

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## Leena's Big Day

Leena came to Epworth last fall after her mother was sentenced to prison. While the four-year old was home, a violent domestic dispute between her parents erupted and the authorities arrested her mother during the incident. When the Department of Social Services investigated the living situation, DSS determined that the home was a dangerous situation for a young girl to be in. Leena experienced physical and verbal abuse and various forms of neglect in her young life. Because Leena's mother was in prison, and because there was no safe alternative, Leena was placed at Epworth.

When she arrived in Asbury cottage, it was evident that she had been traumatized by the recent events in her life. She sobbed uncontrollably for hours at a time. She was withdrawn, and afraid to embrace the people around her. Her world was broken. Sadness and fear had taken over her life.

Ms. Jamie and Ms. Linda, her cottage staff, consoled her and spent many hours with her to help ease the shock of being separated from her parents and the only home she had ever known. In the earliest days that followed her arrival, Leena became very dependent on the

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# Miles to Go

## Fall 2014

A Message from The Rev. John Holler  
President

Children come to Epworth Children's Home from every county of our state. They come with white faces, black faces, and brown faces. They come with blond hair, brown hair, black hair, red hair, and occasionally with purple or pink hair. Our children are short, tall, or somewhere in between. They range from cute and cuddly to a bit scary looking. They all have one thing in common. They have, for a period of time, lost the family that they have known, and they live in and with the pain that springs from that.

No matter how hard we try to make Epworth a wonderful place to live, children who reside here, never the less, live with shame, fear, hopelessness, brokenness, and helplessness and often exhibit behaviors that are forged in the furnace of deep and enduring pain.

The longer that I am here the more obvious two truths become. The first truth is how much more the children of our state who come from places of abuse, neglect, abandonment, addictions, and/or mental illness need in order to get (emotionally, developmentally, and behaviorally) to the place where most other children start.

The second truth is that, we as a state do not have the political will to make the substantive changes needed to change the systems of care enough to make a fundamental difference. We may say we care about vulnerable children, but our resource commitments and our child care statistics tell a different story.

It comes as no surprise that South Carolina is among the worst in the nation and is losing ground in almost every category that tracks the resources we commit and the outcomes we achieve, in regards to vulnerable children.

Every few years, there is enough negative publicity as is the case at the time this article is being written,

that the chairs on the deck of the Titanic of our system of care are rearranged. A few additional workers are hired, people are trained in the latest technologies, a new structure is implemented, new faces appear on the scene; we restructure enough to get more federal Medicaid money, yet the ship sails on as though the basic design is solid. Elected officials and state agency heads pat each other on the back, smile and go home.

My hope for South Carolina is:

1. We summon the courage to say our system truly is fundamentally flawed.
2. We commit the resources in order to reconstruct it so it produces long term results.
3. We move to institute long term solutions that interrupt the generational cycles of abuse, neglect, poverty, helplessness, and hopelessness and replace those destructive realities with a system of care that leads to fundamental and lasting change.

The odd thing is, in the long term, it is more economical to do it right in the first place, and it eliminates so much of the pain the children or our state find themselves in day after day, year after year, generation after generation.

The children who need our help are all around us; yet we appear to be content to be a state that says, "Well that is the way it is here." We can do better than that. Let us show through our common voice that we are people who care about our most vulnerable citizens.

adults in her cottage. She used them to build a shell of safety around herself. The other little girls in the cottage would try to play with her and include her in activities, but Leena resisted their efforts.

After a period of getting to know her and assessing her needs, a care plan was developed to assist her staff in working toward common goals for Leena. She was enrolled in preschool to help establish a routine, build independence, and ease the sadness in her life. At four she was too young for kindergarten, but fortunately the preschool at the Epworth Early Intervention Center (EEIC) had an opening. The EEIC is a program designed to serve children with developmental delays. The EEIC also serves typically developing children. Non-typically developing children are matched with typically developing children who model and encourage new skills. Leena did not have signs of delays, in fact she was quite advanced for her age, so she served as a model and peer. The school meets in the classroom building at the church on the Epworth campus. This enabled Leena to go to preschool without the added stress of leaving the campus.

Her teacher, Ms. Sandy, still remembers when Leena came to the preschool the first day. The preschoolers start every morning by sitting in a circle. They sing and begin their lesson for the day. Leena cried during the ritual. Ms. Sandy tried to comfort her, but Leena continued to cry as the morning went along.

The next day there were fewer tears. By the end of the week during opening circle, Leena spoke for the first time. The lesson of the day was “Where We Live” and the children were asked to tell others where they lived. One by one, the children replied with their city and some even recited their street address. When it was Leena’s turn she sat up and said, “My name is Leena and I live in the *college* at Epworth.” Ms. Sandy smiled at the first words Leena shared

with the class, and then politely corrected her, “That’s right Leena, you live in the *cottage* here at Epworth!”

After that moment, Leena started to open up a little with Ms. Sandy. As she grew more comfortable with her surroundings, she not only became active in her lessons, but she started helping Ms. Sandy work with the other children. Some of the children in the school use wheelchairs and have limited mobility. When one of them would drop a toy and was unable to reach it, Leena would be the first to pick it up and give it back. If a child cried she comforted him or her by singing. “She had such amazing empathy for other children and such a sweet spirit,” Ms. Sandy recalled.

Her role as “Ms. Sandy’s helper” gave her confidence in herself, and she began to build friendships with others. She became close friends with two of the other children in the class. They played together, and slowly smiles and





# Investing in Care!

giggles replaced Leena's tearful demeanor.

Her growth in the preschool classroom immediately transferred back to the cottage. Ms. Linda and Ms. Jamie saw the weepy and clingy Leena transform into a different child. They were amazed at the changes they saw in Leena.

She emerged from her shell and became active in the cottage. She taught her favorite songs from preschool to the other girls in the cottage, and told them about what she learned every morning. She brought back schoolwork, and the staff and other girls helped her practice her alphabet, writing, and numbers. She wanted to read books constantly. One day Ms. Jamie sat down to read her a story out of her Bible. Ms. Jamie read it aloud to her and Leena clung to every word. When they had finished, Leena took the book and recited the story back to Ms. Jamie, page by page.

As Leena became comfortable at Epworth, she became a social butterfly around campus. She played dress up with the other girls, and even gained the reputation as the best hair stylist on campus. The staff pulled out feather boas, tiaras and princess dresses for the children to strut around in as they played in the cottage. Leena told jokes along the way, keeping the mood light and fun as they played.

The close relationships she built with new friends in the cottage and at preschool gave Leena the confidence to become more independent and adventurous. Once reluctant to do anything outside of her comfort zone, she now loved to try new things and developed a little motto which she repeats to anyone who will listen, "Don't cry until you try!" She really blossomed into a healthy and happy little girl.

By the end of July, the preschool year was ending and it was time for Leena to graduate

and go to kindergarten. The graduation ceremony was held at Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church on campus. When she woke up that morning she could not wait to get there. Ms. Jamie helped her put on a new dress and fixed her hair. They walked to the church with excitement. She joined her classmates from the preschool where Ms. Sandy was waiting on her with a graduation cap and gown. She put on her gown but when her teacher went to place the cap on her head, Leena jumped and said, "Ms. Sandy don't mess up my hair!" Ms. Sandy assured her that she would be careful and her hair would look great for the ceremony.

Meanwhile, the rest of the girls and staff in Asbury cottage made their way into the sanctuary. As they filed into a pew, one of Leena's best friends leaned over to Ms. Jamie and asked, "Why are we here?"

"This is Leena's preschool graduation. This is her big day," Ms. Jamie replied.

Still bewildered the girl responded, "What is a graduation?"

The question stopped Ms. Jamie in her tracks. By this time the entire cottage was tuned in to Ms. Jamie's response. "A graduation is a celebration for completing your school work and moving on to something new. Leena is graduating from preschool and is going to go to kindergarten." She went on to explain to the girls that graduations happen at many different levels and that when they complete school they too would have their own graduations one day. Just as Ms. Jamie finished her impromptu life skills lesson about graduation, the preschool students came into the church in front of their proud teachers, family and friends to start the ceremony. The EEIC preschool has a long tradition of actively involving family members in the graduation ceremony. When it came time to hand-out diplomas, the teachers

invited the family members to come forward to hand the child the diploma. One by one moms, dads and siblings came to the front of the room as their child walked across the front of the church to receive the diploma. Then came Leena's turn.

Ms. Sandy stood up and said, "Would the family of Leena please come forward." The entire pew of her cottage mates and staff stood up. Leena's face lit up with a huge smile as they walked forward.

Some of the parents and friends at the graduation never knew that Leena lived at Epworth, but now her family—all seven other little girls and her staff—stood right there in front of everyone. Ms. Sandy called Leena's name and she walked to her family to receive her diploma. Everyone's eyes were filled with tears of joy and hope.

It was indeed Leena's big day. She left the ceremony and returned to the cottage to have a full graduation party to celebrate. The cottage bought her graduation presents—new outfits for kindergarten. And just a few weeks ago, Leena wore one of those new outfits to her first day of kindergarten.

In just the one year, Leena saw her mother arrested and jailed. She was removed from an unsafe home, and placed into care in an unfamiliar place. The events she experienced could have derailed her childhood and beyond, but the transformational care she received at Epworth prevented her from spiraling into a cycle of despair. As Leena begins kindergarten her future

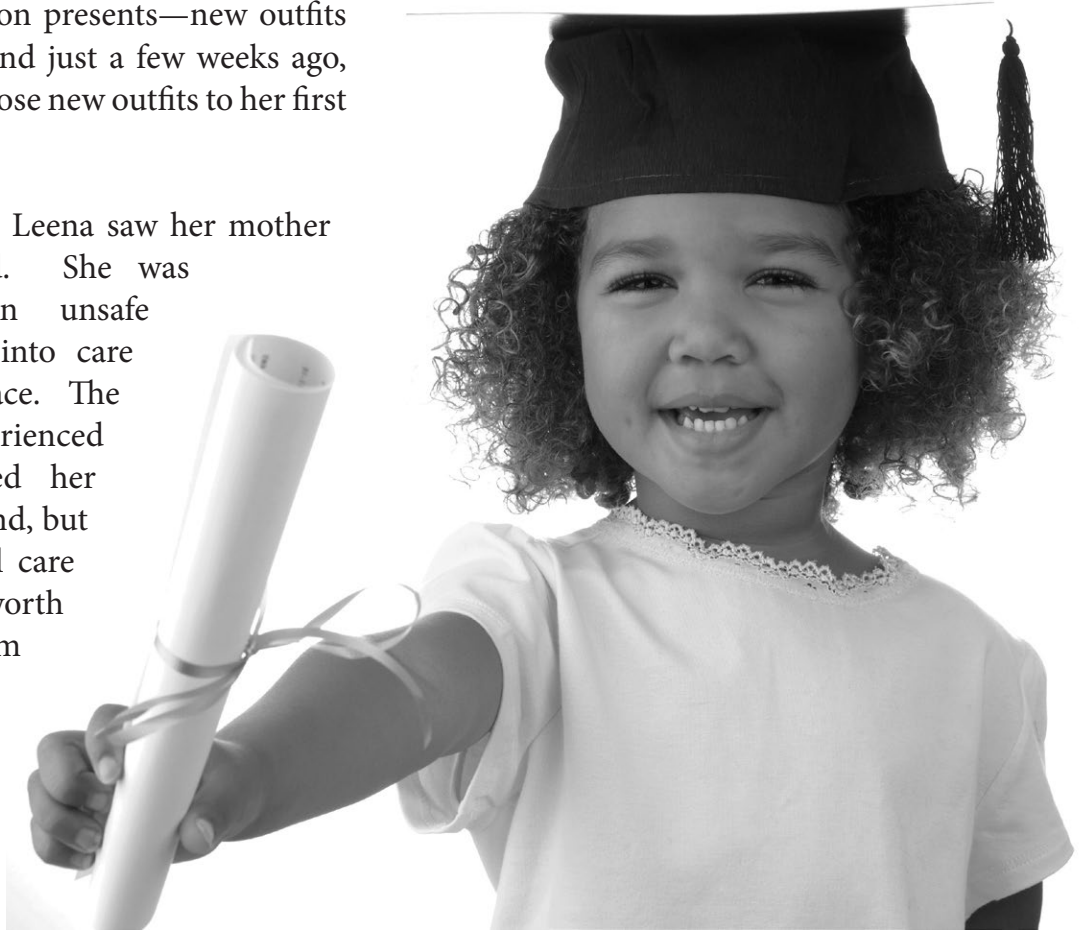
is bright and joy has become part of her childhood.

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### ***What's next for Leena?***

*Leena is doing great at kindergarten and loves being in the cottage. During the last year her mother has been released from prison and is currently working to put her life back together. The hope is that Leena and her mom might one day be reunited but for now the two are enjoying supervised visits on the Epworth campus and phone calls whenever they can. As they work toward reunification, Epworth will provide family counseling to her and her mother so they can grow into a healthy family. There is currently no timeline for family reunification. The Department of Social Services will ultimately make that determination. But as long as Leena is at Epworth, she will receive the loving care that she needs to continue to bloom.*

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### *School is Back in Session!*



Epworth is committed to meeting each child's emotional, spiritual, physical and educational needs while he or she is in our care. Each fall Epworth enrolls approximately 100 children in schools from pre-K to college. The children need to have their schedules set. They need to meet their teachers. They also need school materials to start the year off with a solid foundation. Academic support extends beyond getting children back and forth to school. It means providing a comprehensive support system for educational success.

Most of Epworth's children are placed in the Richland One School District in Brennen Elementary, Hand Middle, and Dreher High schools. Epworth has a strong partnership with the schools that assist in creating a path for success. Within the first few days of class this year, a teacher saw Ms. Christy Mooneyhan, Vice President for Academics, in the hallway of the school. She talked to Ms. Mooneyhan about Michelle,\* a child from Epworth, who was struggling to pay attention in class. Ms. Mooneyhan arranged for Michelle's Epworth case manager and the teacher to develop a plan to help manage Michelle's behavior and encourage better study habits in school and in the cottage. Michelle's behavior and schoolwork are already showing signs of improvement.

In addition to helping establish classroom success, the Barnes Learning Center on the Epworth campus benefits each child. The "BLC" has a fully stocked library, computer lab, auditorium and individual classrooms where certified teachers provide tutoring sessions after school. Through the tutoring program children receive help with study skills, and have access to a study hall to assist with homework and other assignments. Normally, the children are at least two grade levels behind their peers when they are placed at Epworth. Through tutoring at the BLC and in the cottages, living in a stable environment and receiving high expectations messages, over 50% of residents make the honor roll each year.

Having a support system that enables children to succeed in school is an essential part of Epworth's program, but each new school year begins with a new challenge - to collect and distribute enough school supplies for each child at Epworth. Due to the generous support of donors, each child was given a new backpack to start this school year, along with all of the school supplies needed---from pencils and paper to calculators and water bottles. All the backpacks were taken to the altar of Epworth Memorial United Methodist Church on the Sunday before school began, and the campus pastor, the Rev. Meg Cook, blessed them.

Epworth values education and challenges the children to "Aim Higher" to achieve their goals. As they pursue excellence in the classroom, the children know that the community schools, the Epworth staff and especially the donors and churches that make it all possible, are standing with them.





## *A Life to Remember. A Legacy to Inspire.*

*Once a refugee living in the woods of Germany, Rosemarie never stopped thinking of others.*

Rosemarie was born on the island of Banzine, Germany in 1928, in a time and place that would soon unravel. Shortly after her birth, the German economy collapsed and the Nazi party began its rise to prominence in her homeland. By the time she was a teenager, her life was encompassed by the pains of World War II. She and her family were forced to flee their island home and hide in the forests of the mainland until reaching relative safety with distant family. At a very young age, she had seen the worst of humanity and witnessed and experienced the resulting suffering and despair.



After the war ended, Rosemarie began to work for the Americans in occupied Germany, and she met an American serviceman named Raymond. They were married in 1958 and in 1962, Rosemarie became an American citizen. They spent many of the following years traveling both Europe and the United States together before settling permanently in Columbia, South Carolina in 1978. She was a joyful homemaker who enjoyed needlework, history and the arts. She developed a keen passion for providing for the needs of others. Rosemarie recognized that she was very fortunate and blessed considering the turmoil she experienced as a child.

In large part, because of her own history, she was always very sensitive to the challenges faced by those less fortunate than she, and particularly in the plight of children in need. It became her utmost desire that she find meaningful ways to provide support to some of the many needy children in the state of South Carolina.

When Rosemarie died on May 27, 2014, her husband knew that it was up to him to see that her interests were honored and her legacy was fulfilled. Raymond contacted Epworth in order to establish an endowed fund in his wife's memory for the purpose of meeting the needs of children. Through careful planning, Epworth and Raymond created the Rosemarie Faucher Memorial Fund. The newly established fund will be used to advance the physical and/or emotional health of children at Epworth into perpetuity. The earnings from the invested funds will provide for the children at Epworth, ensuring that Rosemarie's passion to care for children in need will continue forever.

Rosemarie's remarkable life is an extraordinary and inspiring story. Interwoven in her life, from her childhood as a German refugee to her later years in Columbia, was a keen awareness for the needs of others and a passion to make a difference in their lives. Now, through the fund that bears her name, her story will continue to be told through the help given to vulnerable children.

*If you are interested in learning more about making a gift to the Epworth Endowment through current or planned gifts, please contact Andrew Boozer, Vice President for Development, at [abooser@epworthsc.org](mailto:abooser@epworthsc.org) or by calling 803-256-7394.*



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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.**

## *Follow-up: Epworth's Higher Education Program is Growing!*

**T**his fall, 11 Epworth young adults are attending six colleges across the state of South Carolina and one in North Carolina. These young adults spent part or most of their childhoods at Epworth. They successfully completed high school and are preparing for independence. Of the 11, five are freshman. Two of our students are expected to graduate this spring with Associate degrees.

The five freshman students earned a total of 18 outside scholarships. Three of those freshmen, including Jazmine and Curtdrieka, who were featured in the Summer 2014 newsletter, *The Record*, earned full scholarships for their first year in college!

Another student, an upperclassman at Spartanburg Methodist College, was selected to be a "Pioneer Peer." This prestigious honor is awarded to students who embody the ideals and mission of the college in behavior and spirit. In this role she helps lead freshman orientation and is assisting in a freshman seminar class.

Epworth's commitment to education and to breaking destructive life cycles is evident in the success of our higher education students.

