

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Emerging from the Chaos

YTerrani[#] grew up in Columbia not far from Epworth. She lived in a four bedroom home with her four siblings and her mother. She did well in school and played outside with her family and friends until it got dark and the street lights came on. She describes her early childhood as “normal, just like everyone else’s.”

At the center of her childhood was her mother. Her mother provided everything for the family. She worked as a nurse on night shift at a local nursing home while a cousin came and watched YTerrani and her siblings. During the day YTerrani’s mother made sure everyone got to school, and then grabbed just a few hours of sleep before she went to school herself to earn her

[#]pronounced “why tyranny”

nursing degree.

On September 13, 2010, everything changed. YTerrani was in middle school. She got a message from her neighbor asking for her and her brother to come straight home after school. As she got off of the bus at the bus stop, a family member whisked her into a car and drove them towards her home.

“On the ride we kept seeing lots of policemen, long lost family, and the coroner,” YTerrani recalls. “We knew something terrible was wrong. It was at this time I began to realize how fragile and vulnerable we are, that in just one second a person can go from being alive with family,

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Creating a Culture and Making a Difference

Summer 2015

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

Epworth has been a high quality mission for 119 years, but the child care world has changed dramatically since Epworth was established. The need for high quality comprehensive care has increased significantly during the last 10 years.

In recognition of this, eight years ago we dedicated ourselves to do at least two things:

- (1) Create a culture of success. We encountered children and youth who were coming from places and situations where success was not something that was even on the radar of possibilities.
- (2) Make every attempt possible to make a difference for a lifetime and beyond. It is not enough to feed, clothe, and house children. We witnessed children and youth falling back into generational cycles of hopelessness, and non productive living after leaving institutions of care.

Because of the resources that you have provided toward creating a culture of success and making a difference in children's lives for a lifetime and beyond, I am able to report:

- For the fourth year in a row Epworth high school students have achieved a 100% graduation rate and are enrolled (or are in the process of enrolling in) some form of post secondary education.
- 58% of our students made their schools' honor rolls this year.
- In spite of accepting more children with greater numbers of academic deficiencies, 92% of our residents had an overall C average or better this year.

- Success breeds success – 96% of our residents had two or fewer disciplinary referrals at school.

This year our Higher Education/Independent Living population has doubled, and the projection is that in the next five years the number of Epworth students eligible for college will increase by 300%.

The next bit of information is less than stellar. According to the 2014 Kids Count Data Book, South Carolina ranks in the bottom tier in every indicator that is a predictor of success for children. Children's economic well-being dropped to 45th in the nation. Our education rank is 43rd. Children's health is 43rd. Our family and community rank is 41st in the nation.

Other reports tell us that our high school dropout rate is 31%. South Carolina has over 17,000 youth between the ages of 16 and 19 who are neither in school nor working. There are over 91,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 who are not enrolled in school, not working, and have no degree beyond high school. South Carolina's youth who fell into this category constitute 45% of our state's population of this age group.

There are increasing numbers of children who live in high poverty, low resource areas and are growing up in families that cannot or do not provide adequate child care, protection, educational support, and nurture.

These numbers tell us that the work of building a culture of success and of making a difference for a lifetime and beyond has really just begun. The challenge for all of us is great, but the opportunities are unlimited as we work in concert to be a transformational resource for children and families in South Carolina.

friends, years of education and goals to being gone, wasted, never to come back.”

YTerrani’s mother died suddenly from a genetic heart defect. She died only months before she was to graduate from her nursing program. Relatives gathered YTerrani and her siblings together. They assured the children they would be taken care of and that they would not be split up.

Later that day, an aunt gave YTerrani her mother’s cell phone. For weeks, people would call the number expecting to reach her mother. YTerrani would have to tell them the tragic news. During those same weeks, the family who promised to keep the siblings together began to realize the complexity of their promise. Keeping five children together was more than any one family member could handle. The siblings were split between family and friends and scattered across the southeast, never to live together again. YTerrani’s “normal” childhood was suddenly chaos mixed in trauma and grief.

Over the next two years, the chaos continued. YTerrani grieved for her mother and missed her family. She first stayed with her aunt but it did not last long. Then she went to live with her father, who had not been active in her life before her mother’s death. When that did not work out, she moved again. The cycle repeated itself over and over. In less than two years she moved eight times to places as far away as New Orleans.

“I was passed around from relative to relative until I was taken in by DSS (Department of Social Services),” YTerrani recalls. “Moving was exhausting. I didn’t know when I was going to have to leave again.”

Being a teenager can be hard enough, but YTerrani was also exhausted, disheartened and felt insecure. Eventually she quit trying; she quit trying to make friends at her new schools, she quit trusting those

who were taking care of her. In the afternoons she began to find herself hanging around the wrong crowds in the wrong neighborhoods. She was headed toward a very dark path.

As life continued to unravel for YTerrani, she was placed into the foster care system by the South Carolina Department of Social Services. After staying at an emergency shelter for a few weeks, she was placed at Epworth.

For YTerrani, it was just another move and another place to sleep at night. Though she remembers the other girls in her cottage and the Epworth staff being very nice and welcoming, she did not bother trying to make friends. She assumed she would just be moving again. Her attitude was often sour and she was short and rude with those around her.



In those first few weeks a local church group hosted a holiday event for her cottage. The group already knew some of the girls, but wanted to get to know this new girl who had just arrived. One lady came up to her and said, “Hi, what’s your name?” YTerrani responded, “Y.” Confused, the lady responded politely, “Because I have never met you and I would

like to get to know you. May I please know your name?” YTerrani, with a sharp glare and firm voice responded, “Y.” The other girls overheard what was happening and explained to the group that her name was YTerrani but she preferred to go by her nickname, “Y”.

Similar scenes repeated themselves in those first months. Then one day, she was invited to play on the Epworth basketball team. When the season started, she sent a schedule to her family nearby hoping that they would come watch her play. As the season wore on, no one in her family ever showed up. She was heartbroken, but it is a moment that transformed her life. “I realized that I wasn’t doing it [basketball] for them, but for myself,” she recalls. She then went to the United Methodist Basketball

Investing in Care!

Tournament off-campus for the weekend. She enjoyed herself and started to develop a bond with some of the other players on the team.

From then on, YTerrani began to open up to more people on campus. She began to embrace Epworth and the opportunity it was providing her. She was the youngest girl in her cottage at the time, so the older girls took her under their wing.[#] “There are good people here,” YTerrani now says. “They try to encourage us to be a family, and to grow with one another. Ms. Gee (her case manager) is like a second mother to me. Though living here could never replace the home I had with my mother and siblings, it sure does come close.”

As others were taking her under their wing, YTerrani also began to do the same to another Epworth resident. In the youngest boys cottage was a seven year old named Tony*. Tony was about the same age as YTerrani’s little brother when her mother died. She missed her brother and she admits that Tony helped fill that void in her life. “We grew a bond like a big sister, little brother. We did everything together. One time we all went to the movies and rather than go see a movie with my cottage, I went along with Tony to watch a little kids movie.” They would take walks together on campus, play on the playgrounds and sit next to each other in the dining hall. For over a year they were inseparable until Tony was discharged from Epworth. Tony’s leaving was sad for YTerrani, but it did not derail her progress.

In school, YTerrani always did pretty well, even through the most chaotic times. However, at Epworth she did not just do pretty well, she excelled. Her grades were always excellent and she went out of her way to do even more. Before Epworth she did not have the support or the extra money to do extracurricular activities, but in her words, “Here I could do anything!” She sang in the school chorus and played tuba in the band. She joined clubs, including the National Honor Society and the student council. And she did all of this while holding a part-time retail job near campus.

A few weeks ago, YTerrani graduated with honors from Dreher High School.

She has been accepted to and will attend Winthrop University next fall as a higher education student in Epworth’s Independent Living program. She just moved out of the cottage she has called home at Epworth and into an apartment on the Epworth campus that is reserved for college students. It is the first step of independence for YTerrani and the next step in achieving her dreams. She will live in a dormitory when school starts, but on breaks and on occasional weekends her apartment at Epworth will still be her home.

While at Winthrop, YTerrani plans to major in Biology so that later she can go to medical school and become a doctor. She wants to help others and carry on the tradition of medical care that her mother started years ago. She dreams of settling down one day and having her own family. When she does, she hopes that she can reunite with some of her own relatives but also introduce her children to her Epworth family.

There is still a long way to go before those dreams become reality for YTerrani, but thanks to her time at Epworth she is on the right path to getting there. YTerrani will gladly tell anyone that before Epworth, “I was on the path that could only lead me behind bars, in a grave yard or just on the streets. I am very grateful for Epworth Children’s Home.”

Watch YTerrani tell her own story in a brief video shared at this year’s SC United Methodist Annual Conference. The video is available online at www.epworthchildrenshome.org.

#Note: Two of those girls were Jazmine and Curtdrieka from the June 2014 issue of The Record.



Epworth Missions Program

Epworth's Missions Program is a comprehensive, hands-on outreach program where volunteers from churches across the state can come to Epworth to do mission projects close to home and close to their hearts. Whether for a few hours or a few days, mission projects at Epworth meet facility and program needs for the children at Epworth, increase volunteers' understandings of Epworth's ministry, and create the space to deepen discipleship in Christ.

"In getting to personally know the children through my volunteer work, I have come to respect them in so many ways for their strength and perseverance," said Heather Rogers member of Chapin UMC after helping refurbish Waddell Cottage. "In their eyes you can still see hope when there could be darkness."

For residents, Epworth's 32-acre campus is a safe, peaceful and loving community where children's needs come first. With over 25 buildings on campus (including 10 cottages, a health center, classrooms, church, gym, dining hall and more) and plenty of shaded green space and playgrounds, each area is designed to meet and provide for children's needs. However with 180 residents each year coming and going, maintaining and beautifying these areas is an on-going task.

How a Mission Project Works

Epworth's volunteer coordinator, Beth Robinson, helps groups identify their capabilities and matches groups with current campus needs. Mission leaders then come to campus two to three months in advance to plan their project details. They then return to their congregation to solicit support. Each group raises its own funds to pay for the project and provides the volunteer hours and materials necessary to complete the project. Along the way, Epworth staff helps guide the process.

When the day comes for the mission to start, groups meet at Epworth and the facility staff helps kick off the project. Groups



Covenant UMC, Greer, updated the Sunday School rooms in the church and created an age-appropriate theme for each room.



Aldersgate UMC, Greenville, assembled welcome boxes for new Epworth residents to receive when they arrive.

staying multiple days are offered overnight accommodations on campus, meals in the dining hall and suggested activities for any “down-time” during their stay.

“The staff was very accommodating and welcomed us with open arms,” said Sandy Hager, Bethany UMC, Summerville. “The maintenance crew continually provided us with assistance. Our every need was taken care of.”

Something for Everyone

Epworth’s mission projects can be catered to the size and skills of the group. For advanced large groups, doing full cottage makeovers and other large projects can be a great opportunity to involve a wide variety of church members over the course of a weekend or even a full week. For smaller and/or novice groups there are shorter projects like painting walls, planting flowers or helping with cleaning and organizational needs.

“It was important to me that these girls have a cheerful and welcoming place to stay...a place they would be happy to call home,” said Joan Beck, New Beginnings UMC in Boiling Springs. “Also, I wanted them to know that our church family loves them and supports them as they strive to further their education, and I knew that this project would be a visual reminder of that love and support.”

A Gift for the Children



Bethany UMC, Summerville, created new spaces for the boys in Clinton cottage to play and study while renovating the cottage's living room.

Every mission project at Epworth is designed to improve the experience of the children who call Epworth home.

“It’s so cool,” said a young boy from Clinton Cottage after Bethany UMC, Summerville completed a week-long renovation. His case manager, Andrea Cox, agreed. “The boys love having a new gaming section, and the work-space cubbies have been so practical for homework and crafting. The boys have taken pride in their new area and they are reminding one another to keep it clean and to keep their shoes off the new couch cushions and table—just as the women from the church taught them. The room truly feels inviting and comfortable. We are so grateful!”

If you are interested in learning more about the Epworth Missions Program, please contact Beth

Robinson at brobinson@epworthsc.org or 803-256-7394, or visit www.epworthchildrenshome.org.

Volunteers from First UMC, Isle of Palms, have made eight mission trips to Epworth since 2009. One of their faithful volunteers, Wayne, remembers his first visit fondly.

One day, a young child came quietly into the room where we were working, open-eyed and obviously curious as to what we were about. She looked around and then asked me, "What are you doing?" I replied that we were working to make the room a nicer place for her. She hesitated a moment and asked, "You're doing this for us?" With tears in my eyes, I replied, "Yes." She left without any further comment. The next day, she came back - that time with several friends and I was moved to recall Jesus's phrase from Matthew: "...when you did it for the least of these... you did it for me."




First UMC, Isle of Palms, is actively preparing for their ninth mission project.

Friends of Epworth Continues Growth

At their May 2015 meeting, the board members of the Friends of Epworth presented Epworth with a check for \$40,000 in undesignated support for the care of children at Epworth. In each of their first three years, the Friends of Epworth have grown their annual support. 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 call Epworth home.



Food Truck Rodeo

9.15.15

Tuesday, September 15, 2015
5:00-8:00PM @ Epworth Children's Home

A portion of all food sales benefit Epworth.
Free admission, donations appreciated.





Epworth
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.

Another Year of Accomplishments

The residents and staff at Epworth celebrated another joyful graduation season in 2015. Again this year, 100% of Epworth high school seniors proudly walked across the stage at the Dreher High School Commencement. With their high school studies completed, these residents will now transition into Epworth's Independent Living Program where they will begin a variety of post-secondary educational experiences from life skills and job training programs locally in Columbia to over 10 colleges and universities. Additionally this spring, one Epworth college student, Brianna (pictured with Laurie Brandes, Director of the Independent Living Program), earned her Associates Degree at Spartanburg Methodist College. She now plans to complete her Bachelor's degree in math and accounting. Epworth is committed to supporting these young people as they strive to end the destructive cycles that once dominated their lives and transition into becoming responsible and self-sufficient adults.

