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Loni Chewing, left, and Diane Adams, volunteers at the Frisco Family Services Center resale shop. photo by Leah Beckham

we live in Frisco. I never knew that this town had such a big heart.”

HELPING THOSE IN CRISIS

As the Center prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary, Frisco’s only social service agency continues its mission of helping local residents hit by hard times—from the poor, sick and elderly to middle-class people in crisis.

The need is great. In the last two years, the agency has seen a 55% increase in the number of families it serves. “I always tell people that by helping us today, you might be helping yourself tomorrow, because no one really knows what’s around the next corner in life,” says Jill Cumnock, executive director of the Center.

In fact, about 45% of the Center’s clients are middle – to upper-income residents. In an upscale community with a median home value of \$157,200, many residents are surprised to learn that people could go hungry in Frisco. But many still struggle. “I’m constantly trying to educate people that you can’t always judge a book by its cover. Despite outward appearances, you never really know what’s going on in another person’s life,” says Cumnock.

Prior to 1995, there was no social service agency in Frisco at all. In 1994, the Reverend John Peel, former pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Frisco, found property on John Elliot Drive for sale and purchased it with his credit card during a land auction. The funds required to construct and furnish the original 1,200 square foot building were raised locally by dedicated volunteers and local businesspeople. The agency began operating under the name Frisco’s Project for the Future in January 1995. A Board of Directors composed of local volunteers continues

Frisco Family Service Center Celebrates 10 Years As need Continues to Grow

By Lindsey Townsend

IT’S BEEN A ROUGH COUPLE OF YEARS FOR THE SMITH* FAMILY OF FRISCO. In April 2003, when their five-month-old infant daughter needed open heart surgery, serious complications developed. What was supposed to be a week-long hospital stay ended up being three months. Before she turned one year old, little Kayla would have five surgeries and flirt with death four times.

Rather than be away from the hospital during the family crisis, John chose to quit his downtown job. “He tried to go back to work, but it was just too hard with his baby girl so close to death,” Lisa, 40, says. “And with family support far away, we needed each other so much.”

Fortunately, the family was able to get help from the Frisco Family Services Center, which provided food pantry items; vouchers for clothes, toys and household items at Frisco Resale Center, and partial assistance with rent and utility payments.

The Smiths’ story has a happy ending. Today their daughter is back home and thriving, and John, 41, has found full-time employment in Frisco just three miles from home. “It hurt us pretty hard financially and I’m sure it will take us months before we are caught up, but we have so much to be thankful for,” says Lisa.

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“I was one of those people who thought we would always have the money and resources to care for our family,” she adds. “I am so thankful that



Clayton Clark, former board president and treasurer and now, active volunteer. photo by Leah Beckham

to oversee the agency's operation.

"This charity really started as a grass roots movement to help those in need. It's so important to the underlying fabric of a community to have a volunteer organization such as this to give the word 'community' real meaning," says Jerry Holder, current board president.

The agency proved so popular that it soon outgrew its original location. With the help of the members of the fifth class of Leadership Frisco and countless community volunteers, the agency moved to its current 4,100 square foot location at 8760 Third Street.

"What was once a dream has become a reality," says Pippa Couvillion, a founding board member and environmental services manager with the City of Frisco. "A small building built and supported by a few caring citizens that operated very limited services has now become a large organization that is an integral part of our community—with support from the whole community."

Today, the Center offers an ever-expanding number of critical services, including computer classes for low-income children and adults

in transition, vocational training, information and referral services and financial assistance for families who may become homeless.

Working in collaboration with the Assistance Center of Collin County, Allen Community Outreach, and Community Lifeline in McKinney, the Center can also provide some help with prescription drug costs to qualifying families. "We'd really like to expand this program in the future, as it fills an important need for people who need life-

saving medications — but can't afford their rising costs," Cumnock says.

Other special projects the Center funds include purchasing school supplies and clothes for needy children, putting together Thanksgiving food baskets, and providing holiday gifts for children and elderly residents.

More than 16,000 pounds of food alone is distributed each month to residents like Josephine*, an 86-year-old widow living on Social Security. "I don't like to ask for anything unless I just can't do it," she says. "I cut corners wherever I can, but things are awful tight."

Josephine visits the pantry every two weeks with an elderly friend to collect food staples such as eggs, canned food, and pasta. "Having this program means everything to me," she says. "Without its help, I would do without a lot."

LOOKING AHEAD

In the future, the Center plans to further expand the food pantry services, perhaps even offer a summer lunch program for low-income children. The adult computer class program, which has been very well received, may

also be expanded.

Results of a needs assessment conducted later this year by the City will be shared with the Center's management and board to help with strategic planning for the future. "We pay very close attention to what our clients tell us they want and try to make adjustments to meet those needs," says Cumnock. For example, the food pantry is now open on Fridays due to numerous requests, and the Center stays open later during the week for working clients.

Support from the community continues to be vital to the Center's long-term success. There are many ways that residents can support the Agency's mission. One of the best is by attending the 11th Annual Fund Raising

FOOD PANTRY ALWAYS NEEDS DONATIONS

It's hard to believe that in a country so full of plenty that the shelves can be bare at the local food pantry, but that is exactly what's happened already twice this year.

Why not consider adopting a shelf at the local food pantry through your Bunko group or other local club or organization?

If you'd like to help, here is a list of items usually in short supply:

- Sugar • Canned chili
- Cooking oil • Paper towels
- Toilet paper • Canned fruit
- Diapers (size 4, 5, 6 & pull-ups)
- Jelly • Bagged rice • Dry milk
- Baby food & formula
- Canned chicken/ham
- Hygiene items (toothbrushes, tooth paste, shampoo, conditioner)

In addition, volunteers for the food pantry and other areas are always needed. Call 972.335.9495 for more information.



Mural inside Frisco Family Services Center
photo by Leah Beckham

Gala, scheduled this year for March 12 at the Westin Stonebriar Resort in Frisco. Because the event raises approximately 34% of the Center's annual budget, its success is critical to area families in need.

The fundraiser, which includes a silent and live auction, musical entertainment, and food and beverages, is fast becoming one of Frisco's premier

kept our ticket prices low at \$50 a person so as many people as possible can attend," says Cumnock.

This year, 750 raffle tickets will also be sold for \$100 each. The grand prize winner will receive up to \$30,000 towards the sticker price of any new Chevrolet at Stonebriar Chevrolet. Tickets are available at the dealership and through the Frisco

events. Last year's event raised almost \$138,000 with over 650 guests in attendance. "We have purposely

Family Services Center website at www.FriscoCenter.org.

Other raffle prizes will include a golf package with two friends and Hall of Fame Dallas Cowboy Randy White at TPC at Craig Ranch, and an autographed football by White and Tony Dorsett

Donations of gently used clothing, furniture, household goods and toys to the Frisco Resale Center at 9085 Dogwood are also always appreciated. "Frisco Resale is one of our biggest funding services, so we really need people to shop there, donate there, and volunteer there," says Cumnock. Call 972.712.7833 for pickup of large items.

* Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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