

# **365 DAYS OF FAITH**

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



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

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 year 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 launching this initiative, we have achieved both tangible and measurable impact. 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:

“High Praise Crestview is grateful for the opportunity that NWF Health Network offers to churches to assist the most vulnerable in our community. As a local church, we have been fortunate to provide hundreds of **backpacks, haircuts, and supplies** to foster families annually. We are enthusiastic about expanding our reach to help even more families than ever before! We also enjoy opening our facility to host trainings and meetings for the Foster Family Support Team. High Praise remains dedicated to **endorsing and supporting** the remarkable efforts within the child welfare field. It has been a privilege to contribute to the impactful work that God is carrying out through our community!

**Pastors Micah & Chelsea Gay**  
High Praise Church Crestview

“High Praise Panama City has been incredibly honored to partner with NWF Health Network in blessing our community! We’ve had the privilege of hosting foster family photo shoots with Santa for multiple years in a row, as well as facilitating numerous gift card drives and fundraisers every year! Our church is full of **generous leaders and congregation members** who find joy in being used by God to bless those around us! One of the foundational elements of our vision at High Praise is to build families; not just within our church but throughout this community and region! We are so thankful for the incredible NWF Health Network team and we look forward to **continuing this incredible partnership** for years to come, as we work together to fill hearts and homes with the love of Christ.”

**Pastors Joshua & Miranda Gay**  
High Praise Church Panama City

# 2023-2024 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 role.
- 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 and awarded five General Behavioral Health Faith Grants totaling \$125,000 to local faith-based organizations.
- Awarded 16 **Teen Meth Prevention Faith Grants** totaling \$80,000 to local faith-based organizations.
- Identified, updated, and increased our list of faith organizations from 98 to 200 formal and informal partners across all circuits, including a Memorandum of Understanding with Share Your Heart, Inc.
- Planned and conducted the **Inaugural Faith Summit** on October 19, 2023 at Brownsville Church in Pensacola. The event introduced a three-level model of care for vulnerable children and families. In attendance were nearly 100 community and faith partners, Governor DeSantis' Liaison for Faith and Community, the CEO & President of the Florida Coalition for Children, and NWFHN staff and leaders.
- Assisted CarePortal, an online platform that brings the needs of hurting children and families to the attention of community churches, to recruit and enlist churches within all circuits.

## GENERAL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FAITH GRANT RECIPIENTS:

- Freedom Life Compass & Freedom House (Valparaiso)
- First City Church (Pensacola)
- Health and Hope Clinic (Pensacola)
- The Pearl Project (Niceville)
- Safe Families for Children (Tallahassee)

## TEEN METH PREVENTION FAITH GRANT RECIPIENTS:

- Avalon Baptist Church (Milton)
- Bible Way Baptist Church (Milton)
- Crossview Church (Pensacola)
- First Baptist Church (Panama City)
- Grace Assembly Church (Chipley and Vernon)
- Greater Little Rock Baptist Church (Pensacola)
- Imitators of God Ministries (Tallahassee)
- Liberty Church (Pensacola, Pace, and Gulf Breeze)
- L.O.V.E.T.A.G.S. (Pensacola)
- Safe Families for Children (Tallahassee)
- The Secret Place Home (Pensacola)

# QUALITY PARENT TRAINING

The following places of worship have opened their doors to NWFHN Foster Family Support and the community to host Quality Parent Training (QPT) classes and other trainings for new foster and/or adoptive families. We are incredibly grateful for their efforts and know that we could not do what we do without their active and ongoing support.

- Bayside Church (Panama City)
- Beachside Community Church (Ft. Walton Beach)
- Callaway Assembly of God (Callaway)
- Church on Bayshore (Niceville)
- Crosspoint Church (Niceville)
- Crosspoint Church (South Crestview)
- First City Church (Pensacola)
- Gateway Church (Pensacola)
- Generations Church (Tallahassee)
- High Point Church (Crestview)
- High Praise Church (Crestview)
- Immanuel Baptist Church (Milton)
- Seagrove Baptist Church (Santa Rosa Church)
- Shalimar United Methodist Church (Shalimar)



## 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 from Feb. 1, 2023 through Jan. 31, 2024:

- 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 gifts** 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.

# SPECIFIC EVENTS ACCOMPLISHED (CONT.)

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- 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.

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.

First City Church (Pensacola) continues to provide monthly meals to foster families in Circuit 1 through the "Feed Fosters" program. Lighthouse Church (Panama City) allowed us to have a recruitment table in their lobby and donated a substantial number of gift cards to us.

# SPECIFIC EVENTS ACCOMPLISHED (CONT.)

The following churches hosted us for Christmas activities, including the drop off and pick up of Christmas presents for more than 1,200+ foster children:

- Central Baptist Church (Crestview)
- Echo Life Church (Pensacola)
- Evangel Church (Marianna)
- First Baptist Church (Milton)
- First Baptist Church (Pensacola)
- First City Church (Pensacola)
- Generations Church (Tallahassee)
- Good News Church (Santa Rosa Beach)
- High Praise Panama City (Panama City)
- Lynn Haven Methodist Church (Lynn Haven)
- Restoration Place Church (Tallahassee)

The following churches contributed substantially to Christmas gifts for 15 or more children in care:

- Crosspoint (Pensacola)
- Evangel Church (Marianna)
- First Baptist Church (Marianna)
- Holmes Valley Community Church (Vernon)
- Victory Assembly of God (Cantonment)

The following churches continue to provide immediate needs to kids coming into foster care:

- Generations Church (Tallahassee)
- Grace Covenant (Panama City)
- Lynn Haven Methodist Church (Lynn Haven)

# CIRCUIT SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Circuit 1:

- A **breakfast with Santa** was sponsored and conducted by First City Church of Pensacola, held at the Gulfarium in Fort Walton Beach. More than 650 foster families totaling over 1,500 people visited the attraction with breakfast provided by Chick-Fil-A from Destin. Each child in foster care picked a gift for each parent, which was wrapped and taken home for Christmas. Each family received care packages containing essentials such as diapers, toiletries, handmade quilts, food and gift cards. Santa was available for pictures inside the aquarium.
- The Circuit 1 NWF Health operations team partnered with Pastor Evon Horton from Brownsville Assembly of God and the Escambia Children's Trust in a grassroots effort to address the childcare crisis in Circuit 1. Together with other community partners, the church is pursuing the **development of a special needs childcare center** with services tailored to children in foster care and those with significant trauma histories.
- NWF Health Network has been part of the Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Ministerial Alliance groups for more than a year and regularly attends and contributes to the content of the meetings. Several CarePortal and faith partners have come from the meetings in addition to the opportunity for the faith partners to join in using NWF Connects for their Community Based Needs.

# CIRCUIT SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONT.)

## Circuit 14:

- The Eastside Baptist Church in Vernon has demonstrated exceptional compassion and generosity towards a family in need, showcasing their commitment to community support. The church provided crucial assistance to a mother striving to reunite with her four children. The family, facing significant financial constraints, required **bunk beds, a twin bed, and mattresses** to overcome the only barrier to their reunification. Despite the mother's tireless efforts and full-time employment, the financial burden proved insurmountable, making the church's intervention even more impactful. The estimated value for this need was \$700 and the church did not hesitate to meet this CarePortal request.
- The compassionate and timely intervention of Northside Assembly Of God has made a profound difference in the lives of a struggling family. Faced with financial hardships and the absence of heat in their home, this family, with three children aged 1, 8, and 13, found themselves in a dire situation. Despite managing to avert eviction through sheer determination, the family's living conditions remained challenging. In response to the mother's request for a heater in the living room, suggesting the family could sleep in there on cold nights, and a heater for the bathroom, Northside Assembly of God jumped on the opportunity to meet this crucial need. This request was input into CarePortal and the church met the need within 4 hours.
- We had the opportunity to speak with The Jackson Hospital Chaplains Group to discuss NWF Health Network, our mission, and our needs. We were able to share ways these pastors and their congregations can make an impact on the lives of families in need in their communities.

## 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 another 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:

- **Continue to offer Faith Grants.** NWF Health Network will announce 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 another Annual Faith Summit.** An in-person Faith Summit will 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. This system should be 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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**NWF** Health  
Network