

Program Rebuilds Young Lives Scarred By Abuse At Home

BY LYNN CARLSON

You're 9 years old and you spent the night under your bed. Daddy was beating on mama again, real bad this time. Next morning you go to school as usual but in class you have trouble paying attention, too mixed up about all these feelings—love and hate, anger and sadness, shame and guilt. Teacher scolds you because you didn't do your homework. You know better than to say why. You're not supposed to tell.

Children who witness domestic violence are, ironically, often more difficult to heal than those who are physically abused at the hands of a loved one. Hope Harbor Home deals with both kinds and is the first domestic violence shelter in the state selected for a \$29,000 juvenile delinquency prevention grant from the N.C. Crime Commission.

Working for the children of Hope Harbor Home is Wanda Feldt of Holden Beach, who designed and implements her therapy program with all the zeal you'd expect from a woman who recently earned her master's degree in social work and whose own "yours, mine and ours" family includes two school-age children and two in their 20s.

Her multi-faceted strategy includes individual and group counseling and play therapy for the children, plus helping their mothers develop effective parenting styles and appropriate ways to discipline. Feldt's services are available not only to women housed at the shelter but to those back in the community, piecing life back together in the wake of an abusive relationship.

The point is to help not only individual families but the larger community, because violence begets violence. Many children who witness or experience beatings grow up believing that aggression is the only way to deal with problems. Others withdraw into a silent fog of self-loathing and shame. Either way, growing up in a violent home can breed adults who don't form healthy families of their own and who contribute disproportionately to societal ills ranging from divorce to the most heinous crimes.

Feldt's job is to help children from violent homes untangle their web of seemingly conflicting emotions. "They don't understand how they can love and hate their father at the same time," she explained. "They're in survival mode. They fear for their mother, but they



STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

WANDA FELDT directs Hope Harbor Home's program for children from abusive homes.

sometimes take the side of the abuser because he's got the power and they can't trust that their mother can take care of them. They feel responsible, that the beatings happen because they're bad, that if they can be good enough, maybe it won't happen again."

The first step, Feldt said, is getting the children to talk, breaking the code of secrecy and denial that's been so much a part of their

young lives. "They often seem relieved to discover that they're not the only children living this way," she said. "Many times they've been isolated from other people or have been moved around so much they haven't been able to make any friends. The average number of times an abused woman moves, usually taking her children, is 7 before she finally gets out of the relationship."

In some cases, the children need help with social skills, she added—just basic manners like the importance of sharing and saying "please" and "thank you."

It's not all about counseling, though. There are exercises like the Anger Control Game which teaches something about solving problems without using your hands. There are books with titles like "Don't Feed the Monster on Tuesdays," which offer subtle child-size messages about how to replace feelings of ugliness and worthlessness with more positive emotions.

Community participation is important, too, Feldt said. She's looking to hire a volunteer coordinator and says she's grateful for all types of contributions. "The kids in the shelter are adjusting to an entirely new life. They may have no money, so they have no toys, not even things as basic as notebook paper, dictionaries and the other school supplies they're expected to have."

Thanks to a contribution from the Mega-Flite headboat, the children recently were treated to an off-shore fishing trip, Feldt said. "I can't tell you how important that is, because it's been a long time since some of these kids have had any

fun." Others give by participating in programs such as Brunswick Buddies, serving as mentors or positive role models for kids at risk of ending up on the wrong side of the law.

The program's other, interdependent component is working with the children's mothers, providing emotional support as they plan their families' futures and adjust to life after abuse.

The mothers learn the important difference between discipline, which develops self-control and character, and punishment, which creates fear without offering explanations for solutions.

Discipline makes children feel loved, important and powerful, Feldt said. "Nobody believes in discipline more than I do. It gives children the structure and consistency they crave in their lives and teaches them the system of rewards and consequences that drives all our adult lives."

Punishment, on the other hand, says it's okay for people who love each other to hurt each other. And that's a message the children of Hope Harbor Home don't ever need to hear again.

Preschool Reaches Out To Break Dependency Cycle

BY LYNN CARLSON

The building smells of newness—fresh paint and elbow grease. Its walls are covered with murals of favorite cartoon characters. New toys are scattered about. The purple dinosaur sings from a portable television set in the corner.

Nine happy children, ranging from pre-school to adolescents, are spending this sunny Friday at Rainbow VIP Preschool in Cedar Grove Community. All are African-American, though that may not always be the case.

Their presence at Rainbow means several things. They are safe and supervised, will have a nutritious lunch and snacks, and will participate in a structured blend of educational and recreational activities. That frees their parents to go about the business of building a life without reliance on public assistance.

The facility once housed the Head Start program at Cedar Grove before Sandra Pierce's family refurbished the entire building and opened Rainbow VIP Preschool with the help of Brunswick Community College and several other community agencies.

"All these kids are involved in the social services system in some way," Pierce explained. Some have mothers participating in government programs designed to train them for self-sustaining jobs and to wean them off Aid to Families with Dependent Children, or welfare payments. Others have moms taking classes at Brunswick Community College or out in the workplace.

"We make it possible for them to get out there and

make it on their own without having to worry about their kids all day," Pierce said.

The center has capacity for 20 children from toddlers to pre-teens. Plans are in the works to eventually take babies, too. Unlike traditional day care settings, Rainbow offers Saturday care. "In a community like ours, when you're trying to get on your feet, you best not tell your boss you can't work on Saturday. If you're working in food service or cleaning cottages, you've got to work the weekend," Pierce said.

The children come from all over Brunswick County, from as far away as Thomasboro near the state line. When they get to Rainbow, they're guaranteed quality care by workers who've been trained in child development. Parents sign a contract acknowledging the preschool's pledge not to spank, belittle, or deprive the children but to listen to, respect and encourage them.

Parents of the Rainbow children attend workshops to learn about the problems and issues of child-rearing, information some might not otherwise receive.

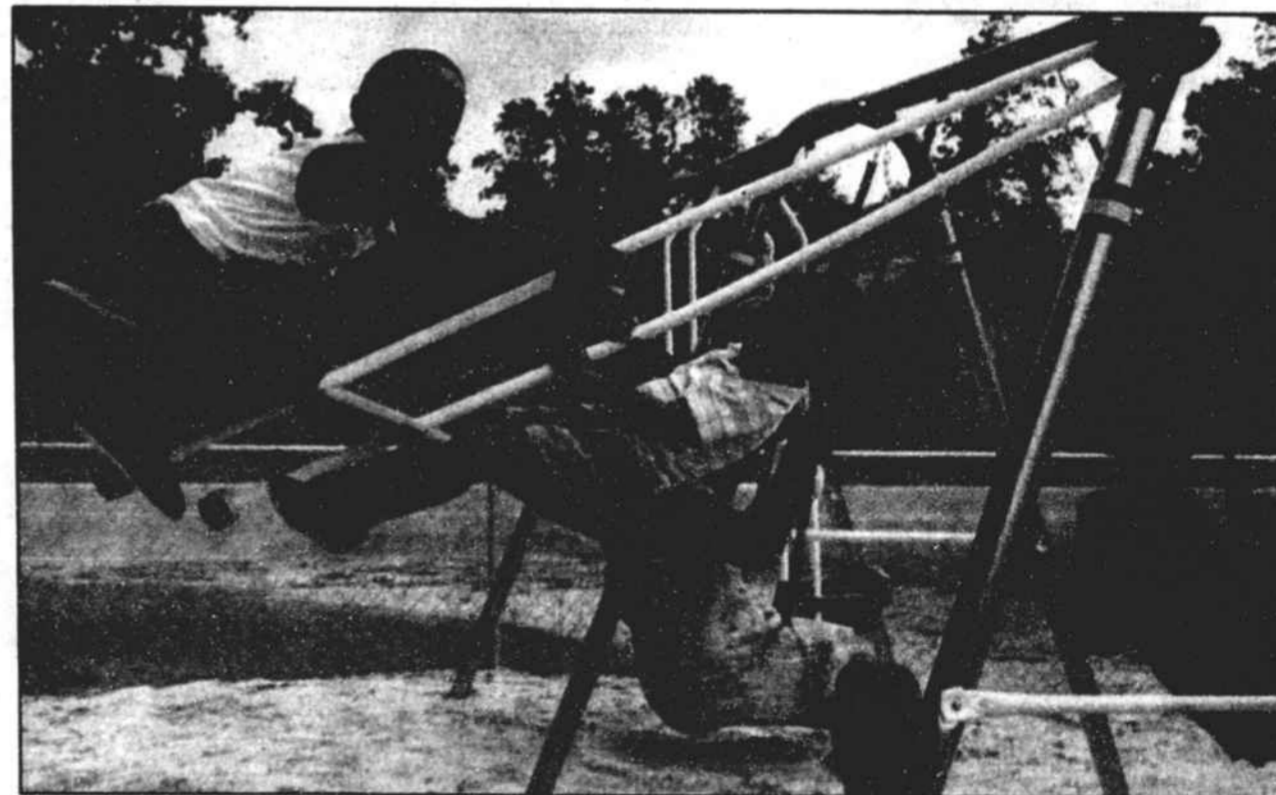
Pierce, the mother of a toddler herself, said, "Raising our kids is the most important job we do, but we don't automatically know how to do it right. I'm so grateful for all the resources we've had to help us develop a good program and to help our parents learn how to be as effective as they can."

It's another step, she said, toward a life of financial self-sufficiency for families who want it and are willing to do their part to get there.



STAFF PHOTO BY LYNN CARLSON

SANDRA PIERCE reads to Rainbow Preschool children (above) after their playtime (below).



Local Historical Society To Mark Anniversary At Brunswick Town

The Brunswick County Historical Society will celebrate its 40th anniversary Sunday, Aug. 7, with a program at Brunswick Town State Historic Site.

Members and special guests including past society presidents are expected to attend the program that begins at 3 p.m. at the site Visitors Center off N.C. 133 between Southport and Wilmington.

Site Director Jim Bartlett will discuss the historic site and the Brunswick County Historical Society's large role in its preservation. A reception is planned afterward.

Presently led by Lottie Ludlum, the society was organized in 1954.

On Sept. 8, 1963, during the presidency of Mrs. M.H. (Marie) Rourke of Shallotte, the society was observing the centennial granting of the Carolina Charter with a ceremony at the ruin of St. Philip's at Brunswick Town when a guest speaker, historian Lawrence Lee, proposed the preservation of the colonial seaport site.

A year later the county historical society launched the project that resulted in creation of the Brunswick Town State Historic Site.

"That was the society's major project," said society newsletter editor David Bennett. "We still support the historic site today in various behind-the-scenes ways."

They May Be 'Just Weeds' But Their Blossoms Are Beautiful

BY BILL FAVER

Someone has said the only difference in weeds and flowers is that weeds are flowers in a place where you don't want them to be! Maybe that isn't true for all weeds, but for many with colorful flowers and bright foliage we could probably tolerate them if they were somewhere else. We might even permit them to grow and appreciate them as more than "just weeds."



FAVER

A dictionary definition of a weed is "any plant growing in cultivated ground to the

detriment of the crop or the disfigurement of the place." Even our best flower specimens would be considered weeds in the soybeans or corn.

Some of the "weeds" have the most beautiful blossoms. Along many roadsides and at old house sites we find thistles, chicory, Queen Anne's lace, passion flower, pokeweed, Caillardia, phlox, dayflower, wild asters, daisies, morning glories and scores of others, all with very interesting and colorful blossoms.

There are many opportunities along our roadsides and beaches to discover some of these weeds and flowers. Some even make good contributions to our plantings and flower beds. All have a role in the complicated web of life as part of the food chain, as a nourisher of the soil, or as a recycler of some elements.

Maybe they're not just weeds. Maybe we can take the advice of the one who said, "If it's green, let it grow, and if it blooms, enjoy it!"



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

MORNING GLORIES growing on an old building would be considered weeds by some people.

