

Monday, April 25, 2011

Keeping Families Strong

Olive Crest programs help parents, children face challenges

BY CAITLIN MCGARRY

There are countless stories of parents and children who have been helped by Olive Crest, said the organization's regional program director, Jennifer Bevacqua.

As Child Abuse Prevention Month draws to a close and Foster Care Parent Appreciation Month begins, Olive Crest is reminding the community that its services are integral for families who may be struggling. From foster parents to children with special needs, the California-based nonprofit organization offers programs that address the variety of challenges families face today.

Olive Crest expanded to Las Vegas in 1996 to provide specialized foster care services to Southern Nevada families. The organization has taken on many more roles in the intervening years. Olive Crest now offers community-based programs for disadvantaged families, in addition to foster care services and emergency shelter care.

The nonprofit opened its North Las Vegas office, a family resource center, in 2008. The center is one of five in Las Vegas, and offers everything from emergency food and rental assistance to help with referrals and case management services. The center also hosts a Family to Family Connection program that teaches interactive classes for parents and children younger than 4.

"It can be a very prime time for abuse and neglect to happen, especially with new parents, because they don't know. There could be safety concerns. People don't know what to do or become very stressed or overwhelmed," Bevacqua said. "By having knowledge and having support and opportunities to engage with their child in a very positive manner, it can reduce risk factors for abuse or neglect."

Olive Crest accepts referrals from the county and state, but its services are also discovered by word-of-mouth. A terminally ill woman with a 17-year-old daughter recently turned to the agency after hearing about it from a friend. Through its Strong Families program, which has staff members visit the home and offer treatment, Olive Crest helped the woman reconnect with her sister in California. That way, when the woman died, her daughter would have a new home and family to go to.

That case is one of countless tales that Olive Crest's 26 local employees can recount.

When the recession began, Bevacqua noticed a marked difference in the people who turned to the nonprofit for help.

"We were seeing families that never sought help before," she said. "There are some people who know



**GARY THOMPSON | LAS VEGAS
REVIEW-JOURNAL**

Olive Crest Family to Family Connection program supervisor Renisha O'Donnell plays with Uriel Pariente, 1, and Brissa Espino, 4, on April 19 at the North Las Vegas Family Resource Center, 3825 W. Cheyenne Ave. The program helps parents and children younger than 4.

where to go within a system ... but there are families that were coming through the door and continue to that have never been in these types of situations before. There's shame there; there's guilt."

As public funds dry up, Olive Crest, like other organizations, has had to do more with less. The nonprofit is supported by the MGM Resorts Foundation and the Engelstad Foundation, as well as business partners like Cox Communications, NV Energy and USAA Bank, among others.

Olive Crest requires money to offer its programs, but the agency also likes to host events for its clients, who often cannot afford to take their children bowling or to a movie. Families are invited to attend RagTag Entertainment's "Snoopy the Musical" at the College of Southern Nevada's Cheyenne campus April 29. Tickets are \$10.

On June 3, Olive Crest is hosting its "Be the Change ... An Evening of Hope" gala at the Las Vegas Hilton. The Las Vegas Review-Journal is also sponsoring the event. Tickets are \$100.

Contact reporter Caitlin McGarry at cmcgarry@lvbusinesspress.com or 702-387-5273.

For more information about Olive Crest and its programs, visit www.olivecrest.org

DONATIONS

Windsong Trust awarded a \$500,000 grant to **United Way of Southern Nevada** to provide scholarships for early childhood education.

NV Energy awarded a \$25,000 grant to **Spread the Word Nevada** to provide children's books and encourage literacy in elementary schools.

Dollar Loan Center donated \$10,000 to **Henderson Little League** to pay for uniforms, umpires and other baseball-related expenses.

Invisible Fence Brand of Southern Nevada donated 175 pet oxygen masks to the **Clark County Fire Department** and other Southern Nevada fire departments for dogs and cats rescued from fires.

Putter's Gaming Group donated \$2,000 to **Specialized Alternatives for Families and Youth**.