

Orphanages in Worcester assisting a growing local Catholic community included:  
The Children's Friend Society Orphans' Home 821 Main & Benefit  
St. Francis of Assissi Orphanage, 10 Bleeker St.  
Sisters of Charity, (Gray Nuns), 133 Granite St.  
Sisters of Mercy, 34 High St.  
Less noted:  
Sisters of Notre Dame, Vernon St.  
Sisters of Providence, Vernon St.  
Sisters of St. Anne, Franklin St.

In the late 1880s Worcester had two major orphans' homes, referred more often as asylums. The **Children's Friend Society**, founded in **1848**, opened the **first orphanage in Worcester**, the **Orphans' Home** at William, and Chestnut streets before moving into a "comfortable house" on Pine Street. In the fall of 1863, they purchased the property, built in 1848, at 821 Main Street, on the corner of Benefit Street. Today, the Children's Friend is an affiliate of Seven Hills and continues to serve children and families in the greater Worcester area. You can read more in our PDF file '**Orphans' Home**'.

The news clippings collected date from 1875 thru 1902 all refer to the 821 Main St. location as the **Orphans' Home**. Pictures of the collected news clippings are in the **Orphans' Home** Album on Facebook.

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WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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**Children's Friend keeps great tradition**

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The quality of life in any community, to a large extent, depends on a spirit of compassion and willingness to help. Worcester has been fortunate to have that spirit throughout its history. There is no better example than Children's Friend Inc., a private, nonprofit organization that, in one form or another, has been serving the city for 157 years.

Founded by Mrs. Jonas Miles in 1848 as an orphanage, the former Worcester **Children's Friend Society** has blossomed into a comprehensive agency seeking the social, psychological, and physical development of children into mature, contributing adult members of society. The first group of 17 children was temporarily housed in Mrs. Miles' home at William and Chestnut streets, until Col. John W. Lincoln donated a "comfortable house" on Pine Street. The initial budget, according to the first treasurer's report, was \$651.51. "Merchants, mechanics and grocers lent a helping hand by supplying the necessary articles in their respective trades and occupations," enabling the organization "to furnish the house without encroaching upon the funds the society already collected," Alida M. Waterhouse, secretary, reported.

The society, renamed Children's Friend Inc. in the 1990s, has functioned in the same spirit of generosity, striving to meet the changing needs of children and families in today's complex world. Much of the current \$2.4 million budget comes from government sources, insurance companies and service fees. But charitable contributions remain a significant portion of the income.

Traces of history are everywhere. "We're a small agency, providing a wide variety of services," Karen E. Ludington said in her spacious office at the former Paul Morgan House on Cedar Street, an architectural gem from the 1920s. Looking across the street, one could admire the 1836-vintage Silas Bachelor House, now the agency's Ellsworth Child and Family Counseling Center.

"Children's Friend has a long history of identifying needs and offering solutions," she explained. "We were the **first orphanage in the area**, the first adoption agency in Central Massachusetts, the first licensed outpatient mental health clinic for children, the first state-certified school program for pregnant and parenting teens, and the first grief support center for children."

A lawyer, community activist and former owner of her own consulting firm, Ms. Ludington served on the volunteer board of directors for 15 years before becoming president and CEO in 2002. Ann E. Carlson, executive vice president and managing director of Sovereign Bank, chairs the 30-member board. She wanted to be a social worker but couldn't find work in her field and took a job as a bank trainee instead. "I have one degree in sociology," she said. "My husband is a school principal, has three degrees and makes an impact on people's lives. As a

banker, I make twice the money he does. What does that say about our value system?"

She went on: "I'm here because I think there's a preponderance of needs for children today," she said. "I think my generation has done a lousy job raising kids, and if we don't help young children find their way to be healthy and reach their potential, the future is lost."

Both she and Ms. Ludington expressed relief over the agency's successful recovery from financial hardship caused by the opening of the Child and Family Counseling Center in 2000. "Essentially, we responded to a community need without doing much financial planning," Ms. Ludington noted. Ms. Carlson added: "Providing mental health care for children is a wonderful service nobody wanted to pay for." Most of the debt has been wiped out, and the agency has been operating in the black. A large bequest from the estate of Mary O'Brien, who remembered how the organization had helped her family in 1918, went a long way toward restoring financial stability.

The counseling center is the agency's largest project. It offers individual and group therapy, as well as psychological testing and psychopharmacology services, dealing with a variety of emotional and behavioral problems, such as Asperger's disorder, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, post-traumatic stress and mood disorders and self-injurious behavior. The clinic has been collaborating with community partners, such as the Children's Justice Center, the district attorney's office, the state Department of Social Services and the University of Massachusetts Medical School. During fiscal year 2005, more than 1,400 clients were seen at the clinic.

The Carriage House, adjacent to the clinic, is a unique grief support program for children and teens trying to cope with the loss of loved ones. Under the guidance of trained volunteers, children participate in peer grief support groups. "Children deal with death differently from adults," Johanna D. Sagarin, director of clinical services, explained. "We provide a place where they help each other just by being in a group. They talk about death if they want to, play, even have some fun." There are support groups for adult caregivers as well.

In collaboration with the state Department of Social Services, Adoption and Family Services helps children who need safe, loving, and permanent homes. It provides home studies, placement supervision and administrative assistance to families seeking out-of-state and international adoptions. The Therapeutic Supervised Visitation program brings together children, adoptive parents or guardians and birth families. Last year, the program completed 27 home studies and 109 adoption assessments, finalizing the adoption of four children.

Accompanied by Ms. Ludington, I visited two locations of the School Age Mothers (SAM) program, providing services for pregnant and parenting teens, in collaboration with the public school system. At the day care center in the Providence Street Girls Inc., we saw babies and infants play or take a nap under the watchful eye of professional caregivers. The center is licensed for 23 children and needs to expand to accommodate the demand.

The educational component of the program is housed in the basement of the Comprehensive Skills Center at the former Granite Street School. In addition to classroom work, it offers health, counseling, parenting, prenatal and pregnancy prevention programs. Currently 52 young women are enrolled. “Without SAM, these girls would be out of school,” said Jan Girard, the program director.

Now that the agency is debt-free, I asked if there were plans for future expansion. “Well, we’re certainly not going to build another clinic,” Ms. Carlson said. “But adoption is a possible growth area. So is going beyond Worcester.”

Ms. Ludington agrees. “My dream is to do more outreach, a kind of service on wheels,” she said. “We could train and send out experts to do programs for schools and institutions that cannot afford them.”

That Mrs. Miles’ dream has survived for 157 years is both a small miracle and a huge tribute to the community. Children’s Friend deserves credit for keeping it alive.

Robert Z. Nemeth’s column appears regularly in the Sunday Telegram.