

Final Report

Completed by dswedberg@fccnetwork.org on 5/18/2026 11:39 AM

Case Id: 31097

Name: Family & Children's Center; Stepping Stones;

Report Id: 310: 4/1/2025-3/31/2026

Final Report

Please provide the following information.

1. Briefly describe the public service activity and its purpose. Mention who the activity was intended to help and the community need it addressed.

Family & Children's Center exists to help individuals and families achieve safety, stability, and healing through compassionate, trauma-informed services. The organization's crime victim services are rooted in the national victims' rights movement, which includes the right to have victim's mental health addressed. Services focused on advocacy, crisis support, safety planning, and helping survivors access resources and navigate the criminal justice system. Stepping Stones, Child Advocacy Center Program, provides forensic interviews to individuals who may have experienced abuse. Interviews can be conducted with children as young as 3 years old all the way through vulnerable adults. Stepping Stones also provides family advocacy services to the non-offending caregiver and/or teens. Advocacy services consist of making referrals for services to support healing and recovery along with working with the non-offending caregiver to determine what other services the family needs. These additional services can be directly related to the abuse or can be other aspects that are needed to support the family unit as a whole. Advocacy services are typically initiated at the time of the forensic interview and can last for as long as the family wishes; this can be quite some time, particularly in cases where there are criminal charges or court proceedings. Stepping Stones staff also assesses the child's current trauma response by administering the Pediatric Traumatic Stress Screener for all children 6 years of age through 17 years old. This screener allows staff to have a more accurate picture of how the child is currently managing trauma stress and what may be the most appropriate Mental Health Services for the child. The safe visitation program offers supervised visits, supervised exchanges, parent education services, substance use screenings to individuals and families who have experienced domestic abuse or child abuse which makes a supervised or supported setting necessary to maintain or develop a parent-child relationship in a safe manner.

2. Summarize key accomplishments, such as the number of people served, types of services provided, and any specific outcomes achieved.

Family & Children's Center had anticipated serving 475 people through the Stepping Stones Child Advocacy Center. Stepping Stones exceeded that projection by serving 515 child and adults impacted by child abuse. Stepping Stones was able to continue providing the Pediatric Traumatic Stress Screener (PTSS) with children 6 years of age through 17 years of age; although not all children chose to complete the survey, many did. The PTSS results allowed advocates a more accurate understanding of the impact that trauma (the abuse) was currently having on the child and what may be the best healing and recovery services for that particular child and their family.

3. Explain how the activity has positively affected the community. Describe the changes in quality of life, access to resources, or any specific benefits for the target population.

Family and Children's Center continue to employ the new therapist who is working specifically with the child advocacy center. This therapist was able to gain greater understanding of the multidisciplinary approach to investigating Child protection investigations, join the multidisciplinary team case review monthly meetings, and accept a majority of referrals straight from Stepping Stones clients. Advocates worked with non-offending caregivers to maximize their use of local resources for the healing and recovery process; this included referrals to not only Family & Children's Center therapist but community mental health organizations, if that is what the family chose, collaboration with other

advocacy serving programs in the La Crosse area, La Crosse School District and local hospitals. These efforts to support and promote the healing and recovery process assist in decreasing the life long trauma response for child abuse victims. By decreasing the lifelong trauma response, the victim is less likely to partake in risky behaviors later in life and decreasing the demand for supports to that individual across their lifespan. The decrease in risky behaviors has a direct correlation to a decrease in homelessness for that victim.

4. Briefly mention any challenges faced during the project and how they were addressed. This demonstrates adaptability and problem-solving.

Over the course of this grant cycle, Stepping Stones experienced the challenge of finding and hiring replacement employees for both full-time forensic interviewer and advocate positions. This required a time where only the Coordinator was trained in forensic interviewing. Family & Children's Center was able to find two very strong candidates to fill these positions and get them fully trained during the course of this grant. Family & Children's Center is happy to report that Stepping Stones is and has been fully staffed with quality forensic interviewers and advocates for several months now. Stepping Stones was able to overcome this barrier while continuing to see an increase in the number of children and their caregivers served through the program. Family & Children's Center is proud that no child victim or they're not offending caregiver was denied services during this time.

5. Include any success stories or testimonials.

It can be very challenging to define what constitutes a success story for a family that comes through the Stepping Stones program. Some may view success as a successful prosecution of a child abuser, the reunification of a child with the support of caregiver, or even the healing of a child who has been victimized. However, these measurements may take months or even years to see the positive fruition of the efforts of the Stepping Stone staff. For this reason along with the value of the work that is done at Stepping Stones and the recognition of the extreme difficulty that a child faces when disclosing abuse, Stepping Stone staff see true success as a child feeling safe enough to disclose their abuse in the forensic interview. Victims of all ages experience fear or reluctance to disclose their abuse for a multitude of reasons; this could be a fear of not being believed, threats from the abuser, physical abuse or injury from the abuser, or simply uncertainty of what disclosure may bring. The entire Stepping Stones team is trained and aware of many of these barriers that victims face. The welcoming environment, the training of the forensic interviewer, and the support of the entire team all work to provide the child victim with the most supportive environment possible to feel safe in the disclosure of their abuse. Over this past grant cycle, Stepping Stone staff have received like comments as the following from children: I was scared when I got there but they made me feel safe or I didn't think anyone would believe me, but they did and now the abuse will stop. Responses such as this are the greatest success moments that Stepping Stones can achieve.

Narrative

Completed by washtockl@cityoflacrosse.org on 10/8/2025 12:07 PM

Case Id: 31097

Name: Family & Children's Center; Stepping Stones;

Report Id: 335: 4/1/2025-6/30/2025

Narrative

Please provide the following information.

Please provide a narrative regarding any accomplishments or barriers during this quarter. You may also upload any supporting documentation below.

A major barrier for Stepping Stones this past quarter has been the staffing. The program typically runs with 3 people. We've been running the program with 2 for much of the last year. While we were finally able to hire a third staff member in early April, our other staff member then left at the end of April. Having an open position creates a lot of challenges for the program. Hiring appropriate staff for the position has proven to be a more challenging task than expected. Stepping Stones' wages have historically been low, and lately they haven't been able to keep up with inflation rates, unlike for-profit organizations and government entities. This makes Stepping Stones wages even less competitive than in the past. Family & Children's Center continues to be an incredibly supportive agency and has managed to offer wage increases for some starting positions. A candidate has been identified and will hopefully start in Stepping Stones in late July, 2025. These barriers have not stopped Stepping Stones from continuing to provide strong, high quality services to child abuse victims and their families. During this past reporting period, Stepping Stones has supported 49 potential new victims and 33 caregivers. Even with limited staffing, Stepping Stones has attended 8 court hearings with scared, emotional, and uncertain victims.

Documentation

Quarterly Report Supporting Documents

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Narrative

Completed by washtockl@cityoflacrosse.org on 10/8/2025 12:10 PM

Case Id: 31097

Name: Family & Children's Center; Stepping Stones;

Report Id: 336: 7/1/2025-9/30/2025

Narrative

Please provide the following information.

Please provide a narrative regarding any accomplishments or barriers during this quarter. You may also upload any supporting documentation below.

Over the last year, we have experienced some changes in staffing. Nicole Eiken and Olivia Kudronowicz left the organization. Fortunately, we were able to bring on Emily Meyer and Danielle Helms in their place; Danielle Helms was trained in forensic interviewing during this reporting period. This change has not impacted our ability to fulfill the goals of the project. Stepping Stones continues to provide forensic interviews to any child or vulnerable adult who is referred to the program. During this past quarter, Stepping Stones conducted 88 forensic interview and provided advocacy services to 53 new caregivers. Stepping Stones continued to provide advocacy services to at least 7 families from previous reporting periods.

Documentation

Quarterly Report Supporting Documents

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Narrative

Case Id: 31097

Name: Family & Children's Center; Stepping Stones;

Report Id: 337: 10/1/2025-12/31/2025

Completed by dswedberg@fccnetwork.org on 1/2/2026 1:53 PM

Narrative

Please provide the following information.

Please provide a narrative regarding any accomplishments or barriers during this quarter. You may also upload any supporting documentation below.

Family & Children's Center's Child Advocacy Program, Stepping Stones, has continued to provide forensic interviews, family advocacy, and mental health screeners (Pediatric Traumatic Stress Screeners) to clients referred for services by law enforcement or child protection who may be the victim of child abuse. Stepping Stones is pleased to report that no child victim was turned away when services were requested. Stepping Stones Staff continues to have a strong working relationship with the Multidisciplinary Team Members to provide quality supports to those in our community impacted by child abuse. Stepping Stone staff remained the same during this reporting period for the 2nd quarter in a row. It has been a great accomplishment to have both staff fully trained and completing forensic interviews, advocacy, and mental health screeners during this quarter. As you have seen the challenges over the last year with staffing changes was significant; however, the dedication from Family & Children's Center to the Stepping Stones program has allowed for that challenge to be overcome and result in the positiveness the program has experienced this past quarter. Family & Children's Center and Stepping Stone staff are very confident that the current three staff members (1 Coordinator and 2 Forensic Interviewers/Family Advocates) running the program will continue and remain for the foreseeable future. It is a wonderful feeling for not only the program staff, but the Multidisciplinary Team members and the children and families that Stepping Stone serves to see the same faces and gain confidence in the expertise of the services provided at Stepping Stones.

Documentation

Quarterly Report Supporting Documents

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Narrative

Case Id: 31097

Name: Family & Children's Center; Stepping Stones;

Completed by dswedberg@fccnetwork.org on 4/8/2026 12:04 PM

Report Id: 338: 1/1/2026-3/31/2026

Narrative

Please provide the following information.

Please provide a narrative regarding any accomplishments or barriers during this quarter. You may also upload any supporting documentation below.

Stepping Stones continues to provide strong quality forensic interviews for child and vulnerable adults who may be victims of abuse and supportive and engaged advocacy services to family members and caregivers of those children. Additionally, Stepping Stones staff provided family advocacy to child victims and non-offending caregivers. Stepping Stones staff also provided and/or participated in community engagement and education events, facilitated the La Crosse and Monroe Multidisciplinary Teams. Stepping Stones started working with Monroe County on forming a Multidisciplinary Team in 2025. Monroe County struggled with collaborative efforts when conducting investigation related to children. There was a great deal of mistrust, solo grandstanding, duplicative efforts, and hostility between social services and law enforcement. The initiation of the MDT was a first step in building bridges and creating better practices to support children, families, and victims of all forms. This has been a tenuous process and at times very stressful for the Stepping Stones staff who are facilitating the process. However, the notable progress has been seen throughout this reporting process. Team members are working together better, critical conversations are more constructive and less hostile, and member attendance at meetings is improving. Stepping Stones has been working to add a Teen Support Group for adolescents who are survivors of abuse and just at the end of this reporting period, Stepping Stones staff received notice that the funding for this group was successfully obtained. Stepping Stones continues to work hard to find alternative funding to maintain staffing levels and provide as much direct victim support as possible. Thankfully, Stepping Stones continues to have great support from our multidisciplinary team members and agencies. Limited funding has meant that there is not direct client assistance funds to support the financial barriers that victims face. Additionally, Stepping Stones has seen an increase in service requests. Staff have not had to decline any request for a forensic interview or initial advocacy; however, there continues to be a challenge to provide the desired level of on-going advocacy. Stepping Stones continues to see an increase in Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM,) Sextortion, and Trafficking related cases. This is believed to be in part due to increase in the number of victims and an increase in community outreach and education which supports victims in knowing how to find supports.

Documentation

Quarterly Report Supporting Documents

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