's Faith and Community Initiative Office.
- Attended a variety of faith-based meetings (DCF, No More Orphans [Tony Dungy], Safe Families, CarePortal, etc.).
- Met and worked with Foster Family Support (FFS) Director, FFS faith leads, community relations specialists, Independent Living (IL) regarding their efforts, needs, and faith-based connections.
- Promoted new initiative to use Behavioral Health Managing Entity funds to add additional services that are for children and families we serve. Met with faith-based organizations to let them know about the new initiatives.
- Updated list of faith organizations and identified faith organizations who are contract providers (3), formal partners (5), and informal partners (123) in each circuit.
- Created brochure insert and faith-specific content for website.



QUALITY PARENT TRAINING

The following places of worship in the newly expanded Circuit 1 have opened their doors to NWFHN Foster Family Support and the community to host QPT (Quality Parenting Training) classes for new foster and/or adoptive parents. **We are so incredibly grateful** for their efforts and know that we simply could not do what we do, without their active and ongoing support:

- High Point Church in Crestview
- High Praise Church in Crestview
- Church on Bayshore in Niceville
- Immanuel Baptist Church in Milton
- Crosspoint Church in Niceville
- First City Church in Pensacola

SPECIFIC EVENTS ACCOMPLISHED

Below are various ways that other local faith-based organizations have given hope to our cause! These churches have been involved in supporting Foster Family Support (FFS) from 2/1/23 thru 5/10/23:

- Callaway Assembly of God in Panama City opened their doors to host Super Saturday training for all C14 families.
- Generations Church in Tallahassee opened their doors to host Fostering 301 training. In addition, they graciously provided food, childcare and special gift for each attendee.
- Generations Church is piloting their new outreach program "Placement Support" during the month of May. They have a goal to provide new basic care items (shoes/clothes) for children who are newly sheltered in Leon County.
- Holmes Creek Baptist Church in Chipley provided meals for each foster family in the surrounding counties near them.
- High Praise Panama City created an on-line giving portal that the public could use to donate toward coffee gift cards for foster families to receive on Valentine's Day.
- High Praise Panama City welcomed FFS to set up a recruitment information table in the lobby during the entire month of February. We were also given 6 opportunities to address the congregation about the need for foster families.
- Bayside Church in Panama City welcomed FFS to set up a recruitment information table in the lobby during a Sunday morning service. We were also given the opportunity to speak to the congregation.
- Morningside Church in Tallahassee provided food for the foster family picnic that was held at Wakulla Springs.
- Timberland Church of Christ in Tallahassee donated meal kit baskets to all foster families in Leon County.
- Lynn Haven United Methodist Church has a Foster Closet and provides new basic need items for any child being sheltered in Bay County.
- St. George Island United Methodist Church welcomed FFS to speak during a Sunday morning service about the need for foster families during their "Moment for Missions."
- United Church in Tallahassee welcomed FFS to speak during a Sunday morning service about the need for foster families during their "Moment for Missions."
- Westminster Oaks Worship in Leon County welcomed FFS to speak during a Sunday morning service about the need for foster families during their "Moment for Missions."
- Gadsden County Clergy meeting welcomed FFS to speak during meeting on the need for foster families and how they can be involved.
- Tallahassee Interfaith Clergy welcomed FFS to speak about the need for foster families during their "Moment for Missions" at their meeting.
- Holmes Valley Community Church in Washington County runs an outreach for foster families called "The Valley Village." They provide meals and other items.
- Sandhills Assembly of God Church in Bay County had a youth fundraiser selling Boston butts. They donated Boston butts to foster families who live in their area.
- Grace Covenant Church in Bay County coordinates covering new car seats, Bible and gift card for children being newly sheltered.

SPECIFIC EVENTS ACCOMPLISHED (CONT.)

Further, NWF became a Collaborative Partner with Healthy Relationships Bay County, a county-wide cross-sector coalition and collaboration of faith-based and community-based organizations, to support Bay Youth Healthy Relationships and Pregnancy Prevention.

Additionally, Founder and President Kristin Lipscomb, The Secret Place (TSP), Advocacy Center, and Human Trafficking Service Provider, announced at their Legacy Builders Luncheon in April a formal partnership with NWF Health Network. The partnership includes an investment in educating and supporting our parents, caregivers, and workforce in a trauma approach to supporting survivors of human trafficking. TSP is a safe space for female child & adult survivors of human trafficking to heal, dream and find a new future. The faith-based program offers trauma informed therapeutic services, independent living life skills, medical, health & wellness support, and survivor led mentorship.

With these items in mind, we offer a sincere thank you to each of the above, to their faith leaders and the congregants who freely (and generously) give of their time and talents in service to others.

“We simply could not do what we do without the love, the commitment, and support of our local faith partners. Whether it’s providing a meal, hosting a family education seminar, or simply offering up prayers for the families we serve, they are an integral part of what we do and we are forever grateful for what they do.”

Marcia Mathis, Faith Liason
NWF Health Network

MOVING FORWARD

Mathis is working to build a robust communications network with the faith-based community via regular email correspondence as well as social media updates and a periodic e-newsletter. Additionally, we are putting together a region-wide annual faith summit hosted and organized by NWFHN to recognize, reward, and inspire faith-based leaders who assist in helping us achieve our mission.

Additionally, in the coming year, NWFHN will:

- **Offer Faith Grants.** NWF Health Network will announce in June 2023 several new grant opportunities for our faith-based partners. These grants will allow for expansion of behavioral health, substance use, and mental health programs to serve children and families throughout the region.
- **Host an Annual Faith Summit.** This fall, NWF is putting together an in-person faith summit to bring together those faith leaders who have worked with our teams to improve foster and adoption care support services. The faith summit will be both a recognition of the work they have done and an inspiration to continue to grow and expand it.





SUCCESS DEFINED

As this program looks forward, it is vital to define what success looks like. To that end, we have identified several key goals:

- **Achieve Sustainability.** It is essential to achieving our long-term goals that we develop an ongoing system that is both reliant on and supportive of our faith community. To ensure that, we have built an internal staff structure to ensure consistent support, a structure to ensure ongoing communications, periodic recognition for supporters and an annual Faith Summit to inspire others.
- **Attain Measurable Success.** It is vital that we at NWFHN never forget our charge to be the very best provider in the state, to serve families and to achieve our corporate goals of service. This means our independent rankings as provided by DCF and their agents should always demonstrate that success through the metrics we provide and keep us always in the top of these rankings. These faith partnerships extend our reach and if successful, will keep our rankings high in all areas.
- **Provide service with humility, respect, empathy, and goodwill.** In all that we do, we must always align with our values and hold both ourselves and our partners to those values. Our faith initiative not only strives to hold these values but helps us expand and strengthen them through concerted action in services to others.



ABOUT NWF HEALTH NETWORK

NWF Health Network is a not-for-profit organization that serves as the network management agency for child protection and behavioral health services across 18 counties in Northwest Florida.

NWF Health Network announced the creation of the position of Faith Liaison on January 27, 2023. Marcia Mathis was named as the Faith Liaison with the stated goal of dedicating and directing resources in support of Governor DeSantis' Faith and Community-Based Initiative.

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