

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Breaking the Cycle of Neglect...Together.

For Jazmine and Curtdrieka, childhood was anything but a fairytale. The two 11-year-old girls from the Upstate of South Carolina did not know each other at the time, but each experienced forms of neglect. Drugs, alcohol and violence were everyday realities as they moved from place to place throughout their childhoods.

Jazmine's Story

As an infant, Jazmine was in and out of the foster care system. Her mother struggled with drug and alcohol addiction, and the effects of the addiction took their toll on Jazmine and her family. They went weeks without electricity in their home.

The neglect took a toll on Jazmine physically. Twice she contracted a severe, life-threatening

inflammatory disease that develops when a very common infection is left untreated for a prolonged period. She received treatment only after her right side became temporarily paralyzed, similar to a stroke. Her condition caused permanent heart damage and she continues to struggle with chronic joint pain, especially in the cold weather. The lack of medical care as a young child, means that for the rest of her life she will need to be given a monthly shot to prevent the disease from returning.

Jazmine recalls moving a lot. "Too many times; we moved every six months for 11 years."

In 2007, she found herself in the foster care system, staying with a foster parent who struggled to provide for her. One winter day, her case worker

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Creating a Culture of Success

Summer 2014

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

This time last year there was a buzz around the Epworth campus. All the high school girls who lived in Anderson Cottage had made the honor roll at Dreher High School and all of the seniors in Anderson had graduated and been accepted into college. There was pride and excitement to the extent that both the residents and the staff members of Anderson would talk about this achievement to anyone who would listen.

This year we saw the same scenario minus the girls and staff talking about it all around campus. Last year some of the Anderson Cottage girls burst into my office and exclaimed, "We all made Honor Roll". This year I was in our dining hall talking to some of the Anderson girls while they were waiting to eat dinner, and, as I was about to walk away, Ms. Gee, the Cottage Coordinator, said in a matter of fact way, "You know all my girls made Honor Roll again."

I could tell she and the girls were proud, but the tone was different. Last year it was "Wow! Look what we have done!" This year the tone was "What else did you expect?"

So much of what happens at Epworth is geared toward creating a climate of success for children and teenagers who may not have succeeded at much in their lives except counterproductive behavior.

Even our teenage boys are plugging in. Some of you may remember that several years ago I wrote about talking to my wife, who has taught school for many years, about how distraught I was regarding the behavioral and academic performance of our boys. I told her how unmotivated and underachieving most of the boys were. I said that the boys are so far behind the girls it is unbelievable. She smiled slightly and said "and you boys never catch up". I left that comment alone.

This year all of our high school senior boys graduated. They have all been either accepted into college, are planning for a military career, or specialized job training.

There is a sense of pride on the boys' side of campus. They are not all scholars yet, but they are moving in that direction.

This is my favorite time of year at Epworth. School is out for the year, and our children are on campus during the day. There is an increased vitality as children and young adults find a new rhythm. The younger children are engaged in play and day trips to the zoo, Water Park, Ed Venture, and other such activities.

Older children are engaged in kayaking, summer camps, service projects, and the summer basketball league.

Many are starting summer jobs, and will soon receive their first ever pay checks. They will have that learning and eye opening experience when they calculate the difference in what they earned and what they received after state and federal deductions.

Many of our college students are back on campus. They seem to have matured during the year, yet in some ways they still need the same things they needed a year ago – a pat on the back, a handshake, a word of encouragement, and occasionally some corrective advice that says "Hold on, maybe that choice is not going to take you where you really want to go."

All this energy, activity, hoping, praying, and planning is aimed toward creating a culture of success and breaking destructive cycles that tend to be passed from generation to generation. It is rewarding to watch it all unfold.

came to visit and found out that the foster parent had been threatening Jazmine. The case worker quickly pulled Jazmine aside, introduced her to a place called Epworth and asked her if she might want to visit it. Jazmine agreed to check it out and after taking a tour of campus she told her case worker that she wanted to move as soon as possible. A few weeks later, on March 12, 2007, she was officially placed at Epworth and moved into Stokes cottage.

Curtdrieka's Story

Curtdrieka, the youngest of four children, lived at home with her mom. Growing up she remembers being dropped off with other family members a lot, and being confused as to why she would be separated from her mom so frequently. As she got older she came to understand what was happening--her mom was sending her away.

Curtdrieka's mom abused drugs, and though she would turn things around at times, she always reverted back to addictive activities. In addition

On March 15, 2007, the two girls woke up for the first time under the same roof. It would be the first of many.

to substance abuse in the home, there was also on-going violence. Her mom's boyfriend physically attacked her mother in front of the children. He never turned the violence toward the children, but the physical and emotional danger he presented was traumatizing for Curtdrieka.

Curtdrieka's older sisters began to follow in the same path as their mother, continuing the heartbreaking cycle. "All my sisters had children at a young age," she said. "None of them graduated high school. One of them was in and out of jail, and always getting in serious trouble."

At age 11, Curtdrieka was placed into the foster care system. After a four month stay at another facility, her case worker arranged for her to come to Epworth. Curtdrieka was angry. She did not want to go and feared that Epworth would be another unsafe place to live. The day she moved to Epworth she begrudgingly climbed into her case worker's car. As they drove through Columbia the case worker got lost. Curtdrieka remembers the day well.

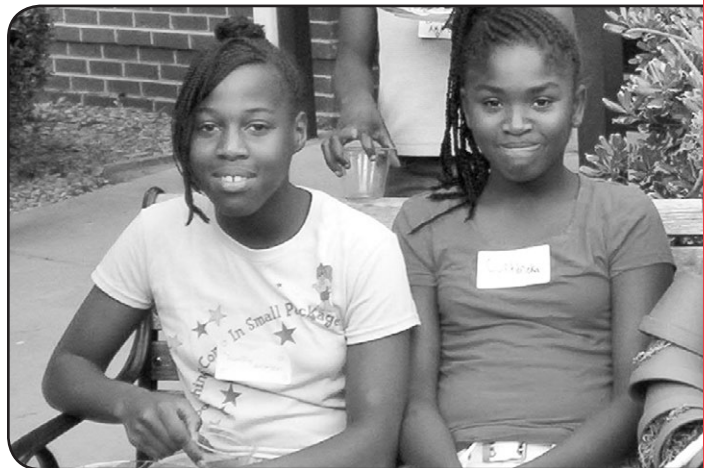
"I remember we were driving along and I looked out the window and saw an Epworth sign but the case worker didn't see it. I just kept my mouth shut and let her drive on by. I thought that if she could not find it, then I would not have to move there."

Eventually the case worker regained her bearings and helped Curtdrieka move into Stokes Cottage. It was March 14, 2007.

Adjusting to Epworth

Within two days of each other Jazmine and Curtdrieka both moved to Epworth. Each came from different circumstances but they now found themselves as the "new girls" on campus. They were born in the same town and just weeks apart. They were placed in some of the same foster homes at various times before coming to Epworth, but had never met. On March 15, 2007, the two girls woke up for the first time under the same roof. It would be the first of many.

"At first I was really quiet, but I made friends pretty quick," Jazmine remembers. Curtdrieka remembers being angry at first but it didn't take long to adjust. "We were little then so it was easier," she recalls.



The cottage staff in Stokes cottage worked to help them adjust to life at Epworth. Ms. Johnson and Ms. Kim made sure the girls had plenty of time to play with the other girls and were able to get a good start at their new school. "They loved us."

Curtdrieka remembers fondly what it was like back then. "Back home, I knew I was smart and that I could do better in school than I was doing. When I got here, they starting encouraging me to do more and had higher expectations. That would not have happened back home." Jazmine can relate to that, too. "If I would have stayed at home I would have never even made it to high school. No one in my family ever did, I would have been a drop out for sure."

As the two girls got settled there were plenty of hard moments too. Both girls still loved their mothers but struggled with the idea of maintaining a relationship with their families. The heartache that was the result of years of neglect and chaotic homes was difficult to

Investing in Care!

endure. The staff encouraged them to write family members, but neither girl was very receptive to the idea. Eventually the parental rights of each of their mothers was terminated. Periods of sadness and grief came and went for the girls as they wrestled with the reality of their childhoods.

Progress

As the two girls started to grow up together and blossom into teenagers, they began to thrive at Epworth. The girls actively participated in the educational, emotional, physical, and spiritual programs around campus.

"I started doing better and by the time I was in middle school, I worked my way into taking honor's level classes," recalls Curtdrieka. In high school she earned a Certificate in Mobile Electronics through the Heyward Career and Tech Center in the Richland One School District. She fell in love with math and science. Through the same center, Jazmine discovered that she loved helping others and received her Certification as a Nursing Assistant while still in high school.

Both girls became frequent members of the school Honor Roll and became increasingly active in after school and summer programs. "We have done things here we would have never done if it were not for Epworth," Jazmine says.

They went camping and fishing at Epworth's Camp Glenyr near Orangeburg. They took adventure trips to kayak, raft and complete high-ropes courses. They both learned to ride horses and looked forward to the opportunities with local camps and equestrian programs to ride. They took day trips to water parks and always took advantage of Epworth's annual weeklong beach trip.

At 16, Jazmine had a breakthrough in her life. She started to accept the reality of her past, and came to believe that she could take care of herself and had the ability to do more with her life. She realized that she did not have to follow the same path as her family. The realization brought a sense of peace to her and enabled her to begin reconnecting with some of her cousins, then later her grandmother. Eventually she even reconnected with her mother.

Jazmine can reflect on her situation now and the role it continues to play in her life. "My family situation is not right," she says. "It disgusts me. It took me 16 years to get over it, until I started doing things for myself and realized I could do better. The past motivates me to do everything I can to be better."

The two girls grew up together. They secured summer jobs and later part-time jobs at a local retail

"The past motivates me to do everything I can to be better."

store during the school year—while maintaining their honor roll status. Their manager praises them for their hard work as clerks. They are receiving more shifts to make extra money. By all accounts, the once reserved girls transformed into stellar young women.

Giving Back

By their late teens, both Jazmine and Curtdrieka were clearly excelling at Epworth. They took full advantage of the opportunities in front of them but as they became the oldest children on campus, a desire to do more grew. They wanted to give back.

It started with their participation in Salkehatchie, an annual summer service program of the United Methodist Church. For a week they volunteered to travel to the upstate, wake up at 6:00AM, and do hard and physically demanding work for those in need. They learned to paint, hang siding and even to re-roof a home. "I didn't care that I had to wake up early," says Curtdrieka. "We had devotions, awesome worship, did fun things that helped people." ...Jazmine interrupts, "And the food was awesome!"

Their habit of giving back continued. They began helping the younger girls on campus. They played with them and encouraged them to do better in school. The younger girls opened up to them about their own struggles. "We are the old ones now and we wanted to set a good example for them," says Jazmine.

Their good deeds extend beyond campus as well. At Christmas they combined their money from part-time jobs and adopted a family in need to provide presents. They volunteer at the local soup kitchen and homeless shelter. They do not just serve the food but they seek out real conversations with those they serve. Sometimes when the cottage has leftovers, they go to the park and bus station to give a sandwich or snack to those who are homeless.

"I guess because we were on the receiving end of so many good things here at Epworth it just means so much to us to give back to others. We get to know the people we are serving and it just feels good," says Jazmine. "I can call some of the people we serve at the shelter and park by name. I mean we know them."

The Future

This summer the girls are graduating from high school and moving into young adulthood. All year

they have been taking the SAT and ACT and applying to colleges in anticipation of their graduation. With their academic success and stories of resilience, the girls were accepted by multiple colleges.

Jazmine really enjoyed her nursing program in high school and wants to pursue her nursing degree. Curtdrieka's love of math and science, her experience in mobile electronics and her earned reputation in the cottage as the TV and computer repairwoman, are leading her to look into computer engineering programs. Both girls had the same school on their short list—Lander University in Greenwood.

“Without Epworth my life would be miserable,” Jazmine says. “Mine too,” says Curtdrieka.

After being accepted they decided they would attend Lander and room together. Their support system will continue and increase their likelihood of success. Nationally, only 2% of foster children complete college, but both of these girls are committed to beating the odds. In addition to each other, they will be a part of Epworth's Independent Living/Higher Education Program. They will continue to receive support from Epworth staff and come “home” to visit for weekends and holidays.

Both girls have big dreams. Jazmine wants to be a traveling nurse and go around the country seeing new places. Curtdrieka wants to be a computer engineer and continue to fix things, but she wants to settle down somewhere permanently. The future is bright, but both girls say they will keep Epworth part of their lives.

“Oh we are coming back. We talk about it all the time, having cottage reunions with the other girls and staff,” says Jazmine. Curtdrieka especially wants to come back for alumni events like the BBQ and summer homecoming. “As a kid here, I love it when alumni come back and get to know us. We have so much fun talking to them and hearing their stories. That's going to be us one day for some other kids,” she says.

Seven years ago Jazmine and Curtdrieka faced uncertain futures. “Without Epworth my life would be miserable,” Jazmine says. “Mine too,” says Curtdrieka. When the girls arrived at Epworth they were given the opportunity to rise above the cycle of neglect that dominated their childhoods. Each girl seized the opportunities provided for them and broke the cycle of neglect. Their stay transformed them into mature and intelligent young women with bright futures ahead. Jazmine and Curtdrieka now enter college and a new chapter in their lives, a

chapter that would not exist without Epworth's care and support.



Friends of Epworth Grows Annual Support

At their May 2013 meeting, the board members of the Friends of Epworth presented Epworth with a check for \$30,000 in undesignated support for the care of children at Epworth. The monies raised came from a full year of events and activities including their signature gala held in February.

The Friends of Epworth is an independent 501(c)3 with the mission to raise undesignated funds and public awareness for Epworth Children's Home. The group is comprised of Columbia area business and community leaders with a passion for providing for the children who live at Epworth.



Follow-up: From Jail to College

The Fall 2013 cover story of *The Record* told the story of Trevor*. Trevor spent 72 hours in jail before being cleared and released following a violent incident in the home with his abusive mother. After being placed at Epworth, Trevor blossomed and when we last told you his story he was beginning to transform academically, emotionally and spiritually.



Since last Fall, Trevor has pushed himself and is maturing into a responsible young man. When he started at Epworth his high school GPA was 1.75 and slipping. His environment at home made it difficult for him to perform at school. With the safety, structure and support of Epworth he earned a 3.3 GPA by the end of his junior year. His success continued this year as a senior, and though at the printing of this issue his final grades were not in, he consistently continued to make the honor roll at Dreher High School this year. He also stayed busy after school in the marching band, wrestling, and as an all region-qualifier on the track team.

His teachers and Epworth are very pleased with his progress, but another important audience took notice---college admissions counselors! Trevor's transformation inside and outside the classroom allowed him to be accepted to multiple colleges. With plenty of options in front of him, Trevor decided to take a college tour of his top choice with Mrs. Laurie Brandes, Director of the

Independent Living/Higher Education Program at Epworth.

As they began the tour, the admissions counselor started to tell Trevor about life as a student at the college. Trevor smiled and laughed a little, but did not say a word. The guide continued the tour and at least three times Trevor repeated these small outburst of laughter. When the tour concluded, Mrs. Brandes turned to Trevor and asked, "What was all of that laughter about, Trevor?"

Trevor responded with...more laughter and smiles! "Mrs. Brandes, I couldn't help it," he finally responded with words. "For so long no one believed I would finish high school, even I wasn't sure. But now, I'm not just finishing high school. I'm going to college. I couldn't help but laugh."

Next fall he will be attending Lander University and intends to follow his dream of receiving a degree in criminal justice. He has already received multiple scholarships. His younger brother, now in high school himself, is very proud of Trevor and is already showing signs of following in his older brother's footsteps.

Trevor's transformation has not just transformed his life but it is breaking the cycle for his entire family. He is serving as a role model for his siblings and for other residents here at Epworth. The teen who faced an uncertain future just a few years ago is now walking confidently across the stage at graduation and right into college.



The Hipp Family: A Lifetime of Giving

Earlier this year, the late Rev. John G. and Mrs. Carol M. Hipp became members of Epworth's prestigious *Society of 1896*, an honor reserved for faithful donors who leave estate gifts of \$25,000 or more to Epworth Children's Home. Adding their name to this prestigious group is certainly a notable accomplishment but what this gift reflects is more than just one act of generosity—it was a lifetime of giving.

In 1971, the Hipps' only son, John, Jr. (Jerry), tragically died at a young age. At the time of his death, John and Carol established a trust in their son's memory. To this trust they applied all of the memorials from the family's friends at Mathews United Methodist Church (Greenwood) and contributions from family and friends. As the years went by, the Hipps and an occasional family or friend would contribute to the trust and it slowly began to grow.

In the trust, the Hipps agreed that at the end of their own lives the assets would be transferred to Epworth Children's Home to establish the John G. Hipp, Jr. Fund for Christian Ministry. The fund is to provide opportunities for Epworth residents such as counseling, camps, college scholarships, and summer jobs.

Recently both John (2011) and Carol (2013) entered the church triumphant. At the time of Carol's passing and as their estate was settled, Epworth received the assets of the trust which had grown substantially since it was first established over 40 years ago. Epworth received these assets and this summer it is helping provide activities for Epworth children as John and Carol requested. It will continue to do so into perpetuity. John and Carol's lifetime of giving and careful planning of their son's and their own estates is making a significant impact at Epworth—both now and in years to come.

Interested in learning more about planned giving and how you can provide care for children at Epworth for the generations to come? Please call Andrew Boozer, Vice President for Development at 803-256-7394 or email him at abooser@epworthsc.org.



The Society of 1896

All persons leaving a planned gift or bequest that exceeds \$25,000 will be included in the Society of 1896 when Epworth is notified of your planned gift or bequest. All Society members are recognized as members on a plaque that hangs in the Administration Office at Epworth Children's Home. Gifts are also listed in our newsletter upon receipt of the gift.



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Children's Home

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Rev. John. E. Holler, Jr.
President

**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.

2014 Cook out for Kids BBQ a Success!

Thank you to everyone who supported the Epworth Alumni Association's Cook out for Kids on Saturday May 3. Nearly 2,000 plates of BBQ and 700 Boston Butts, along with a pile of baked goods and drinks were purchased with all of the proceeds benefiting Epworth. Thank you for making this annual event a great success!

