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## **FAYETTE COUNTY CUTS RIBBON ON NEW FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER**

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County Children and Youth Services (CYS) celebrated their latest major programming expansion with an open house and ribbon cutting Tuesday.

The Plans of Safe Care (POSC) Family Support Center is officially open in Uniontown Mall. Years in the making, the facility is the result of a joint effort by CYS, Fayette County Drug & Alcohol and the Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration to support children born with drug dependencies.

Program Specialist Jayme Shaffer said CYS is notified when babies are born locally with drug or alcohol withdrawal symptoms and their existing Plans of Safe Care Program goes into effect, offering a variety of resources designed to help mothers who may be battling addiction.

“We have a new pregnancy program to help those who we know early on may be struggling. We do entire family assessments, in-home visits, connect them with medical care not only for their baby, but their entire household. We offer drug and alcohol treatment, screenings for postpartum depression and other health issues; and even transportation to appointments and court hearings; help with housing and receiving documents if they’re couch surfing; and just an all-around high level of support from the very beginning,” Shaffer said. “We want to help them develop goals and work toward using the services we offer independently. We build that support system around them, identify their existing support systems – 99 percent of what we do is support, and that’s where our Family Support Center comes into play. We want to encourage them to do it themselves.”

Funded by grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS), the new facility will not only give the Plans of Safe Care Program a headquarters away from the main CYS office, but create a “safe, non-stigmatized space to offer services to families,” Shaffer added.

“One of the biggest problems we face is that women don’t want to go out and obtain the recovery and support services they need because of the stigma associated with addiction. They’re afraid of CYS and are concerned they’ll be treated differently, so we want to give them a judgment-free, safe, confidential, one-stop shop for everything they need,” she said. “Lots of moms need birth certificates or other documents but aren’t even willing to come here and sit in what they think of as the ‘lion’s den’ full of their ‘enemies’ just to fill out important paperwork. This center will give them access to computers, printers, everything they can’t do with a cell phone – all while their kids play in our community room.”

In addition to the community room, the POSC Family Support Center also boasts private rooms for breastfeeding and diaper changing; medical assessments; alternative visitation needs; and safe, supportive spaces for caregivers who may be overwhelmed by infants going through withdrawals.

Shaffer said the center will also have its own Community Network Team of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who will travel to meet with families.

“So many people don’t want to go out in the community and seek services where they may be stigmatized, so we want to bring those services to them,” Shaffer said. “Before the ribbon cutting, we were meeting with service providers, developing plans, seeing a few clients and setting everything up so that it’s not a clinical setting, but more like a very comfortable house.”

One of Shaffer’s favorite features is the facility’s Share & Care Closet, full of items donated or purchased through grant funding that might be needed to stabilize a family, including infant and toddler items, hygiene products, clothing and more. Shaffer said her team is also developing ways for clients to earn some items from the closet by “giving back” and “putting them in the driver’s seat.”

CYS Administrator Gina D’Auria said the POSC Family Support Center is the wonderful result of a project her agency has been conceiving for many years.

“To finally have the funding and ability to offer 100 percent supportive, nonjudgmental, caring services to families and to be able to bring in other community partners to support families is so exciting, and I’m just totally thrilled that we were given this opportunity,” D’Auria said. “I think that, through the work done at this center, we’re going to have stronger families, closer communities and better outcomes for our youth in the future.”

Tuesday’s event featured presentations from Shaffer; Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, Vince Vicites and Scott Dunn; Drug & Alcohol and Behavioral Health Administration representatives; DHS representatives; federal and state legislators and others who championed the new facility.

Commissioner Vicites said he’s proud of the county’s work to finally address one of the community’s longstanding needs.

“This will have such a significant impact on our citizens and our communities, as a whole,” Vicites said. “Our CYS workers have a very difficult job. The county commissioners have supported CYS budgetarily and will continue to focus on helping this important agency and its programs in the future.”

Commissioner Dunn said the Family Support Center is a testament to Fayette County’s continued commitment to its families.

“Everything starts and ends with family. The more resources we can provide our mothers who may be struggling with addiction and those born with withdrawal symptoms, the better chance we have to preserve that family unit and offer them a future full of opportunities,” Dunn said. “This is a place where Jayme and her team will be able to empower women, offer unprecedented levels of support, and give our families the help they need to succeed. Everyone is struggling with something we know nothing about, so it’s always important to be kind and empathetic. That’s the kind of support we plan to provide here. This is where we stop the stigma and start putting family first.”

Commissioner Chairman Lohr said families are “the backbone of society,” and the place where children “get their foundation.”

“If a family isn’t healthy, it’s the children who pay the price, initially, because it’s the children who are harmed; but ultimately, society pays the price as well. It is incumbent on us that we provide parents with

the training and the tools they need to succeed as parents, so that their kids can have a future,” Lohr said. “With this new CYS Family Support Center, we will have a place where families will be empowered to care for their own kids, so parents don’t have to rely on others to raise their kids. It will be a place where families and children can gain the skills necessary for success, for today, for tomorrow and for the future.”

The Plans of Safe Care Family Support Center is located in the former Yarrick’s Hearing Center office, through the former Sears entrance, at Uniontown Mall, 1368 Mall Run Road, Uniontown, PA 15401.

To learn more about the new facility and its programming, visit [www.fayettecountypa.org/879/Plan-of-Safe-Care-Program](http://www.fayettecountypa.org/879/Plan-of-Safe-Care-Program); email [jshaffer@fccys.org](mailto:jshaffer@fccys.org); or call or text 724-880-6909. Prospective clients, their family members, service providers and more are also encouraged to use that direct phone line to reach the center at any time.

“I really think that this will help bridge a huge gap in trust between our agency and our clients,” Shaffer said. “I’m very open and honest, and we want our families to understand what’s available to them and being delivered in a very non-threatening way. If someone needs help and wants a safe place to get it, we will be that for them.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.fayettecountypa.org](http://www.fayettecountypa.org).

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