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DAVID GARRETT / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The Madison family of Lower Southampton, (from left) Faith, 10, Marlene, "Big" William, William, 15, and Marlia, 12, was selected the Family of the Year by the Family Service Association of Bucks County.

Getting it together

After 15 months of intense therapy, a Lower Southampton family is back together again. For their hard work, the Family Service Association of Bucks County has named the Madisons the Family of the Year.

By RACHEL CANELLI
STAFF WRITER

When Marlene Madison looked at the package of paperwork in front of her, she saw a mountain.

Struggling with bipolar disorder and depression, the Lower Southampton mother didn't always take her medicine, sometimes because she couldn't afford it. Her three chil-

dren were in foster care.

The papers that came in the mail held the key for her and her husband to get their kids back, but Madison thought she couldn't do it.

After a week of avoidance, she remembered something her grandmother once said: Nothing beats a failure but a try. So Marlene

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Family

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Madison tried and soon realized her feat — maintaining housing, seeking therapy, checking the kids' schoolwork and getting them to the doctor — wasn't impossible.

Now, following 15 months of intense therapy, her family is together. For their hard work and progress, the Madisons — Marlene, 47, her husband, William, 49, their son William, 15, and daughters Marlia, 12, and Faith, 10 — are being honored today as the Family Service Association's Family of the Year.

"If I can do it, it can be done," said a humbled and grateful Marlene. "I was a mess. You have to fight your own demons and deal with yourself. The system's not the monster; the monster lives in you. We still have much progress to make. But we made an intense effort to achieve our goals and show over time that we meant it when we said we love our children."

At an annual meeting each year, the Family Service Association's board of directors gives out three awards: Family, Corporate Citizen and Family Builder of the Year, said Stephanie Sides, communications coordinator.

This year, the Langhorne-based organization also is recognizing Peddler's Village as the Corporate Citizen of the Year for hosting the association's biggest fundraising event for the past three years, holding

diaper drives for clients since 2008 and for its efforts to help Hurricane Katrina victims, Sides said.

The Pennsylvania Association of School Retirees Bucks Chapter is being named the Family Builder of the Year for donating more than 500 backpacks filled with new clothes and school supplies through its Klothes for Kids Project, said Sides.

To get them where they are today, the Madisons got help from the Family Service Association's LINKS family reunification 15-month therapy program, said Colleen DeSantis, a LINKS therapist.

"(The Madisons) were successful because they put into it what they needed to," she said. "They were motivated. People think it's a Band-Aid, a quick fix, but it's not. There are reasons why children are removed. I think it's great they're still together. They're so appreciative, but they still have struggles."

That's why the Madisons have continued using the association's services, said Marlene, a nurse who's looking for a job. She hopes sharing her family's story will inspire others.

"My message (to other families) is take a deep breath, hold on, and think about your children," she said. "Think about how much you love them, what you wouldn't do for them. That's what me and my husband did to make it through."

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