

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



The Only Difference



Grayson Jeffords, 12-years-old from
Highland Park UMC, Florence SC

Summer camp and Christmas are as far away from each other as the calendar will allow, but Grayson Jeffords, a 12 year old girl from Highland Park UMC in Florence, SC, found a way to bring them together. Grayson has spent many summers at Asbury Hills and loved them all. She returned this past summer from another wonderful week at camp, but this time she was affected in a different way. "The boys and girls at camp are in separate cabins," her mother Tara Jeffords said. "But they team up for activities. During a 'get-

to-know-you' game, the children were asked to share where they are from. The first children to share named their town, but Randy told the other children he was from Epworth." Grayson had heard of Epworth through her church, but she had never visited campus or met anyone directly connected to the ministry.

"Mom, I felt sorry for him when he said that... Everyone sort of frowned, but he told us Epworth was a great place," Grayson told her mother. "He is hilarious, Mom, and he loves to draw. He's good

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High Expectations High Achievement

Winter 2012

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

Sometimes life feels really good. Such was the case for many of us from the Epworth campus who gathered in the Dreher High School auditorium on the last Tuesday evening in October. The Dreher Orchestra began to play and into the auditorium marched the handsomely dressed members of the National Honor Society. Joining them were the students who were being inducted. Two of these students are current residents of Epworth Children's Home.

Membership in the National Honor Society means more than being listed on an academic honor roll. Membership is based upon a student's outstanding performance in the areas of Scholarship, Service, Leadership and Character. It is indeed a high honor to be a member of this organization.

As the two Epworth residents crossed the auditorium stage, and as they signed the Honor Society book for the first time, those of us from Epworth, both staff members and cottage mates, were filled with pride.

A few days later word began to circulate around campus that the girls in the Anderson Cottage were on the cusp of accomplishing something special. Anderson Cottage is where our 11 junior and senior girls live.

The young ladies of Anderson Cottage are a lively group. They are on school athletic teams, they are cheerleaders, campus and church leaders, and seem to always have plans for new adventures. So, when the Anderson residents began to talk about how well they were going to do on their report cards, no one doubted that they would do pretty well. "Pretty well" was a huge understatement. All 11 young ladies made either the A or the A/B honor roll at Dreher. What an accomplishment!

This from young ladies that society labels "at risk," and who have endured, in their brief lives, more challenges and heartache than anyone should have to endure so early in life.

They are to be congratulated and so should many others because these student's accomplishments are products of many people working together for a common good. Cottage parents, social workers, teachers, counselors, mentors, tutors, administrators, donors and many others have shared who they are and what they have in order for these young people to have the opportunity for a new life. These achievements are the result of sacrifice, prayer, and high expectations. This is the reason that this Fall, life has felt so very good.

My Wish

Alice was asked to stop by Mrs. Deborah Keller's office for a visit. Mrs. Keller is the Intake Coordinator at Epworth, but the children also know her as "Santa's Daughter." Mrs. Keller collects all the children's wishes and shares them with Santa's Angels.

*Alice found herself in Dantzler Cottage four months ago after being taken from an abusive aunt. For a 13 year old girl, she is shy and soft spoken. She doesn't share much about herself, and she doesn't demand a lot of the staff's attention. She is content to spend her time alone, quietly reading the next book on her list.

As Mrs. Deborah collected the Christmas wish lists from the children, she noticed that Alice's list had only two items on it – a gift card and a pair of jeans. Mrs. Deborah asked Alice to stop by her office so she could ask her in person what else she would like to include on her list. Each child at Epworth gets a new outfit, two small items and a larger item for Christmas, and Mrs. Deborah likes to make sure they have an opportunity to ask for what they really want. "For a lot of our children, this is the first time they will ever receive a gift for Christmas," said Mrs. Deborah. "Often our children believe they are bad because Santa has never visited them"

As Mrs. Deborah asked Alice what else she would like for Christmas, she noticed that it was making Alice uncomfortable. "I really don't need anything," she told Mrs. Deborah looking at the ground. "You have already given me everything I need."

Mrs. Deborah affirmed her gratitude and encouraged Alice to use her Christmas list as a time to dream and wish for things she wouldn't otherwise dare to dream about. This proved difficult for Alice. Finally, she added a couple of Bath and Body Works items to her list.

Alice stood and walked toward the door to leave. She turned and looked at Mrs. Deborah. Mrs. Deborah asked her if she was okay. "Did you think of something to add to your list?"

Alice hurried over to Mrs. Deborah and hugged her tight. "What's that for?" Mrs. Deborah asked.

With tears in her eyes, Alice responded, "No one has ever asked me my wish. No one." She smiled down at Mrs. Deborah and said softly, "Thank you."



They are Thriving

As Christmas and New Year's approach quickly, the world is busy purchasing gifts and looking forward to time off from work and school to visit with family and friends. At Epworth Children's Home, we know all too well that abuse and neglect don't take a holiday. Dr. Tan Platt, Medical Director for Epworth Children's Home, has witnessed this reality during his more than 24 years of service to the children.

"I've examined children that came to Epworth so malnourished, from being tied to a bed for months with little food, that their hair was falling out," said Dr. Platt as he prepared to see a new group of Epworth residents just before Halloween. Three young sisters and two eight year old boys from Clinton Cottage were dancing around in the waiting room of Epworth's Health Center. The giggles and chants echoed down the hallway to where Dr. Platt and Bryce, Dr. Platt's newest USC medical student, were going over the realities of serving children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

"Many of the children who come here have never seen a doctor," Dr. Platt told Bryce. It is estimated that 60 percent of the children at Epworth have no documented history of ever seeing a doctor or dentist before their arrival. Dr. Platt sees between 10 and 15 children a month, mostly for routine physicals. There have been times over the years, however, when particular children struggled with severe medical issues. He told Bryce about a particular family that affected him, "We welcomed a family of four once who were found in an old trailer that was being used as a meth lab. The oldest girl, who was 14 at the time, was acting as the parent in the situation. All the children's hair samples tested positive for meth because they were in the home." Bryce asked how the children are doing today, and Dr. Platt responded, "They are thriving because they are still here at Epworth."

Dr. Platt began his service to the children of Epworth in 1988, and he has volunteered his time, one afternoon a month, since. When he is not at Epworth, he serves as the Associate



Professor of Family and Preventative Medicine at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, as well as running his own practice.

As he introduced Bryce to Epworth, Dr. Platt shared several stories of children who arrived at Epworth in poor medical condition and improved drastically during their stay. Children have come to Epworth after being in the Foster Care System for months and through Epworth's initial medical assessment, Dr. Platt learned they were legally blind or deaf. Children have come covered in bed bug bites, lice or with a mouth full of cavities. Dr. Platt is affected by them all but rejoices in their progress over time. "The children come fearful and angry. They are often withdrawn or strike out at their cottage parents," he tells Bryce. "But the nurturing aspect of the care that Epworth wraps around them makes a huge improvement in their relationships with others."

Epworth's Health Center is a busy place. Two full time nurses, Mrs. Wilkins and Mrs. Cooper, coordinate all of the children's medical appointments on and off campus. They give flu shots and teach the children the importance of taking care of their bodies from the inside out. They even stay overnight in the Health Center with children who are sick. They put Band-Aids on boo-boos and make grilled cheese and chicken noodle soup for children with the flu.

The children love the Health Center and stop by just to say, "hello" to Mrs. Cooper and Mrs.

Wilkins. Lots of children dread visiting the doctor, but the nurses and a dedicated group from First United Methodist Church in Isle of Palms have worked diligently to make the Health Center a place the children enjoy spending time. There are games and books for the children to read, comfortable places to relax and even a TV with video games and movies. The rooms are also inviting with their new bright colors and cartoon decorations.

The group of volunteers, lead by Mrs. Mary Chason from First UMC, began renovating the Health Center last year. During October of this year, their work was completed. They spent a week on campus finishing up the project as a gift to the children and staff. Their work and the welcoming personalities of people like Mrs. Wilkins, Mrs. Cooper and Dr. Platt help the children recognize the value of taking care of themselves.



Mary Chason and her crew from First UMC, Isle of Palm

As the laughter from the waiting room continues, Dr. Platt wraps up his conversation with Bryce and prepares to see his first resident of the afternoon. "I am personally proud to be associated with an organization that does so much for children in our community and state," he said. "Medical students can learn a lot about how quality care can be provided for the vulnerable children in our community through their time serving here at Epworth. The staff members give to the children with the best intentions and open hearts."

The Candy Bar Mission

Santa's Workshop is a magical place on Epworth's campus. It's where "Santa's Daughter," Mrs. Deborah Keller, who also serves as Epworth's Intake Coordinator, sorts and boxes all the gifts that Santa leaves for the children. The front room of Santa's Workshop is filled with the wonderful smells of homemade cookies and hot chocolate. As Santa's Angels drop by for visits, they are welcomed by the sounds of Christmas music and Epworth's very own Christmas Elf, Mrs. Mary Parsons.

This year, Santa's Daughter decided to have a "Candy Bar" for the children, and each cottage is scheduled to drop by. Every child will be given a small bag which they can use to collect the candies of their choice.

Mrs. Deborah was in her office just before Halloween when the 10 high school girls from Anderson Cottage stopped by for a visit. "We want to do something nice for the campus," they told

Mrs. Deborah. "Epworth gives us so much, and we want to give back."

Mrs. Deborah was pleasantly surprised by their self-initiated act of kindness. "What would you like to do?" she asked them.

"We want to do a fundraiser and purchase the candy for the Christmas Candy Bar," they continued. They already had a plan and they were insisting she let them follow through with it.

"Well, I think that would be a wonderful gift to the campus, ladies," she told them.

If you are on Epworth's campus between Wednesday, December 5th and Monday, December 17th, we invite you to stop by Santa's Workshop to meet Santa's Daughter and enjoy your own piece of candy from the Christmas Candy Bar, compliments of the 11th and 12th grade girls from Anderson Cottage.



Continued from Cover

at it too,” she continued. “He also told us that Epworth was helping him get back to his mother.” Mrs. Jeffords was touched by the level of care and concern her daughter had for Randy, but she could have never imagined what happened next.

“Mom, the only difference between me and Randy are the circumstances of his life. He is a normal kid just like me, and I want to help him go to camp again next year,” Grayson told her mother.

Grayson is right. Randy is exactly as she described – a hilarious and a wonderful 12 year old artist. This was his first year at Asbury Hills. Randy is at Epworth because his mother struggles with addiction. She is participating in the free counseling sessions Epworth offers to her as a family member of a resident. Despite the neglect and hurt Randy has experienced, he always has a smile on his face. He is polite and well mannered. He makes friends easily and enjoys school.

Mrs. Jeffords was proud to hear her daughter take such an interest in her new friend’s well being. “Camp has always been important to Grayson, and she wants to share that with her new friend,” said Mrs. Jeffords. She explained to Grayson how scholarships work at Asbury Hills, but Grayson was insistent that she be a part of the solution.

“Well, just to make sure,” she told her mother, “instead of asking Santa for presents this Christmas, I am going to ask him to send Randy to camp again.” Mrs. Jeffords called Epworth to see if that would be okay.

Laurie Brandes, who coordinates summer camp experiences for the children at Epworth and serves on the Board of Asbury Hills, was touched. “Here is a little girl who is giving up her own Christmas for the sake of one of our children,” said Mrs. Brandes. Mrs. Deborah Keller, Intake Coordinator at Epworth, but more importantly known as “Santa’s Daughter” by the children at Epworth, assured Grayson that she had personally told Santa about the wish.

After thinking about it for a couple of days, Grayson changed her mind. She came down the steps in her home with an envelope in her hand. Her mother recognized it as Grayson’s savings envelope. On the outside it read, “I-Phone Fund.” That had been scratched out and it now read “Randy’s Camp Fund.” Grayson told her mother that instead of Santa sending Randy to camp, she wanted to pay for his camp herself. “I was amazed,” said Mrs. Jeffords. “I told her I was very impressed with her level of commitment, and I also wanted to help send Randy to camp. So I asked if I could pay half of the \$225 required. Grayson agreed and gladly handed over \$112.50.”

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)

During this season of hope, as we pause to welcome the Christ child, we here at Epworth rejoice and give thanks to the Grayson’s of this world who support the children who call Epworth home through their generous financial giving. Randy, like 30% of the children at Epworth, is a private placement, which means that Epworth receives no government funding to pay for his care. He is happy and thriving because Epworth wraps him in nurturing care that includes afterschool tutors, counseling, faith formation and experiences like summer camp. His life is being transformed from the inside out, so as he grows and moves into independence he will not be trapped in the cycle of abuse and neglect that brought him to Epworth. Thank you for your investment in the comprehensive care of our children. It truly transforms their lives.

Merry Christmas,

From all of us here at Epworth Children’s Home



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**Children's names have been changed for confidentiality.*

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The mission of Epworth Children's Home is to serve children, youth and families through a caring, accepting and safe Christian community, where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self and others is developed.

Planning to Make a Difference

The vast majority of us want to make a difference. We want to make a mark and know that our corner of the world is a better place because we live in it. The trouble is, often many of us hope to make a difference rather than planning to make a difference.

Jacob C. Arant, Sr., Murray C. Hicks, and Mary Frances Fitzgerald Cagle not only wanted to make things better for others, they also planned carefully in order to ensure they did just that. All three of these people named above included Epworth Children's Home in their wills or estate plans and are listed as members of the **Epworth Society of 1896**. The thoughtful planning of Jacob C. Arant, Sr., Murray C. Hicks, and Mary Frances Fitzgerald Cagle will help give children a safe and secure home for generations to come.

The Epworth Society of 1896 was designed and approved by the Board of Trustees of Epworth Children's Home as an expression of gratitude to persons who have remembered Epworth in their

estate planning or deferred giving. Membership in the Society requires a commitment of \$25,000 or above through any one of several planned gift vehicles. They include but are not limited to: a will or bequest, a codicil to a will, a life insurance policy, an annuity or a trust instrument, a transfer of stocks or real estate, and or other instruments. A planned or deferred gift to the Epworth Children's Home defines an individual's ultimate commitment to the care and well being of abused and neglected children.

Gifts through the Epworth Society of 1896 become part of Epworth's endowment fund; therefore, the gifts of Jacob C. Arant, Sr., Murray C. Hicks, and Mary Frances Fitzgerald Cagle will benefit children for years to come from the income their gifts produce. We pay tribute to these individuals and give thanks for their faithful planning and their charitable hearts.

(If you would like more information about the Epworth Society of 1896, please call or write John Holler.)