



Northern Virginia  
Family Service

Mary B. Agee, ACSW  
President and CEO

**Administrative Office  
Oakton**

10455 White Granite Drive  
Suite 100  
Oakton, VA 22124  
703.385.3267  
703.385.5176 FAX

**Alexandria**

5249 Duke Street  
Suite 308  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
703.370.3223  
703.751.5197 FAX

**Arlington**

3401 Columbia Pike  
Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22204  
703.892.1153  
703.892.0895 FAX

**Loudoun**

2 Pidgeon Hill Drive  
Suite 430  
Sterling, VA 20165  
703.404.2021  
703.404.2415 FAX

**Manassas**

9842 Business Way  
Manassas, VA 20110  
703.392.4901  
703.392.0052 FAX

**Woodbridge**

2200 Opitz Boulevard  
Suite 100  
Woodbridge, VA 22191  
703.490.3646  
703.490.4954 FAX

**Online**

[www.nvfs.org](http://www.nvfs.org)



**Alexandria City Budget Hearing  
March 10, 2010**

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Good afternoon, Mayor Euille and members of the city council.

Someone once said, *"Cherishing children is a mark of a civilized society."*

My name is Christine Brown and I stand before you today as a citizen, a volunteer and as mother who cherishes the children of our great city very much. I know that you, Members of the City Council, also cherish the children of Alexandria, as evidenced by your continued support for programs devoted to their health and well-being. As a member of the advisory council for Healthy Families Alexandria, a program of Northern Virginia Family Service that is dedicated to serving vulnerable families with young children, I am grateful that, in these challenging economic times, the city council's proposed budget designates level funding for the Alexandria Fund for Human Services for children and youths in 2011.

Your continued support for AFHS-funded programs like Healthy Families can make all the difference in the world to a child – the difference between enjoying a healthy childhood and becoming a child abuse statistic. Take for example, a child like Carmen. In her case, all the risk factors for child abuse were evident. Her mother Lidia was a first-time single parent with no family or friends nearby. When Carmen was born, Lidia did not know the first thing about how to hold her, diaper her or feed her. She had difficulty bonding with Carmen and was becoming increasingly frustrated with her endless crying. Lidia herself had been raised by an abusive aunt in her home country after her parents moved to the United States to look for work. With no positive parenting role model, Lidia did not know how to be a parent to Carmen though she very much wanted to learn. During weekly home visits with her Healthy Families Support Worker, Lidia soon learned the basics of infant care, how to read Carmen's cues, and, most importantly for her, how to comfort and console her daughter. As multiple studies clearly indicate, a loving attachment between parent and child is the fundamental building block for a happy and healthy childhood and, ultimately, society. In spite of her many challenges, Lidia was able to break the cycle of violence that marked her own childhood and provide Carmen with a loving and healthy start to life. Healthy Families Alexandria helps parents at risk for child abuse and neglect overcome the odds stacked against them to become the best possible parents they can be. Moreover, Harvard's Universal Scientific Council on the Developing Child reports unequivocally that these investments in early childhood pay for themselves many times over in higher academic achievement, lower rates of grade retention, remedial services, school failure, criminal behavior and welfare dependence.

I ask you, the members of City Council, to please hold to the proposed budget and keep level funding for the Children's, Youth and Community Partnership funds. Let us continue to cherish Alexandria's children. Thank you.