

# **New Safe Havens Family Visitation Center in Middletown to Host Grand Opening Sept. 6**

MIDDLETOWN (Aug. 24, 2018) – After five years of development, the Safe Havens Family Visitation Center opened Aug. 8 in Middletown, bringing the total number of family visitation centers for Delaware to six. An official open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held Sept. 6.

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) approved funding for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) under the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program. This cooperative agreement supports supervised visitation and safe exchange options for families with a history of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, child abuse or stalking.

Although the federal grant was received in September 2012, the project had remained in the developmental stage for more than five years because of the requirements of the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) regarding requirements for a site that could be used for the new center. Working hand-in-hand with CHILD, Inc., the Office of Community Services within DHSS toured more than 20 facilities available for commercial lease. Sites were ruled out for a variety of reasons, including size, compliance under the Americans with Disabilities Act, cost and safety. The search ended when CHILD, Inc. secured a landlord-donor who provided the Middletown site. The facility is new construction and has passed the Office of Violence Against Women's requirements and the Town of Middletown's zoning.

“During these challenging periods for families, it’s important to have locations that keep travel time to a minimum for these visits that bring parents and children together, as well as the exchanges of children between parents,” said DHSS Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker, a board-certified family physician. “I am grateful to our Office of Community Services and our community partners for their dedication in finding a Middletown site that would meet the needs of families in that area, along with all of the federal, state and local requirements.”

The Family Visitation Program provides a safe, structured, and nurturing environment where children can maintain or re-establish a relationship with a non-residential parent, and help keep children, adult victims and other parties in cases of intimate partner violence safe during exchanges and visitation. The Safe Havens Family Visitation Center Open House will be held from 5-7 p.m. Sept. 6 at [210 Cleaver Farm Road, Middletown](#).

“Having this new Middletown location will allow increased access for this family-centric approach of providing a secure place for children to unite safely with family members,” said Renée P. Beaman, Director of DHSS’ Division of State Service Centers.

The Family Visitation Program was established in 1995 in response to an increasing number of domestic violence-related deaths and other crimes in the community. In 1992, there were 11 homicides in Delaware connected to domestic violence, 372 intimate partner-related rapes and sexual assaults, and 7,955 domestic violence assaults. Two of these murders occurred while parents were meeting to exchange their children for visitation.

“For many years, the Family Court has considered the Family Visitation Centers an important resource for parents and children needing a safe and supervised setting for visits or

exchanges,” said Chief Judge Michael K. Newell of Delaware’s Family Court. “Families in the Middletown area will benefit from having the additional Safe Havens Center to serve the community.”

In 1995, with funding through the Criminal Justice Council, and funding from Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families, the Department of Health and Social Services’ Division of State Service Centers opened two visitation centers. The centers were created to keep victims of intimate partner violence and their children safe during visitation and exchange. In partnership with CHILD, Inc. and People’s Place, these important services were made available by both agencies and housed at the Hudson State Service Center in Newark and the Milford State Service Center.

Today, there are five family visitation centers, with two locations in New Castle County, one in Kent County and two in Sussex County. All sites are accessible to public transportation and open evenings, weekends and holidays. Fees to use the centers are determined by income, and are as low as \$4. The supervised visits between children and their residential/non-residential parents are conducted based on the parameters designated under court orders. Parents who mutually agree to use the centers’ services may contact the centers directly or be referred by family court, social services, attorneys, victim services or other agencies.

Family visitation centers do not make recommendations about changes in custody or the appropriateness of changing visitation arrangements. Trained staff supervise each visit and monitor each exchange. Safety measures that exist in Delaware’s family visitation centers include separate and distinct entrances and parking areas for each parent; staggered arrival and departure times; security camera monitoring; experienced security guards; professionally trained staff; and access to interpretation services for participants who do not speak English or are deaf or hearing-

impaired.

“CHILD, Inc. is pleased to be able to support families through the operation of the new Safe Havens Center,” said Lori Sitler, Executive Director of CHILD, Inc. “For families who have a history of domestic violence or other situations that require supervised visitation and safe exchange, this new Middletown location will enable more parents and children to develop healthy, safe relationships and ensure that victims of violence are protected.”

There continues to be a strong need for family visitation and other like programs in Delaware. During Fiscal Year 2017, the family visitation centers served 681 families statewide, an increase of 12 percent over the previous year. That year, the program facilitated 2,137 individual visits and 1,688 group visitations. In response to a growing need to increase the state’s capacity, the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services’ Division of State Service Centers, in collaboration with CHILD, Inc., applied for and became the recipient of the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program Grant. The facility opening in Middletown is the result of those efforts.

Donations of new toys and games for children of all ages are welcome.

Funding to operate the five existing family visitation centers is provided by the Delaware General Assembly and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Support Enforcement, and grants to States Access and Visitation Program. Funding for the new family visitation center in Middletown is provided by grant #2012-CW-AX-K025 awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

For more information about the family visitation centers,

referrals, and/or appointments, please call:

- New Castle County: CHILD, Inc. at 302-283-7518
- Kent and Sussex counties: Turning Point at People's Place II, Inc. at 302-424-2420



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*The Family Visitation Program is supported partially by funds awarded by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this website/publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*

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