

ST. JAMES *living*



*Samara's Village -
It Takes a Village*



Samara's Village - It Takes a Village

a **BIG THANK YOU** St. James Residents that Are Part of this Village

BY SUSAN HARMAN | PHOTOS JENNA KAZ PHOTOS

Many of us are familiar with the African proverb – 'It takes a village to raise a child' – but are we familiar with its meaning?

It means that an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment. It means that raising a child takes the love and care of not just parents but the whole community. In the case of Samara's Village, a Brunswick County based nonprofit (501(c)3) organization that offers programs to assist young

parents who live in Brunswick County to raise healthy babies; the 'village' has been the many volunteers that live in St. James and our surrounding neighborhoods.

Samara's Village is the first and only of its kind in Brunswick County that targets the problematic teen pregnancy rates in Brunswick County, which are higher than the surrounding counties and most of the counties in North Carolina. Research has shown that adolescent parents and their children are at a higher risk for becoming unhealthy

physically, socially and emotionally, and can be a drain on community resources. Pregnancy is the #1 reason why teen girls drop out of school, and 80% of unmarried teen moms end up on welfare. Participants in Samara's Village are being educated, equipped, and empowered to raise their children in a manner that will have a lasting impact, improving their chances at success later in life. And this is being done by your efforts, as Samara's Village has only one paid employee. It operates based solely



on the support, donations and efforts of the dedicated volunteers and board of directors.

Samara's Village was founded in 2015 when the pastor of Generations Church challenged members to find their passion. Four women came together and discovered they had a passion for helping female adolescents, and in researching issues related to this group they learned that teen pregnancy was a big and growing problem in Brunswick County. Additionally, they learned that while there existed pregnant and parenting services directed at pregnant and parenting teens, these services only focused on physical and educational needs. The women held a strong belief that there was a need for a more holistic approach – similar to the concept of 'It takes a Village'. The founders chose the name Samara's Village because the name means "under God's protection". And according to a founder, Donna Robey-Sullivan, "We wanted to operate under the notion that 'it takes a village' to raise a child. Our goal is to provide a nonjudgmental support system that focuses on the entire family unit – not just the pregnant and parenting teen. We do this by empowering, educating, and supporting the pregnant/parenting adolescent mother and the baby's father, so that they can be in control of their lives, raise healthy babies, and grow into productive and responsible adults in Brunswick County."

Samara's Village provides the connection to community resources, and mentoring to help the mothers and fathers to lead healthy lifestyles, with a focus on the physical, social and emotional well being of the family unit. This is done via an evidence-based program developed by Florida State University that is proven to support the entire family and reduce repeat teen



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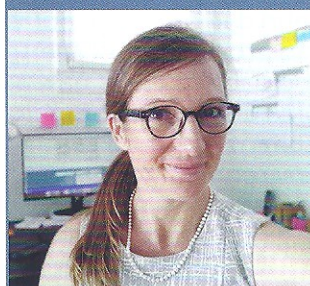

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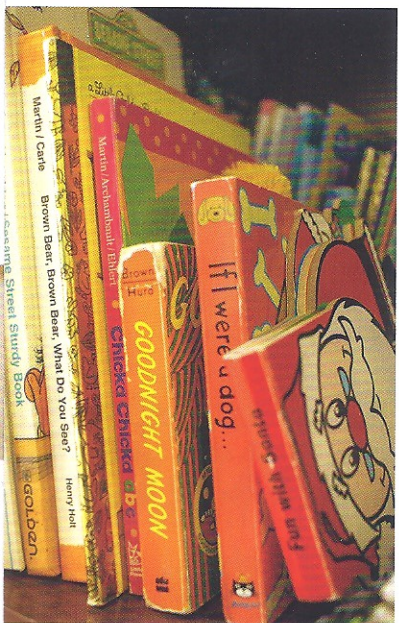


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pregnancies, drop-outs, and child abuse, and continue educational, vocational and life-skills development. Three key services are provided free of charge to the adolescent teen girls and the fathers:

1. Specialized education interventions and parenting education and coaching for both the mom and the baby's father.
2. Services directed at supporting the family's immediate needs – the Resource Center maintains an inventory of commonly needed baby items and an infant and toddler library.

Coordination with available community resources.

Samara's Village has blossomed since it started with 4 teen moms and 4 volunteers. Samara's Village supports the pregnant mom and dad for up to four years in order to provide the 'village' to the family unit and baby. There is now a dedicated Resource Center in Southport that offers a welcoming, safe and comfortable lounge type environment for meetings, tutoring and educational support, and social events for the girls, the babies, and the fathers.

Today there are over 60 volunteers and 23 teen moms. Tony Rizzo, a St. James resident and volunteer, has been a Fatherhood Mentor for over two years, and said, "There were many people who helped me navigate through my life, now it's my turn to contribute." Tony is also the Fatherhood Mentor Team Leader, where

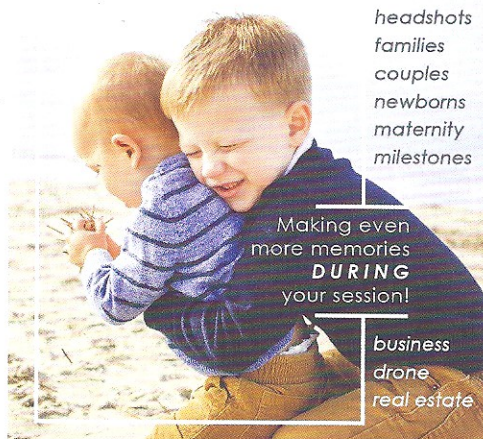
he trains new mentors to help baby dads be responsible and raise healthy babies. Another St. James resident and volunteer, Nancy Adelis, "likes the opportunity to assist young mothers and their babies."

As an adolescent dealing with an unplanned pregnancy, Samara's Village helped Jane throughout her pregnancy - to get through her morning sickness, take care of herself, to be the first and only person in her family to graduate from high school, and then to take care of her baby son and be a good mother. Now Samara's Village is helping her enroll in college and select classes. Jane would not have been able to accomplish this without her village support team—her parents, school counselors and her Samara's Village Home Visitor volunteer team.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Samara's Village, and participate in these roles:

- Home Visitors are female volunteers. The home visitor is an integral member of the Samara's Village team. They are the program facilitator for our Partners for a Healthy Baby Curriculum and the lifeline between the organization and the female participant.
- Father Mentors are male volunteers. They are an integral member of the Samara's Village team and must possess the desire to help support and educate young fathers – direct, instruct, guide and listen.

JENNA KAZ PHOTO



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- Resource Closet and Admin team help to organize and manage the Resource Center and operations.
- Ambassadors represent Samara's Village within a defined area of Brunswick County and consistently promote Samara's Village monthly at each location and build a relationship. The expected outcomes are an increase in program participants, donor development, and Samara's Village name recognition.
- Resource development team members help to fundraise, write grants, solicit corporate donations and participate in donor development.
- Marketing team help with developing content for social media and with event planning.
- Board of Directors are also volunteers that chair various committees and functions. Two-thirds of our board members are residents of St. James.

Jeff Bantle, Chairman of the Board, Samara's Village, is delighted with the participation of St. James residents. "It's great to see Samara's Village making a difference in the lives of these young families. Thanks to you, St. James residents, Samara's Village is having a positive impact on our community and the lives of these young families and their babies, and especially now, with so many fund raising initiatives canceled, they need your help more than ever. If you aren't already part of Samara's Village, consider doing so by becoming a volunteer."




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