

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## *Wishes Do Come True*

“**H**illary, what are your wishes for Christmas this year?” asked Ms. Janelle, her case manager. “Nothing,” replied Hillary\*. “I don’t want anything. There’s nothing I want to put on my wish list this year.”

The reply surprised Ms. Janelle. Hillary was usually a ray of sunshine when she was at home in her cottage. The 12 year old girl had developed a close connection with Ms. Janelle since coming to Epworth two years ago.

She asked her one more time, “Hillary, what do you want on your wish list? There has to

be something.” Hillary shouted back at her, “A mom! A family! That’s all I want. I just want to be adopted. I want a mother who cares about me, a nice home, and I want to get out of the system!”

Ms. Janelle’s heart sank. Tears came to her eyes. She was expecting Hillary to make her normal requests. She likes things that are simple and sentimental, like necklaces or keepsakes that she can keep forever. Though Hillary’s response caught her off guard, she understood deep down Hillary’s frustration and disappointment.

Hillary was removed from her home nearly a

*Continued on Page 3*



# Planning Ahead

## Winter 2013

A Message from The Rev. John Holler  
President

We received very good news this past week as you will see in an article in this issue of the *Epworth Record*. Epworth has been recognized as a Four Star Charity by Charity Navigator, the highest rating that is given to a not for profit organization, for demonstrating financial responsibility, openness, and other best practices. Epworth has long been recognized as a superior children's home where a full range of services are provided for children who need a safe and nurturing place to live and grow.

Now Epworth is in the position of being recognized as a superior home, programmatically and fiscally, because of the generosity of all who support the children who reside at Epworth presently, as well as the children who are yet to come. This is because donors planned ahead.

During this time of year between Thanksgiving and Christmas, thoughts often turn to finding a special gift for someone, and if truth be known, maybe receiving a special gift – one that really matters. For me, a gift that can help change a life is a gift that really matters. A gift that can live forever, generation after generation is an extra special gift. This type of gift is one that lives and keeps on living through children and families who are changed and who pass possibilities on to others.

Epworth is funded through three primary sources. One source of funds is through partial reimbursements from the Department of Social Services for children the Department places here. Another source of funds is donations by individuals, church organizations, businesses

and others. The third major source of funding is derived from the income that is earned from Epworth's endowment.

Through the 118 years of Epworth's existence, forward thinking individuals have remembered the children in their will. The majority of these gifts have been relatively modest, but together these legacy gifts make the difference between minimally adequate care and superior care. These estate gifts also mean we don't have to turn children away because of insufficient funding to take care of these children.

None of us will be here forever, yet surveys reveal a large percentage of us do not have a will and have not made plans for what will happen to our assets when our time here is finished. Most of us do not want to think about it, and/or we may think, "Why bother, there won't be much left anyway."

Financial advisors tell us that we should all have a will (I procrastinated until I was 50). In your will I encourage you to: provide for your children and or other family members first. Second, make a provision for God's work through your church or other faith group. Third, remember the children of Epworth and help change a life.

Estate gifts, unless otherwise directed, are placed in the Epworth endowment which means these gifts support our children for generations.

Thank you for your faithfulness and Merry Christmas.

decade ago. At two years old she was the victim of heartbreaking abuse. The South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) got involved and quickly removed her from the abusive environment. The courts later terminated her mother's parental rights. Family reunification was not a safe option for Hillary.

Hillary's entire childhood has been spent in the foster care system. By age 10, she had been bounced from placement to placement, sometimes multiple times a year. After two consecutive years, Epworth has been the most stable placement for her. While it is not the traditional home of her dreams, she does feel safe and secure here.

The cottage staff got to know Hillary and her appreciation for the small things in life. She was a bright young girl who excelled in school, but she was very reserved. She often sat alone in her room and just wrote in her journal.

As the days passed she began to open up. She learned to trust the staff and eventually, Hillary began to thrive at Epworth. She stopped sitting alone in her room and started playing games and telling jokes with her cottage mates. She built strong relationships with her counselor as well as her volunteer mentor. While every day was not perfect for her, she learned to trust and to live immersed in love and care.

As she thrived at Epworth, the staff was busy working to help prepare her for whatever her next step might be. Epworth has no control in a child's next transition, but works faithfully to prepare each child for what will come. There was an attempt at adoption but it fell through and she was devastated. For a girl who so badly wanted a caring mother, the pain of an adoption falling apart at the last minute was hard to bear. The sweet, reserved Hillary reacted to her disappointment by acting out and she spiraled into depression and defiance.

The entire Epworth staff rallied behind her to help her grieve. Ms. Lisa, her counselor, began to work with her even more. Her case manager would stop to buy her a soda and snack on their way to appointments and made extra time for one-on-one conversations.

Through the loving guidance of the counseling and cottage staff, Hillary began to recover from her disappointment. They worked with her to a point where Hillary could viably be considered for adoption again. She was now 12 years old and on the cusp of being a teenager. The odds of a teenager being adopted were low but it seemed like the best next step for her care. The staff at Epworth worked with the adoption agency and the slow process began again. Weeks passed with no updates.

Still with no news weeks away from Christmas, Hillary's outburst about her wish list was evidence that hopelessness was creeping in. What Hillary

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*"A Mom! A family! That's all I want."*

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and the staff did not know was that a plan was in place to make Hillary's Christmas wish come true.

In a small New England town, a thousand miles away, Alice\* was thumbing through a stack of files on her coffee table and opened one. It was Hillary's, and she was immediately drawn to her story. Alice is a very successful therapist who grew up and made her home in a quiet small, picturesque town. Her mother and family lived nearby, but Alice wanted a family of her own. She wanted to be a mom and had been working with an adoption agency to see if she could make her dreams—and Hillary's—come true.

Alice selected Hillary and the adoption agency began the process of adoption. Only a few days had passed after making the wish list when Hillary's adoption worker called the cottage staff and told them the





good news. They also asked the staff not to share it with Hillary until things progressed a little more. It was perhaps the hardest secret they have ever kept, but they kept it and waited for the next phone call. One day after school, Hillary came home and there was her adoption worker sitting on the couch in her cottage. They called her into the cottage office and told her the news. Hillary was speechless.

They handed her a scrapbook, and she slowly opened the cover. There was a picture of Alice, standing on the steps of her home, and under it was the word “Mom” written in Alice’s own handwriting. She flipped the page again, still in disbelief, and saw a picture of Alice’s mother labeled, “Grandma.” Page after page were pictures of uncles, aunts, pets and houses.

In her hands, Hillary could see her wish for a new life. She was finally going to experience life outside of the foster care system. She was going to have a nice house, a family and a mother who loves her. Hillary could not put into words every thought that was racing through her mind. As the meeting ended, she took the book to her room and started flipping through the pages over and over. It became her routine; day after day she flipped through the pages. Eventually she was able to send some emails back and forth with Alice, and the two began to develop an obvious chemistry.

A few weeks later, Ms. Janelle called Hillary into her office and told her that the approval for a site visit had come through. It was time to get ready for a weekend visit to meet Alice. Hillary quietly responded, “I think I’m going to need a bigger coat.” So the Epworth staff took her shopping for a warm winter coat for her first trip to the northeast.

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## *Hillary was speechless.*

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When she got to the small town she started to recognize things from her book. Alice’s office, her “grandmother’s” picket fence yard, and then as the car stopped, she saw the steps leading up to Alice’s house.

The visit went great and they were one step closer to their goal of finalizing the adoption. Hillary returned to Epworth for Thanksgiving. She and Alice started to write more and more. The adoption needed to cross a few more milestones before it could be official at the beginning of the



new year, but a visit was approved for Hillary to come back to New England for a longer visit—for Christmas.

While it is not finalized yet, everything is looking like Hillary’s wish for a mom and a new home will be coming true this year. Hillary has had a difficult and disappointing childhood, but her time at Epworth, surrounded by loving, trained staff who walked with her through all the disappointment, prepared her to be the confident and trusting child that she is today. We rejoice and celebrate that Hillary is ready for her next transition and will indeed wake up Christmas morning to breakfast and presents with Alice - her Christmas wish come true.

## *Bitter to Better: Breaking the Cycle of Neglect*

At just 14 years old, Tim\* had seen some of the worst humanity had to offer. The oldest of four boys, he grew up living in severe neglect. They lived in extremely rural conditions—no running water, no electricity. When he and his brothers were removed from the house, it was immediately condemned.

Six years ago, Tim and his brothers were placed into foster care and removed from the deplorable conditions and absolute neglect they had known all of their lives. When the four boys came to Epworth, they were far behind their peers developmentally. They had never been to school, never had health care, and had little understanding of the world. They did not understand love and care and responded to situations with fear and anger. As the oldest, and therefore the farthest behind, Tim had a long journey ahead of him.

Though his transition was very slow and a bumpy ride at times, Tim began to take advantage of the long-term stability of living at Epworth and started grabbing hold of the opportunities in front of him. The angry and scared boy began managing his emotions and trusting the staff around him. He started attending school for the first time and, in May 2012, he completed his high school studies.

That wasn't enough for Tim, and he chose to stay in Epworth's care to continue his connection to his support system and resources. After finishing high school, Epworth arranged for him to start with the local Job Corps program. He moved onto the Job Corps campus and transitioned into Epworth's Higher Education/Independent Living Program, coming back to Epworth for holidays and special weekends.

After 14 months, the formerly angry and fearful child who knew nothing but neglect graduated from Job Corps with a solid future in front of him. Tim earned his driver's license, fork-lift certification, and all of the qualifications needed for a career in distribution and warehousing. More importantly, he was no longer the bitter child of his past, but a sweet, kind, and respectful young man taking pride in his life and full responsibility for his future.



*Tim's transformation at Epworth has seen him complete high school and graduate from job training school. Now he is driving to interviews looking for his first full-time job.*

After graduating he started looking for jobs and putting together resumes with Mrs. Laurie Brandes, Director of Independent Living. To help him earn startup money and boost his work history, he got a temporary job helping the Epworth grounds crew with maintenance around campus.

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*...he was no longer the bitter child  
of his past, but a sweet, kind, and  
respectful young man...*

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Mrs. Brandes saw the tremendous strides Tim was making and recently went to him with another opportunity. Through one of Epworth's relationships with a local program, Tim received a newly refreshed used car to help him get to and from work.

"Epworth gave him a chance and he is taking full advantage to work up to his potential," said Mrs. Brandes. Today, Tim is still taking steps toward getting his first full-time job and transitioning into adulthood. Every week he is gaining confidence and motivation to do whatever it takes. As a young man and soon to be an Epworth alumnus, Tim's future is bright!

# Happenings

## Epworth Named a Top American Charity

Charity Navigator, America's premier charity evaluator, awarded its top tier, 4-star rating to Epworth Children's Home. The 4-star rating is given to leading non-profits across the country and recognizes Epworth for its sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency.

"We are proud to announce Epworth Children's Home has earned a 4-star rating," said Ken Berger, President and CEO of Charity Navigator. "Approximately a quarter of the charities we evaluate have received our highest rating, indicating that Epworth Children's Home outperforms most other charities in America. This 'exceptional' designation from Charity Navigator differentiates Epworth Children's Home from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust."



Founded in 2001, Charity Navigator has become the nation's largest and most-utilized independent evaluator of charities. The organization examines tens of thousands of non-profit financial documents to assess thousands of America's charities. Ratings are available free to the public via the company's website to foster informed charitable giving.

"The Epworth family is honored to be recognized by Charity Navigator for our stewardship and commitment to our mission," said the Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth Children's Home. "This award is a reflection of the incredible care we give here. We are focused squarely on helping the children break the cycle of abuse, neglect and shame and replace it with opportunities for children to live lives of self-respect, productivity and responsibility. The four star rating, which is the highest rating given, also confirms that Epworth uses its financial resources in a financially responsible manner and utilizes best practices to insure that Epworth continues to execute its mission in a highly efficient manner."

## Midlands Family Care Center Update



In the last issue of The Record, you learned about the new Midlands Family Care Center which opened on the Epworth campus to help mothers and their young children who are facing issues of neglect due to addiction. The MFCC is officially open and the first moms moved into the facility with their children. The moms are receiving daily therapy for their addictions and the children benefit from the Epworth care system. When mom and her children are together, MFCC staff are on hand to help coach and encourage healthy parental involvement.



# at Epworth

## 2014 Friends Gala:

### A Night at the Silver Screen

The Friends of Epworth will host their annual gala on Friday, February 14, 2014, from 8:00PM-midnight at Leaside in Columbia. Enjoy a night with your Valentine or your friend that includes food, live music, and inspiring words from a special guest and Epworth alumnus, the Rev. Ken Nelson. All proceeds benefit Epworth Children's Home. Tickets are \$100/single, \$150/couple, and are now available at [www.friendsofepworth.org](http://www.friendsofepworth.org).



## A Look Ahead: Save the Date!

### Annual Epworth Alumni Association BBQ

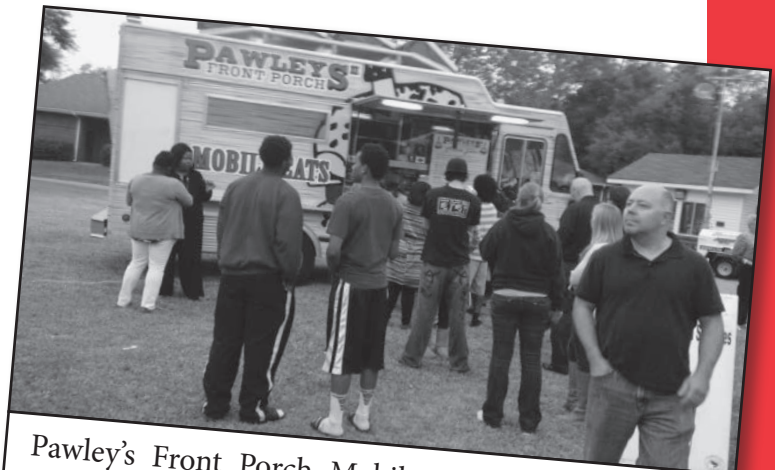
The Alumni Association has some new twists planned for this year's event. Look for more details in the next issue of *The Record* and on facebook. We are looking to secure competition cook teams for this year. Contact Diane Byrdic at [dbyrdic@sccul.org](mailto:dbyrdic@sccul.org) or 803-743-3944 for more information.

### Moe's Burrito Dash: Saturday, April 19, 2014

Join us in Columbia for Moe's annual Burrito Dash 5k—where contestants eat a burrito at the half-way mark! Proceeds from the fundraiser go directly to Epworth Children's Home. A fun family event to run or walk (eating the burrito is optional)!

### Mother's Day Appeal: Sunday, May 11, 2014

One of Epworth's longest traditions honors mothers everywhere with a gift to Epworth Children's Home. We will begin sending out the Mother's Day Appeal information in March. If your church, social group, or business has not participated before and would like to be a new partner in this program, please contact Andrew Boozer, Vice President for Development, at (803) 256-7394 or [aboozer@epworthsc.org](mailto:aboozer@epworthsc.org).



Pawley's Front Porch Mobile Eats and four other Columbia area food trucks held a Food Truck Rodeo on the Epworth campus on November 6. Every child at Epworth was given a free meal from the truck of their choice, and the community was invited to participate in the fun!



**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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**Make corrections on the label and mail it back to us.**

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  - ☐ I receive more than one copy
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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.

## *A Look Back to 2012:*

### *Santa Received the "Change of Address Form" Just in Time!*

Just two days before Christmas last year, the paperwork was finalized on a parent reunification for five brothers who had been at Epworth for a few months. Mrs. Keller, "Santa's Daughter," who coordinates Santa's Workshop at Epworth, heard the news of the discharge and quickly pulled out a change of address form for Santa's Christmas morning delivery. "What Epworth's staff did for those five boys last year is the essence of Epworth's ministry," Mrs. Keller said. "We knew that in the past, the boys had heard things like, 'Santa didn't get our new address this year.' We knew we had to do something. I'm proud to say that we made sure Santa got their change of address last year, and each one of the boys got to unwrap the wishes we helped them write to Santa just a few weeks earlier."

