

Grace Smith House: *An Open Door for Victims of Domestic Violence* History, Programs and Services

December 12, 2019 @ 7pm
Unitarian Universal Fellowship of Poughkeepsie

Established in 1981, the Grace Smith House is an inspiring example of how a small group of determined individuals can create a positive, lasting change in their community. Named for Grace Smith of the Smith Bros. Cough Drop family, the agency was founded on and continues to embody the qualities of its namesake: compassion towards all, passion for social justice, and dedication to service in the community.

On December 12th, we will welcome Interim Executive Director Branka Bryan, PsyD and Marjorie J. Smith, JD who will speak to us about the history of this enduring private not-for-profit organization and the critical services and programs that it offers in our area.

In keeping with its mission to enable individuals and families to live free from domestic violence, Grace Smith House has been at the forefront of developing innovative programs to meet the needs of victims. Over the years, these ground-breaking efforts have included expanding the capacity of its emergency shelter; creating a transitional housing program; providing assistance at court and to child protective services; serving the needs of the Latina community; offering prevention and education programs in the schools; and educating healthcare providers. Grace Smith House has also now expanded its work with children through the development of the ACEs Taskforce.

Quite notably, over time, Grace Smith House has grown into the only domestic violence program in Dutchess County which provides a full spectrum of services including shelter, housing and community-based services to individuals and families impacted by abuse in their homes. Through all of the growth, innovations and changes, however, Grace Smith House remains true to its core services and to its mission.



Having joined Grace Smith House 10 years ago, Dr. Branka Bryan is currently serving as its Interim Executive Director. She is also the Director of Outreach and Support Services, a position she has held for the past two years. Much of her work is focused on community engagement, public policy, and systems relationships as they pertain to domestic violence service provision. She provides additional oversight for its core services and court programs and represents Grace Smith House on various committees, collaborations and coordinated community response teams. Her particular area of interest is in gender issues and the criminal justice experience as well as aging and abuse over the life span.

Dr. Bryan was a graduate student when she became involved in domestic violence work in the 1980's, volunteering in a domestic violence shelter providing core advocacy services to

victims. Since receiving her doctorate in clinical psychology, she has focused her clinical work on issues of women's health and trauma experiences. After her doctoral internship at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois she worked at two Chicago area hospitals as a staff psychologist providing general psychotherapeutic services. She has taught various undergraduate courses at Florida Tech, graduate courses at Illinois School of Professional Psychology and behavioral medicine courses at Midwestern University Osteopathic Medical School.

Married to her husband for 26 years and with her two children away at college she is enjoying her status as an empty nester.



Marjorie J. Smith retired as Chief of the Special Victims Bureau of the Dutchess County District Attorney's Office in 2014. She was a prosecutor in that office since 1983. Ms. Smith was involved in the prosecution of domestic violence, child abuse, homicide and sex offenses for over 30 years. She participated in the organization and design of the Dutchess County Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program and acted as the District Attorney's liaison to that program. Along with prosecutorial duties, Ms. Smith participated as a member of various bodies and organizations including the Domestic Violence Steering Committee, Dutchess County Citizens Advisory Committee on Sex Offender Management, and the New York State District Attorneys' Association Sexual Assault and Family Violence Legislative Subcommittee.

Ms. Smith continues her involvement as a member of the Dutchess County Citizens Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence. She served as a faculty member for the New York State Prosecutors Training Institute Summer College and Safe Horizons Forensic Interviewing Best Practices. She has presented for NYSCASA, the New York State CVB and Saint Francis Hospital.

On a continuing basis, Ms. Smith provided training to various police agencies and participated as needed in the training of Rape Crisis, Crime Advocacy, Child Protective Services and Domestic Violence response personnel for groups including Family Services, Inc., Grace Smith House, Dutchess County Department of Social Services Child Protective Services, Vassar College, Bard College and Marist College.

Following retirement, Ms. Smith joined the Board of Directors for Grace Smith House and currently serves as Secretary of the Board and chairs the annual Grace Pumpkin Halloween Parade. She is also a member of the Planning Board for the City of Poughkeepsie.

Ms. Smith graduated from Dutchess Community College in 1976, SUNY Albany in 1978 with a Bachelor of Science degree *magna cum laude* and attended Albany Law School of Union University and where she obtained a Juris Doctor *cum laude* in 1981.