



Double Time:

Scott Dishman (right) is the director of community engagement for The Family Effect, the fundraising arm of the Phoenix Center (headed up by Adam Brickner, left), which aims to knock out addiction in the home as the leading cause of child abuse and neglect. For more information or to make a donation, go to familyeffect.org

Family Ties

Upstate organization works to unravel the effects of addiction, one family at a time

/by Kimberly Johnson

The rope of addiction is the noose of a child. It's a reality that bears out in heartbreaking numbers. Every year in Greenville County, about 1,300 kids are confirmed as neglected or abused, with about half of them removed from their homes and placed into foster care. Drug and alcohol addictions are the number-one single cause of child neglect, but an Upstate organization is working to change that.

"Our mission is to reduce addiction as the leading cause of family collapse and harm to children," says Scott Dishman, director of community engagement for The Family Effect. "There may be a lot of issues that family is facing, but addiction is the bottleneck in the equation. Nothing is going to get better for them as long as addiction is there."

The Family Effect organization was launched about two years ago as the funding and philanthropic arm for the Phoenix Center of Greenville, a nonprofit that has long operated the Serenity Place residential treatment facility. For four to six months at a time, it is home to 16 women—some pregnant—and their young children as they battle their addiction and relearn parental responsibilities and bonds.

The program's strategy of treating mothers and helping their neglected children catch up with their development is unique. Only about 3 percent of addiction programs accept a mother alongside her children for residential treatment. It's a strategy that heads off having to choose between treatment and staying

with their kids, facility officials say. And results are promising. Of the mothers and children who have completed the program, 83 percent of the children were in age-appropriate classes in mainstream school. Without the program, those numbers fall to about 10 percent, according to Dishman.

The program's success has caught attention from academia. Local philanthropic groups Greenville Women Giving and Dabo's All-In-Team Foundation have brought in clinicians from Duke University Medical Center, who are drawing on the clinical interactions at Serenity Place in order to create a curriculum for how best to treat a young mother facing addiction problems.

"Once that's done, that will allow us to teach other people to do this work and do it well," Dishman says. "It's not just having the program, it's not just having the treatment, but we are working really hard to advance the science."

Angie Crawford says she's living proof. Eight years ago, Crawford, a peer-support counselor at the treatment facility, found herself a patient with an infant and a toddler in tow. The program helped reestablish bonds with her children and put them all on a path of living up to their potential. "They were very fortunate that the intervention came early in their lives when they don't remember Mom being wasted on drugs and alcohol," she says. And most would agree that Crawford was fortunate, too. **T**