



Family & Children's Aid
for every child, a home



Two Hundred Years Later...

"Throughout our history,
we have persisted in trying to do what was needed."
Irvin R. Jennings, M.D., Executive and Medical Director, Family & Children's Aid

“The most hopeful of all charities are those which elevate the very young...”



Virginia Thrall Smith was a pioneer in children's health, welfare and education in Connecticut. Married on New Year's Eve in 1857 at age 21, she bore six children.

It was the beginning of the Progressive Era and Mrs. Smith was leading the way. In 1876, not long after three of her children died from diphtheria, she was appointed City Missionary by the Hartford City Mission, a charitable society sponsored by Hartford's six congregational churches to aid the poor. She was horrified by the conditions she witnessed in Hartford's poorhouses and insane asylums

where, for lack of any other options, more than 2,500 children lived alongside criminals and the mentally ill in squalor and poverty. She lobbied for a law to create a Temporary Home for Children in each county in Connecticut. She wrote proudly these county homes, "...have given shelter to many hundred of children, large numbers of whom have found permanent homes in good families, instead of being left in wretched surroundings."

Improving the lives of the poor and, especially of children, became her mission. Poverty, viewed by many of the era as a moral deficiency of the wicked, lazy or dishonest, was believed by Virginia Smith to be an unwanted, often generational condition – a treatable state that diminished the lives of children, families and societies as a whole and one that could be improved, if not cured, through societal support and interventions. Settlement houses began to replace poorhouses.



They're Just Kids

On my way from the parking lot to my office I passed the remnants of last night's childhood fun scrawled in chalk on the driveway and smiled. Later that afternoon, I found myself smiling again in response to the sounds of laughter outside my window as the kids played basketball.

Seeing their drawings and hearing their laughter touched me. For these moments they were not the worst things that happened to them; they were not beholden to their traumas' behaviors and symptoms. They were just kids, able to laugh and play. Those chalk drawings and that laughter are testament to the impact of FCA. Our campus is a home for these kids, not just a treatment facility. It's a place where kids live and heal.

Mrs. Smith realized early on the connection between healthy families and healthy children, insisting that, "The most hopeful of all charities are those which elevate the very young...all children, legitimate or illegitimate, abandoned or orphaned, black or white, sick or well, deserve to be properly cared for."

Virginia Smith didn't know it then, but she was laying the foundation for much of today's social service network. She established a loan system where, regardless of their financial status, people could obtain small loans to meet their most pressing needs. She organized the Women's Sewing Class and Reading Society, a boys' work room, a cooking school, a day nursery, and a Free Employment Bureau, and, long before women even had the right to vote themselves, she formed the Free Kindergarten Association which was responsible for the law that established free kindergartens for children ages 2-6 in all the public schools in Connecticut. For handicapped children, she built a home and a hospital for orthopedic surgery in Newington, the "Home for Incurables" which is now the CT Children's Medical Center.

She helped unwed mothers find places to stay until their babies were born and then, homes for their illegitimate children. Scandal broke as 1892 Hartford Courant headlines accused her of "baby farming". Criticized for her "immoral" behavior, she was forced to resign from her position of 16 years as the head of the Hartford City Mission.

The Children's Aid Society, an organization that she had helped to found and which was run by all women, made her its director. She opened a Fairfield District Branch of the Children's Aid Society at 30 West Street in Danbury. This is the precursor to today's Family & Children's Aid. We proudly still carry the same motto given to us by Virginia Smith 205 years ago, "For Every Child...A Home".

Back in the 1800's, the children Virginia Smith aimed to help were "crippled", "incurables" "victims of intemperance", had mothers with "abandoned characters" or were the fall out from the poverty of families who could no longer afford to feed and house them.

Today's Family & Children's Aid (FCA) serves children who have experienced abuse, neglect or trauma. The terms have changed and the programs have certainly evolved, but much of her principles have held fast over the last 200+ years: the belief that healthy children come from healthy families; that it's the community's job to care for its children, and that all children deserve a home.



Back-to-School is Right Around the Corner



Did You Know...?

The Danbury Child Guidance Center (pictured above):

- opened in 2011;
- is a 14,000 square foot, state-of-the-art, children's mental health clinic;
- houses the Life is Good Playmakers™ Village complete with a movie theater;
- served 1,075 children last month;
- provides approximately 30,000 sessions of therapy each year.

What time is it when you have to go to the dentist?

Tooth-hurtie!

What's gray, eats fish, and lives in Washington, D.C.?

The Presidential Seal!

What do you get when a dinosaur sneezes?

Out of the way!

Would a tissue be too much to ask?



Our mailing address is:

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www.fcaweb.org

Family & Children's Aid (FCA) provides high quality, innovative and responsive programs focused on emotional and behavioral well being that helps children faced with mental health challenges heal.