

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Life skills aren't always a natural way of life

Dads and sons – they create a combination as natural to life as learning to ride a bike. Many grown men and even young men attribute their knowledge and understanding of how to “fix things” to their dads. First bikes, first cars and first dates are all learning opportunities where dads impart their knowledge to their sons. At Epworth, those relationships aren't necessarily traditional, but they are just as important and life changing.

The first memory Jeremy has of riding a bike is at a very young age. “No training wheels,” he said. “I never had training wheels.” Jeremy's father taught him how to ride his bike. He had also started teaching him how to work on cars. On his 5th birthday, Jeremy's father was killed during a tragic accident. Jeremy was with him. “I have a lot of anger about that,”

Jeremy said. “When I get angry, that's when I just take off on my bike so fast.”

Jeremy's life after his father's death took another turn toward despair. His mother and his step father were addicts. They kept the children from school and abused them. Jeremy was able to secretly call the police and get himself and his brothers to safety. After bouncing around with some family members, Jeremy and his brothers were brought to Epworth Children's Home.

Now, five years later, Jeremy is rarely seen on or off campus without his bike. In every spare moment he is either riding it or working on it. Mr. Lee Porter, the Chief Program Officer at Epworth and avid bike rider himself, has spent many hours teaching Jeremy and the

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My Favorite Time

Summer 2012

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

Summer is my favorite season at Epworth. Our campus, while always lively, literally overflows with energy during the summer. Our children, because of your generosity, are able to engage in life to such a degree that is it difficult to describe.

The younger children go to camps, movies, the zoo, museums, water parks, swim, have ice cream parties, play in the campus park and the list goes on. Children who are a little older participate in these activities, and also go to Epworth's camp Glenayr in Calhoun County, and they participate in other outings such as Salkehatchie that require overnight stays.

Everyone who is 15 and above has a summer job. Epworth's summer work program teams with the Urban League to secure a job for each child. It is interesting and often amusing to hear our residents talking about their first days on the job. It is extremely rewarding to watch them come to the business office to cash their first paychecks and to see how carefully they save

and spend what they have earned.

Many of our residents also participate in the Epworth Summer Enrichment Program at our Barnes Learning Center. This program enables

students to stay current with reading, math and composition, skills and get a head start on the coming school year.

Our older youth participate in the summer basketball league, go to the beach, Atlanta and Charleston. They also have adventures with resident counselor Howard Malpass, who takes them white water rafting, kayaking and to the paintball field. The youth enjoy themselves while learning the life and social skills they will need to engage successfully in the adult world.



Summer is a bit more relaxed. Our children seem to enjoy life more, but the best part about summer is that there are children on campus all day, and where there are children, there is always something interesting going on.

"You mean I have to go into this alone?"

Mrs. Laurie Brandes, Minister of Higher Education at Epworth Children's Home, picked up Tara* and headed to Spartanburg Methodist College for a day of assessment testing and orientation. Mrs. Brandes has done this with a countless number of students over the years, but for Tara this was a new experience.

Tara arrived at Epworth as a loner. She had no one in her life to depend on and greatly appreciated the opportunity to be a "kid" instead of worrying each day about where she would find food or if a parent would come home at night. Mrs. Brandes, knowing how independent Tara was, was surprised at Tara's reaction to learning she would have to walk into a college classroom alone for assessment testing.

"What!"

"Tara actually had a little break down from the panic she felt," said Mrs. Brandes. "I realized, for as independent as she was, she is still nervous and scared. Her reaction reminded me that for the first time ever, Tara had a support system at Epworth, and her response came from a fear of losing that."

Mrs. Brandes talked to Tara and told her how proud of her she had become over the last year. "You are a strong and intelligent young lady and you can do this," she said with a hug. "You go in there, do your best and I will be waiting for you right outside the door when you finish."



Tara calmed down after short minute and walked through the door alone to complete her testing. The tests were followed by a conversation with her advisor. When Tara bounded out of her advisor's office, she was on cloud nine. Mrs. Brandes could only sit and listen as a now excited Tara shared all she had learned from her advisor.

"Everyday with our children requires baby steps. They are often so far behind or afraid or hurt when they come to us," said Mrs. Brandes. "They have so much to learn, and it is our job to teach them. We continue to walk with them through each step and they continue to amaze us as they rise to the challenge."

Lesson from

The courtroom can be a scary place for an adult, but even more so for a child. For many of the children who call Epworth home, the courtroom is the place where they were asked to share private or painful information about their family members. The judge is the person who took them away from their mommy or daddy. The courtroom is the place where their parents were told they were no longer allowed to be a parent. The children at Epworth have a lot of reasons to fear a courtroom, but this summer has helped four of our teenagers see things differently.

As a part of the summer work experience, Brooke and three other residents from Epworth were surprised and concerned to learn that they would be working for the court system. Upon learning the news, Brooke shouted at Ms. Gee, her Case Manager. "I can't believe you are doing this to me. Sending me there! The courts just move me around all over the place and you know I hate them!" Ms. Gee understood Brooke's frustration and expected it. The Department of Social Services (DSS), placed Brooke at Epworth as a government placement because of abuse. She was at Epworth for two years. As a part of the SC DSS Program Improvement Plan, Brooke's case worker needed to find her a permanent placement with a family member. She was taken from Epworth and placed with a grandparent. Brooke didn't understand why she was being forced to leave Epworth, a place she had grown to call home. She blamed the courts.

After only a couple of weeks with her grandparent, Brooke was begging to return to Epworth, but DSS was no longer involved in Brooke's case. The grandparent was trying to manage and care for Brooke without community support. It was quickly becoming a struggle to provide for Brooke emotionally, physically and financially. The grandparent called Epworth and asked if Brooke could return as a private placement. Epworth agreed. Brooke was truly excited to be back in her cottage. One of the things she had been looking forward to before she was discharged from Epworth's care was a summer job. She couldn't wait to start earning money; something she had never had when she was with her parents. Her tone changed quickly however, when she learned she would be working with a judge at a courthouse.

The judge gave all four of the teens the jobs of answering phones and filing paperwork. While this doesn't seem exciting, it is necessary, and it is teaching them the importance of a solid work ethic. In addition to these lessons, the judge has taken a special interest in the children from Epworth. He called Ms. Gee to discuss the teens' performance. "Ms. Gee, I am amazed by these youth. They are well mannered, on time and work hard." Ms. Gee was so pleased. The judge explained that because they have been so trustworthy, he has allowed them to sit in on court hearings to learn about the ins and outs of the legal system. Once a week, they observe in his courtroom. They now have a better understanding of what is really meant by "the courts."

a Court Room

One morning in the car, a couple of weeks into the job, Brooke looked at Ms. Gee. “Ms. Gee, I am sorry,” she said. “It was good for me to be here. The courts aren’t the bad guys.” Brooke better understands now that her life and family dynamics are complicated. Other people have been making decisions about her life and where she will live for now, but ultimately, she decides who she will become. “I am glad I came back to Epworth. I have a lot of decisions to make, and I want to be different than my parents.”

Ms. Gee is very proud as she watches the children grow and mature during their summer jobs. “I am just thankful for all the people, like the judge, who give their time and knowledge to our children,” Ms. Gee said. “There is so much for them to learn about life, and Epworth makes sure they get every opportunity imaginable.”



Continued from Cover

other boys on campus how to keep their bikes in good working order. He has taught them how to change tires and adjust seats. The men on the Epworth maintenance team often share tools for Jeremy to use to repair his bike or honestly to just tinker with it out of enjoyment. Mr. Porter and the men on the maintenance team were simply imparting the sort of knowledge that boys and men “should know,” but they were also setting Jeremy up for his future.

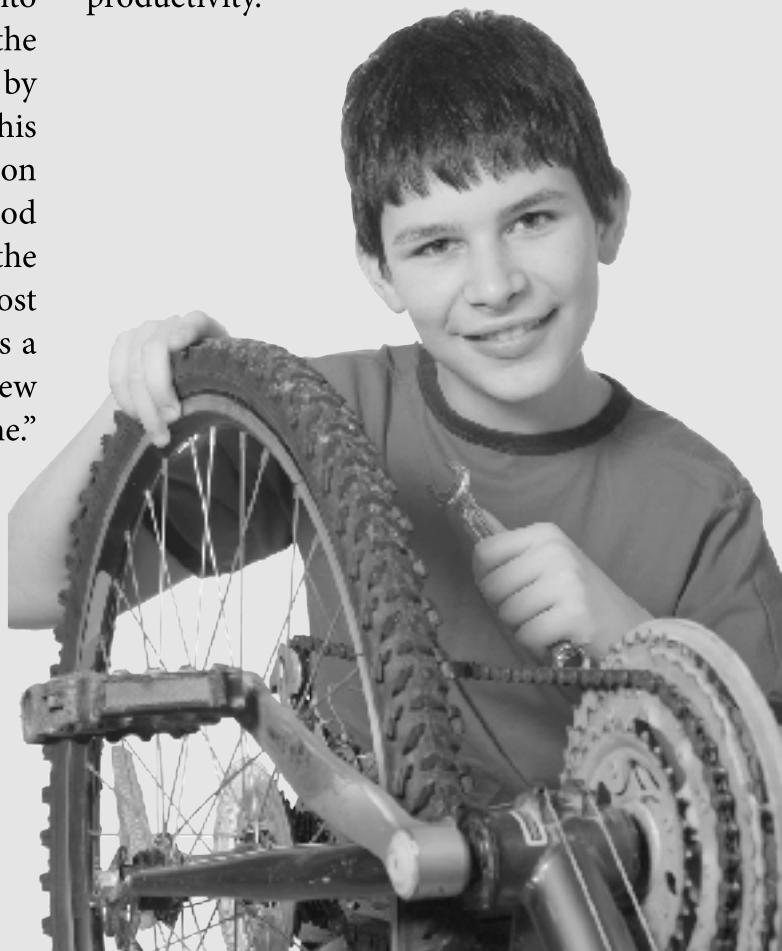
Recently Jeremy, because of his love of bikes, was matched with a mentor, Jono, that also enjoys biking. Jono is also teaching Jeremy different elements of the sport, and without realizing it, he too was helping to prepare Jeremy for a lifetime of success.

At the age of 16, Jeremy has now translated this fundamental knowledge and love of biking into a part-time job at a local bike store. During the application process, Jeremy was coached by his mentor and others on how to fill out his paperwork neatly, dress professionally, be on time for the interview, shake hands, use good manners and ultimately how to explain to the owner all he knows about bikes. Unlike most 16 year olds, Jeremy doesn't come across as a know-it-all. Instead, he went into the interview saying, “I want to learn all you will teach me.” Brian the owner was impressed, and hired Jeremy to build bikes. “The best way to learn is to build them from the ground up,” he said. Jeremy couldn't wait to learn.

Jeremy loves his new job, and he talks about it to anyone who will listen. He is gaining important knowledge about a sport he loves, while learning the importance of practicing a positive and reliable work ethic on the job. He is building his resume

and gaining skills that will translate into a sustainable future.

Jeremy was robbed of the joy of a lifetime of learning new things from his father. No one can replace that. Jeremy was also a victim of abuse, and no one can take that back. Epworth serves to help Jeremy heal and to give him the tools he needs to grow and thrive despite what life has given him thus far. At Epworth, Jeremy has Mr. Porter, the men on the maintenance crew, his mentor, other staff and now his boss, Brian. For the last five years, Jeremy has been intentionally surrounded by people who want to see him succeed; people who have helped him manage his anger. He has been given opportunities that have nurtured him and imparted valuable knowledge and experiences that, regardless of his past, will ensure his future is one of self-respect, responsibility and productivity.



Pizza, Pizza!



It was cold and rainy outside. David's shift at the local Little Caesars Pizza ended and he called Mrs. Brandes to see if she could pick him up instead of having to walk in the rain. David has been working at Little Caesars part-time over the summer to save money for school. When she got there, it was getting late. Like a good "mother hen" she asked him, "Did you eat?"

"No; it's okay," he responded. "I will get something when we get back to the campus." Mrs. Brandes could tell he was

hungry and she offered to buy him a pizza. They took the pizza and set off back to campus. The box was sitting on David's lap and he was staring at it.

"I know you are hungry," Mrs. Brandes observed. "Go ahead and have a slice. It's okay." David took a slice from the box. Two minutes later, when they pulled on to campus, Mrs. Brandes realized David had eaten more than half of a large pizza. "My goodness, David, you were hungry!"

"This pizza is so good," he responded. "I've never had a Little Caesars Pizza before." Mrs. Brandes was amazed. Here is a young man with money in his pocket and he hadn't even purchased a pizza from the place he had been working for more than a month.

David's family abandoned him. Outside of his Epworth family, David has no one. He has a strong internal drive to succeed and he is very appreciative of what Epworth is doing to help him succeed in life. Prior to coming to Epworth, David was homeless and very much understood the meaning of hunger. He learned the value of a dollar the hard way and now is being taught by staff members like Mrs. Brandes what it will take to get through college.

David has earned a scholarship to school. He will begin at Spartanburg Methodist in August of this year and plans to eventually transfer to USC. He knows that Epworth will be there with him every step of the way, helping to secure scholarship funding, making sure his paperwork is correct, providing him a home during the summer months and during holidays. But David also knows that after school, he will need to find a job, a place to live and make a life for himself as a productive adult. Epworth is providing him with a safe and secure place to grow into the wonderful adult he is already turning out to be.



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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.

2012 Down Syndrome Statewide Family Conference Highlights

In 1978, the Early Intervention Center at Epworth Children's Home formed a partnership with a small group of parents of children with Down Syndrome. The result of this partnership led to a conference intended to unite a larger group of parents of children with Down Syndrome. Since that time, Epworth's EIC has spearheaded the biennial statewide conference for families to provide an opportunity for parents to meet together for information and support.

While services and support for families of children with Down Syndrome has increased over the last 30 years, Epworth remains a key player in providing such services and support. On May 5, 2012, 140 parents, family members

and professionals gathered at Columbia College for the 20th conference. This year the featured speaker was Dr. Brian Akotko, a leading expert in the area of Down Syndrome. A sibling panel was gathered to discuss life with their brother or sister who has Down Syndrome. Another highlight of the conference was the opportunity for parents to share good news about their children during the lunch hour.

Epworth is proud of the EEIC's Executive Director, Kay Richardson and the work she, her team and her parents do to assist families on their journey to nurture their children into healthy, happy and productive members of the community.