

Local resource center celebrates 35 years

By NATALIE HOFFMAN, Register Staff Writer

Napa resident DeAnna Moore said she turned to Cope Family Center more than two years ago when homelessness and domestic violence proved to be more than she could handle on her own.

"I had a really good support system (at Cope). ... They went out of their way to get me and my children where we are right now, in transitional housing," she said.

Today, Moore, 36, a mother of three, has come full circle. Applying the same skills and sensitivity Cope volunteers used to help her, she is now an advocate for local families in crisis.

A self-proclaimed "one stop parenting shop," Cope Family Center is celebrating 35 years of serving Napa County families this month. Moore, a testament to the organization's success, was one of the approximately 1,500 individuals and families Cope employees assist each year.

Like Moore, many local individuals and families face more than one challenge at a time. In response, Cope Family Center is set up to help families facing multiple -- and sometimes unrelated -- issues. Some of the services Cope offers include drop-in child care, financial management classes, income tax classes, parenting classes and divorce workshops for adults and children. The organization also provides home visits to help parents with health care questions and more.

Cope had a modest beginning. Founded in 1972 by Napan Linda Thomas, then a social worker, Cope began as a nonprofit run out of Thomas' home. From 1979 to 1999, Ardis Troedson ran the agency in various locations throughout Napa.

During the late '90s, the staff doubled to nearly two dozen people when Cope received funds from a large state grant. Cope bought the Fourth Street building it now occupies -- at 1340 Fourth St. -- in 2000, and the organization now has a staff of 21 part-and full-time volunteers and employees; Cope uses volunteerism to cut costs and so funds can be used to meet clients' needs.

Joelle Gallagher, executive director at Cope Family Center, said the organization's staff is committed to addressing the changing needs of local families. "We keep our ear to the ground and work diligently to make sure services we offer meet the needs of the community. ... that's what we're all about."

Michelle Grupe, Cope's associate director, said besides parent education classes, the organization offers a

wide range of instructional groups, including some created to help families find their way to financial success. Some such classes teach families how to save money, set a budget and create financial opportunities. "These savings accounts are hope in concrete form. ... It's a long-term way to help working families break the cycle of poverty," said Grupe, adding that 65 percent of Cope's client families are making less than \$35,000 annually.

Marti Brennan, a Cope home visitor who has been with the organization for 12 years, said the home visitor program was one of Cope's first services. Home visitors travel to clients' homes anywhere from once a week to twice monthly, sharing health information, parenting advice and resources. Cope's staff of five home visitors explore bicultural issues, domestic violence, drug abuse and more with clients.

Registered nurse and home visitor Jacqui Murray said parent education visits offer preparation for labor and parenthood. The visits create a support system for new mothers facing postpartum depression, child-rearing and other challenges. "We use the behavior of the child to teach parents how to communicate. ... It's about knowing they're not alone and they have emotional support," said Murray.

Nancy Waldeck, a marriage and family therapist and facilities chairwoman at Cope, has been with the organization for 30 years. She said Cope has come a long way since the '70s and '80s, when the organization offered only a hotline for parents and emergency respite care for caregivers.

Waldeck said helping local kids and families is what makes her job rewarding. "I have a soft spot for kids and the quality of their lives. ... It's been a great staff that really cares about what happens to the families we're working with."