

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Redefining a Voice

“Alex,* why is this living room such a mess?” her mother screamed down the hallway.

“I didn’t do it. Stop blaming me for everything!” Alex’s voice cracked as she screamed and threw her book across the room. Alex’s mom tried to reach for her daughter but she could not extend her arm. An argument with her boyfriend the previous night left her arm with bruises and pain. It was the same violent argument that had left the living room in a mess. Whether it was because of her substance abuse or from blocking the incident from her

memory, Alex’s mom could not recall the real reason for the mess. All she knew was that her apartment was a wreck, and her 8 year old daughter caught the blame.

This was not the first time Alex and her mother had argued. But it would be their last. The screaming from the apartment the night before was enough for neighbors to notice the unsafe living conditions for Alex. They called the Department of Social Services, and after an investigation, Alex was removed from her mother’s care. Her social worker carefully loaded her into a car and drove her to Epworth.

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'Tis the Season

Winter 2014

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

Mr. Tom Parker had the buses in place by 5:30pm on Wednesday afternoon. He checked to make sure everyone was on board and to see that the drivers had directions and parking instructions. Then off we went to the Frank McGuire room in the Colonial Life Arena at USC.

The approximately 40 teenagers, who live in the cottages that house our oldest residents, rode mostly in silence to the 23rd annual Christmas party that the American Legion Post #6 hosts for the older children at Epworth. The buses stopped in front of the arena and the teenagers disembarked. Mr. Parker reminded our children to stow their headphones, cell phones, and other electronics, and gave the signal to enter the building.

We were greeted warmly by the smiling faces of Sheriff Leon Lott and many of the officers from the Richland County Sheriff's department, and by members of Post #6. Sheriff Lott welcomed the children, and then turned the microphone over to the announcer and DJ for the evening, Curtis Wilson.

The Epworth residents talked quietly among themselves and looked at the furnishings in the Frank McGuire room, and at the basketball court through the huge pictured windows in the McGuire room. Mostly they were trying to get comfortable in the new surroundings.

Then, in walked George Rogers with his big smile and his Heisman Trophy. Next came Coach Dawn Staley with her high energy and with some of the players on the USC Women's Basketball team. Next, players from the USC Men's Basketball team entered the room. Mr. Wilson introduced each celebrity with fan fare and then, as tradition dictated, Bernie's fried chicken was served.

After the banana pudding desert was consumed, the music was cranked up; posters were distributed and autographed for the teenagers. During this time Sheriff Lott and his deputies were engaging the Epworth residents in conversations and answering questions. Several of our girls developed instant crushes on some of the officers!

Katie Cox, who works for Coca-Cola, and helped organize this year's event "drafted" the USC men's basketball team players to start a line dance. There was mild resistance, and some confusion about how to get in step from the guys, but pretty quickly she had them dancing. Coach Staley, deputies, teenagers, and other adults jumped in and revved it up. It was high energy and great fun.

The evening ended with gifts for each child, "thank you's," smiles, and hugs. And then, a short ride back to the Epworth campus completed the evening's activities. It was a school night, after all, so normal bed time and lights out was the order for the day.

Sheriff Lott said it best when he greeted our teenagers at the beginning of the festivities, "This night was planned for you to enjoy, and because we love you, so have a good time," and everyone did just that.

This and so many other events that are held with and for our children remind me of how very fortunate we are to be part of a wider community of people who care and invest time, energy, and financial resources so the children here know that they are miraculous gifts from God.

My thanks to all of you for providing a place where children experience extensions of God's love through caring people in such a variety of ways.

Alex arrived at Epworth on that Thursday afternoon just over a year ago. Alex did not have the visible marks of physical harm, but the emotional scars of her early childhood were visible to the Epworth staff right away. Alex had a quick temper. If she sensed someone was accusing her of doing something wrong, she would quickly raise her voice and react. The Epworth staff had seen these signs before. Children raised in abusive households often learn non-productive ways to process anger. They frequently do not develop healthy social interactions and responses. Instead, children like Alex mirror the behavior they have seen all of their lives by reacting with outbursts and rage.

Alex's behavior was a barrier for her as the staff worked to help her settle in at Epworth. She did well in her schoolwork but her inability to control her behavior and have healthy social interactions with classmates prohibited her from excelling at school. Even though she was a good student she was struggling to succeed because if a classmate even looked at her the wrong way she yelled and overreacted. Her behavior at school spilled over into the cottage at Epworth.

One day in the spring, Alex came home to her cottage clearly upset. The staff did not know exactly what was wrong, but they could see that she was fuming. Ms. Wolfe, her case manager, stepped in to intervene. She walked into the living room where Alex was sitting and asked, "Alex, would you like to tell me what happened today?" Alex did not respond. Ms. Wolfe continued to talk to her but it was as if she were talking to a brick wall. Alex shut down, and did not even acknowledge Ms. Wolfe was in the room.

Finally Alex shouted, "Leave me alone!" and shot off of the couch to her feet. She was furious. She ran across the room, bear-hugged the 37 inch screen television, picked it up and slammed it to the ground. This was no small

feat. The television was large and heavy, the kind that usually takes two adults to move. After shattering the television she sprinted out of the door and ran across the cottage lawn. She ran to the curb, grabbed a full garbage container and kicked it over. Bags of trash flew everywhere.



Alex's outbursts were a problem and everyone around her knew it. Ms. Wolfe arranged for her to receive extra counseling sessions with her counselor on campus. Together, they worked to teach Alex how to process the causes of her outbursts and learn coping skills to help her manage her anger. The extra professional help was a great start, but it was only one piece of the care plan Epworth developed for her.

Ms. Wolfe and the cottage staff forged stronger relationships with Alex as they slowly earned her trust by being consistently positive and calm voices in her life. They learned the triggers and warning signs of Alex's anger. When they saw her starting to fume they removed her from the situation and went on walks with her around campus. This helped prevent her from losing control and also provided valuable one-on-one time to strengthen their relationships. On occasions where her anger overcame her, and she lost control, Ms. Wolfe would sit with Alex to help process what went wrong. She would teach Alex ways she could remove herself from the situation and calm her emotions next time a similar situation arose.

The Epworth staff also identified a mentor to give Alex a trustworthy adult who she could talk with. Like most children at Epworth, Alex valued her mentor. Having an adult to talk with who is not your teacher, guardian or someone else in a position of authority provides an independent and caring relationship in a child's life. Alex and her mentor met frequently for walks around campus or fun trips for ice

Investing in Care!

cream off campus. Alex always returned to the cottage with a new attitude and refreshed look after her mentor's visits.



The staff also made sure that Alex built friendships with the other girls at Epworth. She grew close to some of the girls in another cottage and when Alex's behavior was more stable, the staff let her go on sleepovers with her friends in the other cottage.

Alex's improved behavior and support system then great growth opportunities for her. The cottage staff always noticed her artistic talents—from sketching beautiful pictures to writing poetry and song lyrics. When the school year began, they encouraged Alex to use her voice in a productive way by joining the school choir. She loved it. Every week after school she stayed for choir practice. The choir gave her a great outlet to express herself and gain confidence.

Her love of choir and singing at school soon trickled back to the Epworth campus when she signed up to sing in the Epworth choir at church. Singing in the Epworth choir meant another afternoon of practices and more activities to keep her focused and productive. As she opened up in church through the choir

she also opened up at Good News Club, the children's Wednesday night Bible study group at Epworth. Despite her busy schedule, Alex continued to do great in school and this year she is taking all advanced-placement courses.

All of Alex's activities have created a busy schedule for her this Christmas. Whereas last year she was responding to her painful life experiences with anger and destructive behavior, this Christmas Alex is playing the role of the angel Gabrielle in the Epworth Children's Christmas Pageant. A few days after the pageant, she will be singing in a concert at school with her choir. A week later, just before Christmas, she will be singing in the Christmas concert with the Epworth choir. Christmas with her cottagemates and all of the Epworth campus and the celebration of her 10th birthday the day after Christmas will round out her events this year. These moments will create lifelong memories for Alex; memories of activities and celebrations that seemed impossible just over a year ago.

Alex's placement at Epworth has been a roller coaster ride of emotions. The consistent care provided by Epworth staff, devoted time with her counselor and mentor, valued friendships with other girls and increased activities that utilize her gifts have helped her develop more healthy outlets for processing her life experiences. Her destructive and volatile mood swings continue to decrease in frequency and severity.

This Christmas as Alex sings in the choir in front of the altar at Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church, her voice will certainly be heard by all. However it will not be screaming in a fit of anger and rage. It will joyfully lift up the message of peace and love that this Christmas season promises to all—especially to children like Alex.



What makes Christmas, Christmas?

Before coming to Epworth Children's Home, most of the children missed out on the typical Christmas traditions of family dinners, decorating trees, gift-giving, Santa Claus and the feelings of anticipation and excitement on Christmas Eve. They also missed out on hearing about the manger, cattle, angels and shepherds. They never heard the story of peace and joy brought to us through our Savior's birth.

While many of Epworth's generous staff, donors and volunteers, help provide gifts and host special events, they also strive to make sure the children hear and celebrate the meaning of Christmas. "Some of the children at Epworth have never heard the Christmas story before. They only know about Santa and reindeer," said the Rev. Meg Cook, Epworth's campus pastor. "When children are here, we want to make sure they not only hear the Christmas story, but that they have the opportunity to learn and understand the Good News of our Savior's birth in their own lives."

Beginning with Advent, Pastor Meg leads a sermon series on the Advent wreath to introduce it to children and teach them its meaning. She uses the children's sermon time to introduce some of Jesus' family members. In Sunday School, the children use special Christmas curricula, with themes like "UnFrozen" (an adaption from the popular Disney movie). Additionally, each of the 10 cottages on campus receives a hand-made Advent calendar that reveals a new scripture each day leading up to Christmas.

In addition to learning about Advent and the story of Christ's birth, there are special events on campus. On the first Sunday in December, the campus gathered at Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church and the youngest children presented the annual Christmas play. Local volunteers organize and direct the annual program. On this evening the church is always filled with the older children, staff members, mentors and cottage partners, as well as some family members of the children.

On the Saturday before Christmas, the Epworth choir and a few other local choirs will present a Christmas Extravaganza, a rich and joyous Christmas choral performance. The Epworth choir, under the direction of Ms. Destiny Moore, a Life Skills Specialist in Epworth's Dantzler cottage, provides a creative and meaningful outlet for the children at Epworth.

Like churches around the globe, Epworth's Christmas celebration will climax on the evening of Christmas Eve. At 5:00PM worship for the younger children will tell the Christmas story, sing Christmas carols and be reminded that Christmas morning is a celebration of Jesus' birthday. Then at 11:00PM, a more traditional service for the older children will include scripture readings, guitar and candles before ending at midnight to usher in Christmas morning.

"We know that special gift giving and magical stories and characters like Santa Claus are part of what makes Christmas special for children everywhere, including here at Epworth," said Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth. "And while we make sure every child at Epworth has a memorable Christmas morning, the task we take most seriously is that every child hears and has the opportunity to understand the true meaning of Christmas—the birth of Jesus Christ."



*You are Invited to the
Friends of Epworth Gala*

The Friends of Epworth invite you to the 3rd Annual Friends of Epworth Gala to benefit Epworth Children's Home on Friday, February 27th, 2015 at Stone River in West Columbia. As the signature event for the Friends of Epworth, the event raises awareness of and funds for Epworth and the children who call Epworth home. Every year the gala has grown in attendance and we expect the 2015 gala to be the biggest and liveliest yet! Attendees come ready for an up-scale good time. The

black-tie optional event includes live music and a large dance floor.

Join the Friends of Epworth for a night of fun as we celebrate the promise of bright futures for children at Epworth. Tickets are \$150 for couples or \$100 for individuals. Purchase your ticket today at www.friendsofepworth.org.



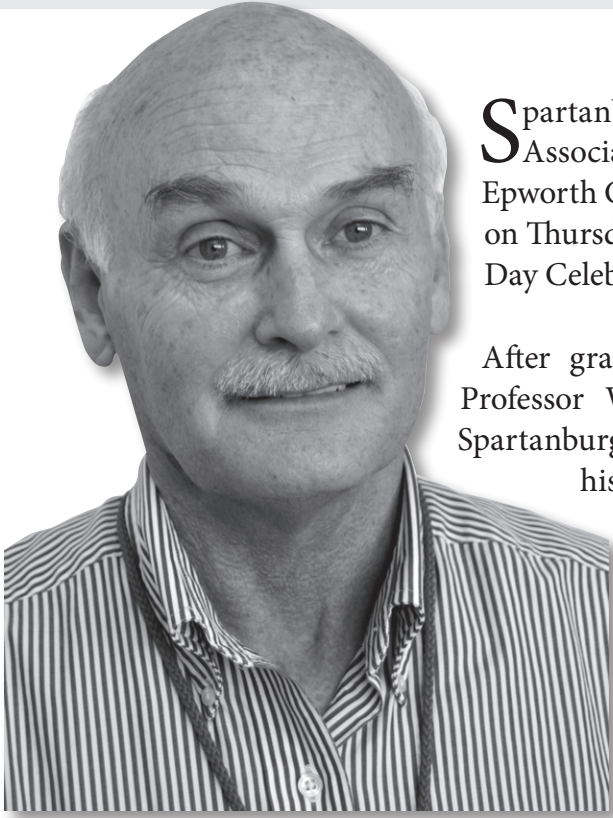
THE FUTURE IS
Bright

3RD ANNUAL FRIENDS OF EPWORTH GALA

February 27, 2015, 8 p.m. - Midnight
Stone River, West Columbia



Epworth Alumnus, Barry Ward, Receives Distinguished Award



Spartanburg Methodist College Student Government Association presented Professor Barry Ward, an alumnus of Epworth Children's Home, with a Founder's Day Faculty Award on Thursday, October 23, during the college's annual Founder's Day Celebration.

After graduating from Dreher High School and Epworth, Professor Ward graduated with an Associate Degree from Spartanburg Methodist College (SMC) in 1979, then completed his bachelors at the University of South Carolina, and masters from Gardner-Webb University, with additional studies at Lander University and Winthrop University.

Ward returned to SMC as an employee in March of 1987 and over the years has held positions from Security Guard to Professor of Health & PE. He has long believed in the merits of the extended-learning-classroom concept. He teaches by day, and

in the evening shares his time and talents coaching intramural sports. Each January he chaperones a ski excursion for students.

Ward once shared that he was blessed to call Epworth home. "I was fortunate to be able to draw upon my experiences at Epworth and build upon that foundation to motivate me academically and professionally. Without Epworth and SMC, I probably wouldn't be as confident, prepared and excited about life as I am," said the 60 year-old, who is known to cartwheel and do back-flips spontaneously down the halls of the Walker Building where he teaches.

Ward was also selected by his peers at SMC as the recipient of the 2010-2011 SCICU Excellence in Teaching Award and used the award stipend to expand his knowledge of health issues and shared that new knowledge with his students. A quote from his nominating materials reads "He creates an atmosphere where students learn life-saving and life-long lessons. Kindness is all he has ever known and he passes it on daily...with jokes, fist pumps, poetry and a perpetually perky persona."

Ward stays actively involved with Epworth. He "keeps an eye" on the higher education students from Epworth who are currently attending SMC. Also, he returns to Epworth every year for the alumni weekend and the Cook-Out for Kids BBQ Fundraiser to give back to the place he called home as a child. Ward is truly a friend of Epworth, a distinguished alumnus and wonderful role model for the children who call Epworth home today.



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.

A Look Back to 2013: The Season of Giving

Two of Epworth's older residents, Jayde and Chaundra,* walked into Mrs. Deborah Keller's office afterschool one day in December last year. "We have been saving up from our part-time jobs and we want to do something special this year," the girls said. "Can we buy some presents for the little girls this year?"

It warmed Mrs. Keller's heart. Here were two young ladies who were clearly learning the meaning of Christmas and living it out in generosity. She quickly looked on her campus wish list and gave Jayde and Chaundra two gifts they could purchase for two elementary-age girls. Jayde and Chaundra went shopping, and brought the gifts back to be wrapped. The gifts were placed under the cottage tree on Christmas morning with all the other gifts from Santa.

