

WELLBEING

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(From left) Our Daily Bread's Lisa Whetzel and potential Naomi Project volunteer Bethany Gardner with some of the items donated for mothers in need.

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PHOTO BY BONNIE HOBBS/THE CONNECTION

'It's Such a Good Fit'

Naomi Project joins Our Daily Bread to help struggling mothers.

BY BONNIE HOBBS
THE CONNECTION

For the past 19 years, the nonprofit Naomi Project of Northern Virginia has worked with high-risk, pregnant women and new mothers to help them have healthy pregnancies and babies. It's now become a program of the nonprofit Our Daily Bread (ODB) and, on Jan. 22, the two groups celebrated their union.

"It's a natural offshoot of what we're already doing with moms," said ODB spokeswoman Heather Webb. "This is another way that we can help them build families and get on a better financial footing."

The Naomi Project is a volunteer-based program that matches its clients on a one-to-one basis in a mentoring relationship that extends throughout the pregnancy. It then continues on an as-needed basis for as long as it's appropriate or up until the child's third birthday.

THE HELP is important because these women represent a niche population that,

otherwise, would go un-served because it doesn't fit within the criteria of other area programs. And in many cases, the clients experience for the first time a caring adult focusing specifically on them.

Peggy Ferguson founded the Naomi Project in 1995. "I have a background in public-health nursing and hospital chaplaincy, but there was never enough time to be with each person," she said. "I have five children of my own, and I knew that pregnant and newly parenting women need all the help they can get."

Although its annual budget has been less than \$5,000 a year, the Naomi Project has made a big difference in its clients' lives. In 2013, its volunteers helped 30 women; some 20 mentors, eight area coordinators and 11 support staff gave more than 1,300 hours to the effort.

"We helped over 500 women in 19 years, and 28 women last year," said Ferguson. "Sometimes, we've helped 30-40 in a year. We match one person with one mentor to help them better understand their pregnancy, develop good parenting skills and



PHOTO COURTESY OF OUR DAILY BREAD

Our Daily Bread and Naomi Project leadership initially gathered together in October. (Standing, from left) are ODB Executive Director Lisa Whetzel, NP Co-Directors Betty Ann Wilkins and Mary Rank, NP volunteers Peggy Cressy, Rosamaria Rosales, ODB NP Manager Jessica Ramones, NP Co-Director Darlene Griffith and NP volunteers Pat Collins and Monica Galloway. (Seated, from left) NP former Co-Director Sarah Bock, NP Founder Peggy Ferguson and NP Training Coordinator Laura Greenspan.

make a plan for the rest of their lives. We also promote breastfeeding and the importance of parents reading to their children."

Last fall, however, she decided it was time for her to retire. But first she made sure the Naomi Project would be left in good hands. ODB provides emergency and seasonal assistance, plus financial education and mentoring to working individuals and fami-

lies in Fairfax County to help them achieve and maintain self-sufficiency.

The two organizations were able to blend together courtesy of a grant from another nonprofit, the philanthropic Giving Circle of Hope. The money allowed ODB to hire someone to work with the Naomi Project's

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Facets Helps People Come in from the Cold

Hypothermia program gives shelter this winter.

BY ABIGAIL CONSTANTINO
THE CONNECTION

People experiencing homelessness arrived in groups on Tuesday, Jan. 13 at Pender United Methodist Church in Fairfax for a hot meal and a warm place to sleep for the night. When they leave the next day, they will have their clothes cleaned and washed and a bag lunch for the day.

Every night, chairs and furniture in a large room of the church are arranged to make way for sleeping bags and mattresses. The chairs are arranged in rows, where in between them people have set up sleeping areas. "This arrangement is much nicer for maintaining some privacy," said D'Ivonne Holman of Facets of Fairfax. Many set up by the walls and line up chairs to close off their area, much like a fort.

There is a room where people can keep their belongings safe, which is guarded and locked. People can also watch television or movies, play games, or read books in another room. Volunteers also run a store which has hygiene supplies



PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL CONSTANTINO/THE CONNECTION

Volunteer Gail Michael minds the hygiene supplies made available to clients of Facets of Fairfax's hypothermia program. Toothbrushes, shaving materials, and other hygiene products are available for clients to take.

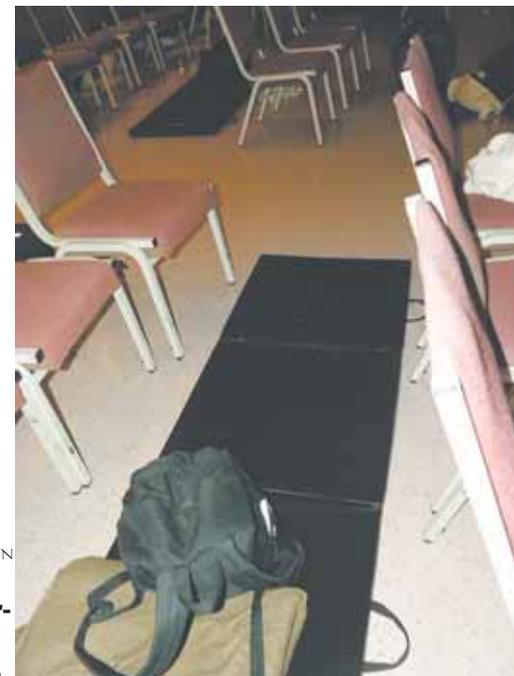
and clothes where people can take what they need. There is also a laundry service, where people can leave their dirty clothes and volunteers will wash them in time for the next day.

The church provides the space and the meals and Facets provides the service as part of its Hypothermia Prevention and Response Program, which runs from November to

March. "It's Facets' show," said Mary Ellen Flather, who volunteers on behalf of the church. But there are two people who stay the night from the church, along with one person from Facets. There is also police presence.

Because Facets does not have a shelter, it relies on churches and faith communities to help run its hypothermia program. Alisha

Matlock, Facets' assistant director of development, said that there are "1,200 individuals who are literally homeless, living in the woods or in their cars" in Fairfax County. She said that it is "impressive" what the partnership between Facets and the 34 participating faith communities have been able to do without having a hypothermia building.



People staying at Pender United Methodist Church in Fairfax as part of Facets of Fairfax's hypothermia program set up their sleeping mattresses in between chairs to create a little bit of privacy.