



This little girl enjoys eating her oatmeal for breakfast at The Lehman Center. Her mother used the shelter for an emergency when she had to enter the hospital.

Record photo by Bil Bowden

Lehman a haven for kids

By LAURALEE JONES
Daily Record staff

A bad day at the office, a traffic jam, a bounced check or a screaming baby can trigger it.

Child abuse.

Children and Youth Services reports that 25 percent of girls and 16 percent of boys will suffer from some form of it—physical, sexual or emotional—by the time they're 18 years old.

They don't have to.

The Lehman Center crisis nursery in York offers them a haven while their parents cool off.

Any time of the day or night, parents can leave children birth to age 6 with trained staff in the building at West Market and Penn streets.

There is one condition: They must agree to let staff help them work out their problems.

That includes home visits by case managers to help them set realistic guidelines. Children may be asked to attend sessions with the center's art therapist.

The annual budget, which will exceed \$300,000 this year, comes from the United Way, government sources and private donations. There is no cost to families whose children stay there, but there are sliding scale fees for children who receive outpatient therapy.

The Christian philosophy of the center is to support families without judgment, said Director Angela Fogle.

In 1992, 420 children were sheltered there. Most were Caucasian with one parent (usually the mom) living at poverty level or just above.

"Being a mother is the most difficult job you can have," Fogle said. A mother of two small children herself, she said she feels for everyone involved. "It takes a big person to say, 'I need help.'"

By law, six children at a time can sleep at the facility.

Upon admission, they get a full health screening in the presence of a parent. It includes a bath to look for marks of physical abuse or identifiable illnesses like scabies or ringworm.

For 72 hours, they remain in the two-story house equipped with security alarms.

During the day, they play in a downstairs room piled high with safe toys. They get homecooked meals and tender care from staff and volunteers.

At night, they sleep in cribs or bunk beds in one of two upstairs bedrooms filled with stuffed animals and Sesame Street wall hangings.

"I don't believe for a minute that people who come in here love their children any less than you or I," Fogle said. "They've just had a tough life."

TIME OUT

Center gives parents a break and also helps their children

By LAURALEE JONES
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Taken at face value, it was just a child's drawing. A stick girl with a big head, wearing a transparent blue dress.

To the 6-year-old artist, it was a cry for help.

Karen Stabley saw it immediately.

Her client — too young to find the words — used crayons and a small piece of paper to say that she was being sexually abused.

Stabley is an art therapist at The Lehman Center crisis nursery in York.

Through drawings and paintings, role playing games and observation, she evaluates then counsels children brought to the center by parents at risk of harming them.

Her service is one of the many available to children and adults who use the emergency shelter.

Since 1987, the non-profit agency has provided a temporary safe haven for children birth to age 6, in-home visits to help families identify problems, and referrals to other community services for counseling and support.

"We're like the grandma and grandpa for these people who don't have that," said Angela Fogle, director. "We give the parents breaks."

Stabley has been working full time more than a year.

Her various degrees in creative arts therapy, seven years of experience and success with the children has earned her respect in the community.

She is sometimes called upon for input by area judges who deal with child abuse cases, Fogle said.

Her upstairs office is a child's dream room.

It's large and has hardwood floors and big windows overlooking West Market and Penn streets.

A pile of dolls lie at one end of a fluffy couch. Above it, colorful drawings are held onto a string with clothespins.

Masks, books, a sandbox full of traditional sandbox toys and a big doll house with a silver roof are neatly placed around the room.

"I do a lot of role playing with the masks," Stabley said. Often, she watches as a child puts one on and talks into a mirror.

She starts her therapy by evaluating a series of 15 to 20 drawings.

Her specialized training allows her to identify problems within those drawings.

For example, transparent clothing and an "X" in the genital area may indicate sexual abuse.

These signs, along with visits to the child's home by the cen-



Record photo by Paul Kuehnel

Karen Stabley, left, is an art therapist at The Lehman Center crisis nursery in York. Her specialized training allows her to identify problems within children's drawings and during role playing games.

ter's case managers, help determine the course of therapy.

"I feel like I'm supported by all angles," Stabley said, referring to case managers and other staff. "They do such a thorough job."

Stabley has no game plan when a child comes to her office.

Depending on their need or interest, they are drawn to a particular toy or game, she said.

A child feeling insecure or unsafe may pick up a toy guns or knives, she said.

"Kids who are especially needy set up little family scenes (with animal figurines) in the sandbox," she said.

And children who lack a bond with their mother often play food games, she said.

Stabley said she has the best job in the world despite the pain she sees.

"These kids need to know there's an adult who isn't going to abuse them," she said. "They need a place where they can just be themselves."