



Hannah's House Supervised Visitation and Exchange Center Information Packet

Introduction:

Hannah's House provides a safe location for children to have contact with parents and other relatives who they might not otherwise be able to maintain a relationship with due to custody litigation or other difficult family transitions. We also provide a neutral location where parents can pick up and drop off children without having to interact directly with each other. Our goal in providing these services is to eliminate as much of the emotional hardship that children frequently have to endure as a result of custody litigation as possible, while helping them maintain safe contact with their parents and other significant relatives. While there may be many allegations made between parents in custody litigation, Hannah's House strives to provide a neutral, non-judgmental, and respectful environment for the parents who use our services. We do provide referral services for issues related to domestic violence, substance abuse, and other difficulties which might impair a parent's relationship with their children, however our focus is on insuring that children can have safe and positive contact with their parents rather than rehashing the issues which are already being addressed by the Family Courts. Although Hannah's House does charge fees for services, we are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that would not be able to continue its work with children without the generous donations of time and money from our "Hannah's Helpers."

History:

Hannah's House opened its doors in late 2001 in response to new legislation which gave judges more latitude to order supervised visitation in cases where there were possible risks to the children involved due to domestic violence or child abuse or neglect.¹ The Dallas/Ft. Worth metroplex had already seen first hand a number of tragic cases where children suffered, and at times died, during contentious custody battles. Hannah's House began with a clear commitment to providing prevention services, but the need is staggering. In Dallas County alone there are approximately 22,000 new divorce cases per year with an estimated 1,300 of those cases involving families with spousal abuse, child abuse, or both.² As the number of other providers

¹77th Texas Legislature's amendments to TFC 153.004 (SB 140), effective September 1, 2001.

²Dallas Family Courts, 2002 Data

who offer supervision has dwindled we have tried to stretch our resources to meet the continuing community need. Since beginning operations Hannah's House has served hundreds of families, and continues to grow to serve areas across the metroplex.

Effects on Children:

The statistics regarding the effects of family conflict (both physical and emotional) on children are staggering. 43% of all critical injuries and child fatalities occur in homes where there is spousal abuse.³ Children who witness or are subjected to emotional or physical violence are at risk for developmental delays, lack of social competency, and poor impulse control and anger management skills. They may feel isolated from friends and family and guilty over irrational feelings of responsibility for the family difficulties. They can be confused, angry, nervous, or attention seeking – often all at the same time. Abused and neglected children are 6 times more likely to commit suicide, 50 times more likely to abuse alcohol or other drugs, and 74 times more likely to engage in crimes against persons than their non-abused counterparts.⁴

Hannah's House exists to serve as a **prevention** program. Regardless of the nature of the allegations involved in the custody litigation we offer an environment where children can feel safe and secure, while still maintaining contact with the parents and family members they love. Parents can prevent revisiting disputes with former partners and escape conflict by avoiding direct confrontation with the other party in the litigation. Children can avoid watching their parents continue the difficulties which may have been the cause for their separation in the first place, and stay out of the middle of the adult disputes which may be continuing in the courthouse.

Services Offered:

- Level 1 "Observational Supervision" – on site visitation conducted by trained staff and volunteers.
- Level 2 "Interactive Supervision" – visits in the community, often at a parent's home or other child friendly location, conducted by degreed and experienced professionals.
- Level 3 "Therapeutically Supervised" – visitations that combine supervised visitation with active feedback from a licensed mental health professional with advanced degrees and training. Level 3 supervision is not therapy, but uses many of the same techniques to help improve parent child interactions.
- Supervised exchanges – exchanges of children without parental contact. Independent confirmation of the time of the exchange and circumstances of the exchange are provided by Hannah's House staff.

³The Family Place Community Report

⁴Injury Prevention Center of Greater Dallas, Child Abuse Prevention Coalition

How you can help:

Become a "Hannah's Helper" today! Hannah's Helpers assist with providing observation during supervised visitation and can help with fundraising and donation requests as well. Two or four hours of your time on the weekend can make a world of difference for the children we work with. We are always in need of volunteers to assist with observations, and without strong community financial support we could not accomplish our work. Please check our wish list or with our Executive Director regarding donations – our needs change from time to time, but we are always appreciative of office supplies and other basics!