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Fox Valley Newsmaker Kids Hope United director retiring

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By Julie Mullen

Jimmie Smith retired as executive director of Kids Hope United on Friday, leaving behind a 30-year legacy of helping children in need.

His amazing work on behalf of children and their families throughout his long career has made a lasting impact on the child welfare system, according to Kids Hope United spokeswoman Ashley Voss.

Formerly known as Central Baptist Family Services, Kids Hope United is a private human service organization dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families through prevention, intervention and community-based programs.

The organization specializes in child welfare system management, reform, consultation and training. With principal offices in Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri and Florida, it serves more than 15,000 children and their families each year.

Smith oversaw 23 offices in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin, including Elgin, which has offered a multitude of counseling, teen runaway and child abuse services since 1984.

In 2004, Kids Hope United opened the Elgin Child & Family Resource Center at 210 National St., providing early education, day care and after-school programs to families in need through the Elgin Day Care Center.

The Elgin Day Care Center serves more than 200 children, 98 percent of which are eligible for state subsidies, Voss said. Prekindergarten care also is available for qualifying children in partnership with School District U46.

Before joining Kids Hope United, Smith worked in the Kenosha County Division of Children & Family Services and later as an assistant area administrator for the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services in Lake and McHenry counties.

Highlights from Smith's long career with Kids Hope United include expanding services to southern Wisconsin, developing family preservation programs, re-initiating a residential treatment program, spearheading the transformation of Cook County's foster care system, and expanding the agency's number of child care centers.

Smith also developed a day treatment/alternative education program in both Lake and McHenry school districts, developed programs to serve runaways, and moved the agency into the community-based corrections arena by providing youth offenders ages 17 to 21 a halfway house/transitional living program in Waukegan.

Smith, now age 62, will retire to his Winthrop Harbor, Ill., home. But those who say he's really more like 16 at heart express no doubt that he will continue touching the community in a very special way.

Kids Hope United President and CEO Martin R. Sinnott echoed those sentiments.

"Although we are saddened that Jimmie is retiring as executive director," Sinnott said, "I am confident that he will continue to be a voice for vulnerable children and families for years to come."