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Safe Havens stays open — for now

By NICHOLAS LEDDEN
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Funds have been found to keep the Nurturing Center's Safe Havens Visitation and Safe Exchange program open until at least the middle of January, the center's board of directors announced Wednesday.

The Nurturing Center faced a financial crisis last month when the expiration of a federal grant almost forced the Safe Havens program to close its doors.

But since then the Nurturing Center has raised about \$22,000 in donations from the community, keeping the program afloat.

"The community really came forward to help us keep the doors open for this vital service," said board president Richard Hildner. "We were able to raise a quarter of what we needed and feel confident that our executive director will find additional funds to insure the continuity of the program."

The donations should keep the Safe Havens program solvent until other grant money can be found, said Nurturing Center executive director Susan Christofferson.

"I feel confident that I can, with this two-month time period, really commit to locating additional funds," she said.

The next step will be to pursue foundation grants with short turnaround times, said Christofferson,

adding that 10 such grant applications are already in the works.

Between foundation grants and donations, the Nurturing Center must raise about \$65,000 more to keep the Save Havens program running until new federal funds become available in about a year.

THE SAFE Havens program had been federally funded since its October 2005 creation by a \$289,798 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women.

But the federal grant expired Aug. 31, and the Nurturing Center missed the deadline to renew it. The center

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57 families use the program

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plans to reapply in February.

The Safe Havens program offers monitored visits between children and a parent who otherwise may not be allowed to have contact with their child.

"Our services are designed to strengthen families based on the philosophy that if families are strong and healthy, it results in a better community," Christofferson said.

The visitation and exchange center is often used when a parent has a history of domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health problems or there are abduction concerns.

"Safe Havens created a safety net for primary and

secondary victims of domestic violence with a facility that focused on the developmental needs of the children and a safety protocol and security system to reduce the risks," Christofferson said.

Sometimes the program is used when no contact between parents is desired by one or both parents.

If a lengthy separation of children and parents has occurred, meeting within the Safe Havens environment can help re-establish the relationship.

About 57 families with 91 children, ranging in age from 3 months to 19 years, currently use the program.

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