

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Elizabeth's Healing Role

The scene was a familiar one at the Epworth Christmas pageant this year. It was a cool Sunday night in early December. The pews were full and little children dressed as angels were standing near the altar. As the tune of *Oh Little Town of Bethlehem* rang through the church, down walked a cute 7-year-old girl named Elizabeth,* who was proudly playing her role in the Christmas pageant.

Before she came to Epworth, Elizabeth's mother struggled to provide for her. As the little girl became school age, someone in the community noticed that something in the family was awry. When the South Carolina Department of Social Services intervened, they discovered years of neglect, abuse and abandonment. Elizabeth was removed from the dangerous situation. The courts later terminated

parental rights and Elizabeth was placed in Epworth's care.

After her placement at Epworth, Elizabeth's pain from her traumatic past materialized through continued episodes of unpredictable behavior. She was defiant. She frequently threw tantrums that disrupted the cottage environment. This was especially true at bath time, where almost every night the staff struggled to convince her to take her bath. Bath time was a trigger for her trauma. Elizabeth screamed, hid under her bed, ran from the staff and yelled profanity at them.

On most mornings, the routine was similar to that of the night before. She refused to get out of bed. Then she refused to get on the bus to go to school.

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Living into CARE

Winter 2015

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

In April of 2005 leaders of the Residential Child Care Project at Cornell University's College of Human Ecology convened an international group of experts to discuss the prospect of creating a best practices curriculum for use in residential group homes. From this collaboration came the Children and Residential Experiences: Creating Conditions for Change model now known as CARE.

Epworth Children's Home was asked to participate as a pilot agency for the newly developing model in 2007, and all of Epworth's staff members were trained in the CARE model. Epworth continues to maintain a strong relationship with the creators of CARE and with members of the Residential Child Care Project at Cornell University.

The shift to this best practices model has not been instantaneous nor easy, because it involved giving up some fundamental assumptions and/or practices that had helped sustain Epworth and other residential child care agencies for many years. As we all know, it is one thing to have knowledge of something, but it is quite another thing to practice it, especially when the stakes are high. It is often very difficult to move from the familiar to the unknown.

One of the most difficult shifts in parenting or working with children in any setting is to move from exerting control over children to maintaining a sense of order through positive communication, and forming relationships that are founded on respect, positive regard, and realistic expectations. This involves giving up seemingly endless lists of rules and consequences for learning how to adapt, and knowing when and how to establish and rely on

certain fundamental practices and expectations. Moving away from control and power struggles involves giving children, as is developmentally appropriate, "voice and choice" in many of the things that affect them. This is much more difficult to do than one would think.

Another shift is from focusing on what could be judged at first glance as bad behavior to focusing on what is under the behavior. This move involves changing the question from "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?" The focus is not so much on the behavior, as on what is contributing to the behavior, and helping an individual find more productive ways of dealing with the underlying influences of the behavior.

At Epworth we talk about creating a climate for success. This means that we put our resources and energy into creating an environment where children can thrive. We believe that every child who is provided with adequate amounts of structure, care, resources, instruction, and is surrounded by caring adults is, over time, able to make productive choices and to thrive.

Creating a climate for success involves building a caring community. In residential group care, groups need to be carefully constructed in order to give each member of the group an important role and a chance to feel valued. It is essential that a caring community environment is reflected in every facet of the child care setting because children learn through what is modeled and they model what is learned. In the CARE system when a child is not meeting expectations the goal of the

Once at school, she cycled between being a great student to struggling to manage her behavior. She is very bright, and her teacher tried to keep her on task, but all too often Elizabeth found herself in trouble for disrupting her class and defying her teacher.

It was evident to everyone at Epworth that Elizabeth was hurting deeply. In addition to surrounding her with care in the cottage, Epworth also matched her with a licensed counselor to begin the healing process. After a few sessions, the counselor recognized that Elizabeth was following a common behavior pattern for those who have experienced chaotic environments at a young age. Elizabeth was using defiant behavior to try to control every situation in her life, and cover up her deep-seeded fears and anger. With each emotional outburst she spiraled further into the destructive cycle.

As her comprehensive care plan kept the focus on her healing process, Elizabeth's behavior began to improve. The staff in her cottage provided positive reinforcement, and praised her when she made good decisions. At school she became more respectful to her teacher and her behavior improved. She began to thrive at things that she loved, especially music. She began singing, and especially loved singing in the Epworth church choir.

Rev. Meg Cook, the Epworth pastor ("Pastor Meg"), and Elizabeth began sharing more time together as the year passed along. During the times when Elizabeth struggled in the cottage, Pastor Meg often went with her on walks. The walks usually involved a trip to the sanctuary where Pastor Meg "checked on the church." When the sanctuary door opened, Elizabeth often walked down the aisle to the front altar rail, knelt and began to pray. She did all of this on her own. Sometimes Pastor Meg joined her,

sometimes she prayed all on her own. "It was obvious she had a big faith life," said Pastor Meg, "She was just too young to articulate it."

Elizabeth's process of healing did not happen overnight, nor has the healing been fully achieved, but as the months have passed her episodes of defiant behavior have become less frequent. At times she still cycles from periods of calmness to turmoil. Her healing is a work in progress—an ongoing work that will be needed for years to come.

Still, on that cool December night during the Christmas Program at Epworth, Elizabeth was as calm as ever. All eyes turned to her, as she walked down to the base of the altar. It was a familiar stroll for her as she traveled the same path she did on those walks with Pastor Meg. She walked with confidence to the altar rails where she proudly took her seat by the empty manger. There she waited along with the rest of the crowd to witness the arrival of Jesus to save a broken world.

What's Next for Elizabeth?

Recently Elizabeth began going on weekend visits with her aunt and uncle. Her aunt says that no one has seen or heard from Elizabeth's mother in months. The weekend visits have gone well and Elizabeth enjoyed getting to know two relatives she did not really know before coming to Epworth. She will continue to receive the care she needs at Epworth in order to break the destructive cycles in her life until a permanency decision (reunification, kinship care, adoption, etc.) is made by the Department of Social Services.



David's New

For most of his childhood David was raised by his grandmother. She loved and cared for David for many years but during his early teen years, his grandmother passed away. With nowhere else to go, David was placed into foster care. David advocated for himself to be placed at Epworth. As a teenager, his social worker considered his request and it was honored.

David arrived at Epworth nearly three years ago. Living in a cottage with seven other boys his age was a big adjustment for him. He was also dealing with the grief and loss of his grandmother. He was not used to the amount of activities and support available for him, and he struggled to find the motivation to get involved with the opportunities Epworth offered. The Epworth staff noticed his struggles, and adjusted his comprehensive care plan to help him adjust to life at Epworth and also to aim higher to reach the goals he set for his own life.

As the months went by, David's lack of motivation continued. He was going to school each day, but not succeeding. Before Epworth, he had similar struggles, so the staff at Epworth worked with his teachers and school counselors to develop a more hands-on approach to his high school education. They arranged for him to work through Richland School District One's Heyward Center & Technology Center. There, he was introduced to vocational-based learning, such as construction. The switch made all of the difference for him and he graduated from high school in May 2014.



Adventure

After graduation, traditional 2 and 4-year colleges were not a viable option for David. Instead, he enrolled in a different program at Heyward that allowed certain high school graduates to continue their vocational programming while also connecting them with a part-time job. David continued his construction courses in the afternoon, but in the morning he worked at the cafeteria at Hand Middle School. The combination of work and education was good for David as he developed more life skills.

In the spring, David visited the Job Corps campus, a vocationally-focused, post-secondary school in Bamberg. As he walked around the Job Corps campus he knew it was a good fit for him, as it has been for other young people in Epworth's Independent Living Program. When he returned to campus, David completed his application and mailed it off. He later found out that his dream would have to wait because there were no open spots in the program. He was placed on the waiting list.

The disappointment caused David to once again lose some motivation. He sat around the cottage watching television or playing video games. After seeing this behavior return, the Epworth staff encouraged him to find a job to make some extra money while he waited for a decision from Job Corps.

It just so happened that the Epworth dining hall needed some extra help the summer while all of the residents were out of school. Because of David's experience in a cafeteria, he was hired right away. Then as school started back for the Epworth residents, he re-enrolled in the Heyward program. This year, his part-time job has been helping to provide care at the veteran's nursing home close to the Epworth campus. While it was not his favorite job, his supervisors commended him on the way he went about his work and how he made sure that everything he was responsible for doing was done correctly.

Finally, in early November, the moment came that he had been looking forward to—he was accepted into the Job Corps program and learned he would begin in just a few days. He was nervous at the news, but the Epworth staff encouraged him and helped him gather the personal items he would need while living in the dormitory.

A few days later, he said his goodbyes to his friends and staff, and he embarked on his new adventure. Surprisingly, saying goodbye was not too hard for David. Since he was starting in November, there was only two weeks until Thanksgiving and he would return to campus. He also knew that just a few weeks after that he would be back for Christmas break. The timing was great for David to adjust to his new experience without being separated from his Epworth support system for too long.

After just a few weeks, David has adjusted well to his new environment in Bamberg. Soon he will have to choose a vocational track, but for now he is evaluating his options. He really enjoyed working in the Epworth dining hall over the summer and is considering following the culinary track. He also likes the idea of working with his hands in maintenance and repairs. David sees

that either of these vocations are potentially a good fit for his gifts and will provide him with the skills he needs to reach his ultimate goal of independence and providing for himself and—one day—his own family.

Epworth's Independent Living program is here to support David's education and career goals as he transitions into adulthood. This support manifests itself in many different ways, including providing him with an allowance, connecting him with services that help him reach his goals, transporting to and from Job Corps, sending him special care packages in the mail, making extra phone calls to give him motivation to continue to aim higher, providing him with a familiar place to stay for the holidays and making sure Santa has his address for Christmas morning.

Epworth's goal is to see David and all of our Independent Living residents living their lives as productive, healthy and safe adults. Thank you for your support in helping to make this goal into a reality.

In His Own Words: "Epworth is a good environment for young people. It's a good place. All the staff here care about you and want to help you be a better person. When I'm mad or upset Mr. Parson (Pictured) can always make me laugh. Epworth prepared me for a lot of things like learning how to wash my clothes, and cook some simple things."



Living into CARE - Continued from Page 2

adults is to determine how to assist the child so the expectations can be met in the future, or adjust the expectations for the time being if meeting the expectations is not possible. This is referred to as helping a child do well. That is the goal, and is generally accomplished bit by bit over the course of time.

The key ingredient in all of this is the relational component. Attachment, separation, and loss are major themes for children who come to live at Epworth. This effects their ability to trust, and develop relationships with adults. In order to learn to manage feelings and behavior, achieve a sense of independence and develop a positive sense of self, a child must have confidence in, and feel secure with an adult. There are no shortcuts here.

Epworth majors in building caring relationships. Thousands of hours are spent in play, work, service projects, church activities, trips, team sports, and many other structured and unstructured activities in order to give our children opportunities to build relationships with caring and trustworthy adults. This is what gives all of us who invest in Epworth an opportunity to make a difference for a lifetime and beyond.

Tickets now on sale!

The 4th Annual Friends of Epworth Gala

**Friday, February 27, 2016
@ Stone River in Columbia**

The Friends of Epworth are proud to announce the 4th Annual Friends of Epworth Gala to benefit Epworth Children's Home on Friday, February 26th, 2016 at Stone River in West Columbia. As the signature event for the Friends of Epworth, the event raises awareness and funds for Epworth and the children who call Epworth home.



Every year it has grown in attendance and we expect the 2016 gala to be the biggest and liveliest yet! Attendees come ready for an up-scale good time. Join us 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 and are available at friendsofepworth.org.

Save the Date!

Epworth Alumni Association's 8th Annual Cook-out for Kids BBQ

**Saturday, April 9, 2016
@ Epworth's campus**

Support the children at Epworth at the Epworth Alumni Association's annual BBQ fundraiser. There will be whole Boston butts, plates of BBQ chicken and pork with all of the fixins', and great baked goods available as well as live music, a collection of restored Ford Model A's and more! For more information or to volunteer please contact epworthalumniassociation@gmail.com





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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.

From Last Year: A Christmas to Remember

Almost every year Epworth gets a phone call within a week of Christmas from a family and/or children in crisis. Last year was no different. The Department of Social Services called looking for a placement for two siblings, a 9-year-old girl and a 7-year-old boy, who had been removed from an abusive environment. The children moved to Epworth just days before Christmas.

In those first few days, it became evident to the staff that the children had experienced an insulated existence. The discovery was made that they had never even been to any place of worship—church, synagogue, mosque or other. Their first ever worship experience was Epworth's Christmas Eve service; the story, the carols, and the lights as the congregation sang joy to the world.

In the last year the siblings have left Epworth to live with relatives. While we cannot know for sure what their future holds, we are certain they will always remember the first time they attended worship was to celebrate the birth of Jesus in the church at Epworth.

