

# the link



Dear Friends,

With the arrival of spring and warmer Pittsburgh temperatures, I am pleased to share with you some updates from Familylinks. Over the past nine months of my time here, I have been humbled and impressed by the work of our team. While the pandemic forced us to work differently, it certainly has not slowed progress. From hiring key team members to program expansion and development, our work continues with strength and focus. In this issue, you will meet Monique Jackson and Jim Needles, our COO and CIO, respectively. Their biographies recount the skills that Monique and Jim bring to the team, but do not reflect their incredible passion for the work that we do. We are truly lucky to have found their talents and brought them to Familylinks. This is not an easy time to be in human services, and I'm so proud of our team for never losing sight of the communities that we serve, and remaining a constant source of hope throughout the pandemic. With the diligence of every staff member, we never once needed to close our doors to individuals in need of services.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and this issue highlights mental health resources here at Familylinks. The pandemic has illuminated our nation's challenges around access to mental health, especially for minority populations and underserved areas. Read about our talented staff and investments in evidence-based training in this issue and how you can access or support our behavioral health services here at Familylinks.

Thank you for your continued support.

*Stacey Vaccaro*



Stacey Vaccaro  
President & CEO

## Mental Health Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and the past year has created a significant increase in instances of isolation, depression, anxiety, and fear for so many individuals. In some cases, we don't even realize how COVID restrictions, unemployment and the potential for a life-threatening illness are affecting their day to day well-being. If you need support or have questions, we would be glad to provide you with additional information. Familylinks continues to provide counseling for youth, adults and seniors. If you, or someone you know, may benefit from these services, please call 866-583-6003 or visit [www.familylinks.org](http://www.familylinks.org).

## Senior Success Story

Sandra lives alone and suffers from back and leg pain as a result of her arthritis. Until discovering Familylinks' **Options Care Management** program for seniors, she had been unsuccessful in finding resources to help her. When she met with Ruth, her Care Manager, Sandra instantly knew she had found an advocate. Ruth searched for resources for Sandra and successfully secured a stair ride to help her get safely downstairs to her garage. Within a short time, it was approved by the Area Agency on Aging and installed in Sandra's home. She is now able to access her car safely so she can get to the grocery store, doctor appointments and other essential places on her own. Ruth also secured a reclining lift chair for Sandra so she can get up from her chair without further aggravating her back and legs. Sandra is now living a safer and more independent life!

## H.O.P.E. for Familylinks Helping to Overcome the Pandemic for Everyone

Throughout the pandemic, Familylinks has provided essential, life-saving services to the most vulnerable members of our community. More than ever, people are experiencing an increase in stress, depression, family conflict, addiction, abuse, potential homelessness, and other difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. At Familylinks, we provide a comprehensive roster of programs and support services to address all of these issues and more.

Our staff is more prepared than ever to meet the needs of the community. As an essential provider, all staff have been offered the opportunity to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, and at our Vintage Center for Active Adults, multiple vaccination clinics have been held for members of the community.

In need of a vaccine?  
Visit <https://vax4.allegHENYcounty.us/>

### About Familylinks

**Our Impact in the Community** – We serve nearly 9,000 consumers each year by fulfilling our mission through programs for those dealing with addiction, individuals and families who are homeless, older adults and their caregivers, children who have been abused or neglected, and the most vulnerable in our community.

**Access to Our Services** – Our staff can work with you to identify and access the services you need. Please call 866-583-6003 for assistance.

### New Familylinks Website

We are pleased to announce that Familylinks will soon have a new website! We have partnered with a local vendor, AlphaGraphics, to build a website that is easy to navigate and accessible for all. The majority of individuals who visit our website are there because they need help for themselves or a loved one. This new website will ensure that support is just a click away. Look for changes in mid-June at [www.familylinks.org](http://www.familylinks.org).

## New Senior Staff at Familylinks

Familylinks has been fortunate to secure two new members of the leadership team who bring key skills and valuable experience to the agency.

In January, Monique Jackson joined Familylinks in the role of Chief Operating Officer (COO). With extensive management experience spanning over 17 years, Monique brings valuable leadership to Familylinks' executive team. As COO, Monique leads the development, implementation and oversight of Familylinks' programs in terms of process, compliance, enhancement, financial success, and efficiency.

Also in January, Jim Needles joined Familylinks in the role of Chief Information Officer (CIO). With extensive information technology experience spanning over 35 years, Jim provides overall strategic leadership of information technology, business process improvement, data management and security, as well as offering a hands-on approach to collaborative problem solving related to technology needs.



Monique Jackson

Jim Needles

## Residential Programs Get High Marks

Our Youth and Family Services (YFS) Division completed an annual audit by state regulators in early May, receiving considerable recognition that Familylinks' residential programs serve some of the most complex youth with dedication, care, and compassion. State Surveyors noted how much they appreciate the partnership with Familylinks to serve children with unique needs, and to do it so well in seven facilities. Congratulations to the entire YFS team for a job well done!

For more updates and stories, follow us on social media @FamilylinksInc

## Staff Spotlight

Familylinks is very fortunate to have so many dedicated members of our staff. We could fill an entire newsletter with praise for them and the compassionate services they provide every day. In this issue, we would like to highlight the work of Johnnie Geathers, MSW, who has been with Familylinks since 2017 as a Mental Health Therapist. After graduating from Penn State in 2011 with a degree in Human Development and Family Studies, Johnnie earned his MSW at Pitt in 2013. He came to Familylinks specifically to work with children in our Behavioral Health Division through the Therapeutic Classroom Model program. Johnnie has done an outstanding job during COVID-19 restrictions of staying in touch with as many of his young clients as possible, and he will be busier than ever now that many schools are returning to regular operation.



Johnnie Geathers, MSW

Johnnie is also active in helping the community address mental health issues, especially during Mental Health Awareness Month. Johnnie was invited to submit an article to *Helpful Living Magazine*. In his article, Johnnie addresses the importance of the significant increase in mental health issues for so many people in 2020, primarily as a result of the impact that COVID-19 brought to

all of our lives. As many of those difficulties are continuing in 2021 – stress, unemployment, family strife, addiction and more – Johnnie shared a helpful resource with the readers and with Familylinks. That resource, Tools 2 Thrive, was developed by Mental Health America and can be accessed at <https://mhanational.org/tools-2-thrive>.

As Johnnie noted in a recent conversation, “Mental health is important to people of all ages. The Tools 2 Thrive toolkit includes exercises and activities for everyone, and can be especially helpful for parents as their kids also experience stress and uncertainty. It can certainly enhance the ability to address self-care during these difficult times.” Johnnie launched his own video segments called JG Mental Health Fridays where he addresses different topics and provides coping exercises that everyone can do to manage their well-being. JG Mental Health Fridays are done on his social media platforms and on his YouTube channel.

Familylinks has been providing information to address self-care for our staff for many years. It is essential for direct care workers, parents and family caregivers to address their own mental health in order to fulfill their role. We thank Johnnie for adding to the roster of resources we can share.

## Familylinks is Here for our Community

Throughout the pandemic, **Familylinks has been providing essential services to nearly 9,000 individuals of this region.** While Familylinks was fortunate to receive some funding to address these new expenses, those funds were not adequate to cover operating costs. We expect that some COVID-related safety expenses will continue in some ways for the foreseeable future, and we ask for your help.

As a friend of Familylinks, you know that our services reach a broad cross section of our community. In fact, our consumers span all age groups. They are individuals and families from different neighborhoods, income levels



Young adult at Familylinks' Downtown Outreach Center and Shelter

and beliefs. Our consumers may be homeless, aging out of foster care, dealing with addiction, or in need of mental/behavioral health services. Our consumers are young children and youth who have been abused or neglected. Our consumers are seniors living alone or their caregivers facing unbearable stress. Our consumers are the most vulnerable in our community and they all have one thing in common – **when they turn to Familylinks in their time of need, we are here for them.**

The enclosed envelope is a convenient opportunity to support a specific program or contribute to our most urgent need. You may also make a donation at our website: [www.familylinks.org](http://www.familylinks.org).

**We need your support more than ever**, and would be grateful for any contribution you can make. If you have any questions about Familylinks' operations or making a donation, please contact Lauren Galletta at [lgalletta@familylinks.org](mailto:lgalletta@familylinks.org) or 412-942-0549.

## Shop on Amazon? Donate to Familylinks!

When you shop on Amazon you could be donating money to Familylinks through the AmazonSmile program. For eligible purchases, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5 percent of the purchase price to Familylinks. It couldn't be easier to donate.

Simply visit [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com), login and shop. That's it! AmazonSmile will automatically send 0.5 percent of your purchase to Familylinks.





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## Pittsburgh Sports Connection is a Winner

Our Pittsburgh Sports Connection 2021 video production has received rave reviews, and we have so many people to thank. Our generous lead sponsors include PNC Wealth Management, Henderson Brothers, UPMC and UPMC Health Plan. Additional support was provided by Fragasso Financial Advisors, Pion, Nerone, Girmon, Winslow and Smith PC, and Signature Financial Planning. Thank you to the host, WPXI's Ellis Cannon, and the sports media personalities, Jim Colony (The Fan), Kevin Gorman (Tribune Review), and Dorin Dickerson (Pitt, NFL and Penguins), who contributed their time and talents to this special event. Pittsburgh Sports Connection 2021 can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/538897926/53cca21788>.

## Save The Date for 35th Annual Lanny Frattare Golf Classic

The name is the same but the date and location are new in 2021. The 35th Annual Lanny Frattare Golf Classic will be held at Chartiers Country Club on September 13, and we hope you will join us. The outing includes 18 holes of golf, lunch, dinner, drinks, contests, prizes, and more! Sponsorship opportunities are available. For more information, contact Lauren Galletta at [lgalletta@familylinks.org](mailto:lgalletta@familylinks.org) or 412-942-0549.



## Special Thanks to Staunton Farm Foundation



On behalf of everyone at Familylinks, and most especially the individuals we serve, thank you to Staunton Farm Foundation for a grant to support behavioral health services. This funding will be used to train 10 licensed therapists in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy, to provide online TF-CBT (Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) training for school-based staff, and to purchase resources for staff working through our school partnerships and therapeutic classrooms. These trainings and supports will help to improve outcomes for the children, adolescents and adults we have the privilege of serving.

## We're Here to Help!

### We accept Medicare, Medicaid and Commercial Insurance Plans

Familylinks accepts Medicare and Medicaid insurance for many of our services, in addition to commercial insurance plans. If you don't have insurance, our staff can help you apply for assistance if you are eligible. In some cases, our services are also covered by government programs which we can identify for you. If you need help, don't hesitate. Call us at 866-583-6003. We are here for you.