

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Creating Family Memories

Christmas memories are cherished moments for both children and parents. The memories that are created on Christmas morning bring joy not only in that moment but in the years and decades that follow. This Christmas, as families everywhere gather around the Christmas tree, a special family at Epworth will be making their own lasting memories.

Bria came to Epworth in August at a critical crossroad in her life. She was a 22 year old single mother with a one and half year old daughter, Jaci, and a three month old son, Devin.* Life had never been easy for Bria but recently things were spiraling out of control. She lived in an unstable environment that was not the nurturing home that her two young children needed. To compound the situation even further, she had struggled off and on for many years with a drug

addiction. The stresses of her current conditions led her to using again and her young family's life was in a destructive downward spiral.

By the end of the summer, Bria had to make a choice: get the help she needed or Jaci and Devin would be removed from her care and placed into the foster care system. Bria loved her children dearly and reached out for help. She had entered a rehabilitation program in the past before her daughter was born and she knew that she needed something different this time. She wanted to get away from her lowcountry home to remove herself from the temptations around her, but she did not want to be separated from her children.

Bria's plea for help and fear of separation from her children was exactly the right situation for her to enter Epworth's Family Care Center (FCC). Established

Continued on Page 3



It is Still Amazing

Winter 2016

A Message from The Rev. John Holler
President

It is cold outside, but there is magic in the air! During the months of November and December all things point toward Christmas. The campus, always a high energy environment, seems to rise to new levels at this time of the year. Our children and youth begin the countdown until school is out for the holidays. We all anticipate the days when our college students return to campus with stories of what college life is like, and how hard they are having to work in comparison to the work that was required of them in high school.

There is the inevitable trial balloon that is floated “Well, at (name of college inserted here) we don’t have a curfew.” And the standard answer, “Well at Epworth you do have a curfew.” It all gets sorted out satisfactorily and life takes on a new rhythm.

There are parties, pageants, presents, outings, worship services, shopping trips, drop-ins, basketball games, and numerous dining out opportunities. This is all woven into the normal fabric of school, tutoring, counseling, and life skills lessons.

Each day it seems the activity level increases just a bit until we think it can’t go any higher, but each day tops the past one and each year seems to do the same! This happens because so many people care and want to demonstrate caring in a tangible way, thus we have Thanksgiving dinner with the USC football players and coaches, a nature walk with Rudy Mancke, visits and parties by Sunday school classes, men’s and women’s groups and business groups, the Scott Hannon Foundation shopping trip, a visit to Alabama Theatre in

Myrtle Beach, a visit and gift sharing from Bikers of S.C., the annual American Legion party at the Colonial Life Arena with USC basketball players and coaches, the Southern Strutt performance in Epworth’s gym, the list goes on and on.

While all of this is happening members of Epworth’s staff and volunteers are receiving gifts from individuals and groups that have agreed to purchase just the right gift for a child from the Christmas lists that Epworth’s elves (Deborah and Beth) have solicited from the children in September and October. Epworth’s version of Operation Santa Claus is a king size project, and is amazing to watch how day by day it all comes together in such a well-orchestrated fashion.

As Christmas Eve approaches the activity level subsides a bit, and a sense of calm seems to surround the campus. The focus then is on the Christmas Eve services. An early one is for the youngest children. The 11:00pm communion service is for the older residents. Then all is quiet for a time.

The next morning, well, that is difficult to describe; presents, shredded wrapping paper, squeals, screams, and laughter!

It is the same every year, but it never gets old.

Thank you, Merry Christmas, and God’s peace in the New Year.

John

in 2013 on Epworth's campus, the FCC allows a mother with substance abuse addictions to move into a secure, supervised environment with her young children. While in the program, the mother receives the treatment she needs through a local outpatient addiction program with the Lexington-Richland Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council. Meanwhile her children are cared for by Epworth staff. In the afternoons and evenings, the family spends family time and meals together. This unique program is unlike others that often separate mother and child. Other programs often create a situation where the mother does well in treatment but is overwhelmed when reunified with her children, increasing the likelihood of a relapse and children entering the foster care system. In the FCC model, over a six-month period the mother receives parenting skills training and gradually gains more parental responsibilities so that she can grow into her parental role post-recovery.



Holiday crafts help make the FCC feel more like home.

When Bria arrived at Epworth in August she struggled to adapt to her new environment. She began her rehabilitation program but was very distrustful of those helping her take care of her children. She had come so close to losing her children that she was fearful that the Epworth staff were just trying to take her children away from her. As she went about her day, she lived in a constant fear that every little thing she did, or did not do, would jeopardize her ability to stay with her children. Each day the FCC staff spoke to her to calm her fears and remind her that this was a safe place designed to help her and her family. The help she was receiving with her children and parenting responsibilities were to support her and her recovery, not replace her relationship with her children.

After four weeks of resistance and reluctance, Bria finally started to be receptive to the support system that was assembled around her. Rather than fearing the staff's help, she began to embrace it. As she did, her children began to blossom in new ways. Each morning as the family finished breakfast and Bria left for her treatment program, Jaci would get up from the table, give her mother a hug and run down the hallway to her classroom in the FCC. Mrs. Mary, the primary caretaker of Jaci and Devin during the daytime hours, would do activities with the children to build their early childhood skills. After reading and doing a lesson they would often do craft projects to give to Bria when she came home. Mrs. Mary took Jaci and Devin on a daily walk around campus and a special trip to the Epworth playground. On Fridays they walked two blocks to the local public library story time and to check out new books for the weekend.

When Bria returned home each evening, she was responsible for going to Mrs. Mary's classroom to pick up the children from their day at "school." Jaci and the staff would share all of the fun things she and her baby brother did that day. The sharing of the day's activities was the beginning of a special family bonding time each afternoon.



The mothers and children decorated the living area to make it special for Christmas.

Then they would come back to the living area and have a snack together and do the chores for the day. Sometimes Jaci would have "homework" from Mrs. Mary's class and Bria would help her complete it, other times they would play games together or go on walks. As the weeks went by, Bria stopped her old habits of relying on television and the baby swing to pass the time and she developed her active parenting skills to strengthen her bond with her children.

The daily routine became a blessing for the family. Not only were the children blossoming, but Bria advanced in her treatment program. She learned self-coping skills that were helping her overcome her substance abuse and also become a better mother. By November, she entered phase two of the program as she neared the end of her treatment program and



The "Sinners" Sunday School Class at Trinity UMC, West Columbia, provided all of the ingredients for this year's Thanksgiving dinner.

began to look for part-time employment. Once she secures employment she will move into phase three of the program to move out of the direct-supervised living area and into a less supervised apartment setting at Epworth. This step-down approach to the program allows her to build the pieces necessary for her to live independently when she graduates from the program later this winter.

Bria and her family also became a sort of mentor family for another family who moved into the FCC in November. She is helping the other mother adjust and trust the program staff and the children are playing and bonding together. The two families are creating their own support system and helping each other stay on track and strengthening their young families.

All the while, Bria, Jaci, and Devin are growing closer together. Part of the family bonding is ensuring that they are creating family memories. On the weekends, the staff takes the family to community centers and parks for special activities and events. In October, the family went to the State Fair for the first time to ride the rides and share special treats like cotton candy. Epworth arranged for a volunteer to come take professional family portraits. Near the holidays the arts and crafts from Mrs. Mary's class turned into special keepsakes. At Halloween, Bria took the children shopping for costumes and then they all went trick-or-treating.

On Thanksgiving the family had a very special day. They started off the morning by putting on their new matching outfits that Bria picked out. Then they joined the cottages at Epworth for a trip to the University of South Carolina's Williams-Brice Stadium where they had a Thanksgiving meal with the Gamecock football team. Bria's favorite part was having the big football players take pictures holding her little baby boy.

After the time at the stadium, they returned to Epworth to begin their own Thanksgiving meal preparations. The "Sinners" Sunday School Class at Trinity UMC, West Columbia came by a few days earlier and provided all of the supplies for a bountiful Thanksgiving feast. The FCC staff helped Bria and the other mothers prepare the meal. Somehow, as they worked together to prepare the meal, the turkey earned the nickname "Roberta." That evening the family gathered together and shared a wonderful Thanksgiving meal. At the table Jaci proclaimed, "Roberta tastes goood!"

Soon after Thanksgiving the preparations for Christmas began. The living area does not have a fireplace for stockings to be hung, so the FCC staff surprised the family and created a faux-fireplace made from construction paper taped to the wall under a shelf. The shelf made a perfect mantle for hand-made decorations and stockings. Volunteers from Trenholm Road UMC visited campus and decorated the outside of the building with beautiful Christmas lights. Inside, the staff and mothers in the FCC decorated the tree and made the space look and feel like home.

Bria is doing her own shopping for gifts for the children, and Epworth's community volunteers are providing a few extra "surprises" for the whole family. Everyone is getting new pajamas for a special pajama day including wearing them to church on Christmas morning for a Blessing of the Toys by Epworth's Pastor Meg.

In just a few more months, Bria, Jaci and Devin will be graduating from Epworth's Family Care Center program. The family is thriving at Epworth which is a wonderful achievement. It is especially important because the treatment and life-skills that are learned by both mother and child are transferable to the next steps in life for the weeks, months, and years to come. As they grow together as a family, they will remember this time at Epworth as not just a treatment program or a learning experience, they will carry with them the lasting memories of handmade crafts, a turkey named "Roberta," and a very special morning where the peace and joy of Christmas was felt by all.

Expanding Anthony's Horizons

Anthony* arrived at Epworth four years ago after spending the first 14 years of his life confined to a small home where he lived with his mother and grandmother. His mother withheld him from school for fear that Anthony was "different." He was receiving an inadequate level of schooling at home, and the SC Department of Social Services removed him from his mother's care for educational neglect. When he arrived at Epworth he could read a little, but he had not yet developed the motor skills to control a pencil and write legibly. His math skills were lower elementary level and at 14 years old, he could not tie his shoes.

When his DSS caseworker brought him to Epworth, he was welcomed by the Admissions Director, Deborah Keller. Uncertain about what was happening to him, and having very little social contact with other people during this life, he was awkward and quiet. While he sat with Mrs. Deborah, he stared out the window and smiled. "You have squirrels here," he asked her. Surprised she replied, "Yes, everywhere." "I have squirrels at my house. They are my friends. I talk to them through the windows," he continued.

Anthony was a sweet spirited young man, but the staff quickly learned that the seclusion he had experienced thus far in his life made public school overwhelming and stressful for him. Mrs. Christy Mooneyhan, Vice President for Academics, assessed his academic levels and worked with his Epworth Case Manager to create an academic plan that gradually introduced Anthony to public school at Dreher High School. He started with only one class a day, and returned to Epworth for homebound schooling and tutoring in the Epworth Barnes Learning Center. Weekly and intentional conversations with Anthony provided him the control and say in his own comfort level to slowly and strategically add additional classes at Dreher. Six months after his arrival at Epworth he was taking all his classes at Dreher and loving it.

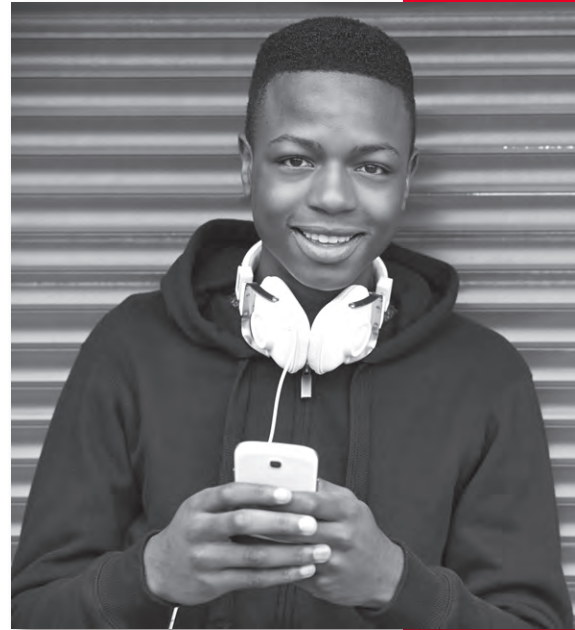
During that time, he began making friends with his fellow cottage mates, although it was difficult for him. He would often retreat to his room, or sit one-on-one with staff. Two weeks after his arrival he bounced into Mrs. Keller's office and announced with great excitement, "Mrs. Deborah, Look! I can tie my own shoes!"

Along the way, there was a short period of time when DSS tried to reunify Anthony with his mother and grandmother. Sadly, his grandmother passed, and his mother was unable to continue to provide care for Anthony. He asked to return to Epworth. We welcomed him back to campus and right away he picked up where he left off. His social skills continued to blossom and his progression at school continued to improve.

Earlier this year, Anthony graduated with a diploma from Dreher High School. This fall he took classes at Midlands Technical College, and is the first member of his family to go to college. He dreams of working in the Information Technology field designing gaming systems. He currently holds a part-time job and just recently opened his first bank account, so his employer can direct deposit his earnings. Through Epworth's Independent Living Program he is receiving budget and money management advice and learning how to prepare to become an independent young adult.

An enormous amount of comprehensive care went into Anthony's transformation: educational assessments, health and mental assessments, counseling, tutoring, educational planning, help with homework, help with job and interview skills, and even intentional practice by staff to help him learn conversation skills with adults and peers.

Together, the comprehensive care Anthony has and continues to receive through the Residential Services Program and now the Independent Living Program at Epworth is transforming his life and expanding his horizons. What was once a shy and confined child is now becoming a confident and capable young man.



Follow-up: Sean's Dream Comes True



In the last issue of The Record readers met Sean, a young man who spent much of his teenage years at Epworth. After experiencing significant loss and disappointment in his childhood, Sean took full advantage of the opportunities at Epworth. He turned around his trajectory in life and graduated from high school. He secured part-time jobs and took classes at Midlands Technical College after high school until he realized his lifelong dream by enlisting in the Army earlier this year.

Sean's dreams continue to come true. On Veteran's Day (November 11), Sean graduated from basic training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He has since been transferred to Virginia and is awaiting a possible deployment to Germany. He is looking forward to the opportunity to see the world and experience a new country. This Christmas we are thankful for Sean's dedication to serving his country and ability to see his lifelong dream come true.

Upcoming Events

5th Annual Friends of Epworth Gala

Friday, March 17, 2017, 7pm-11pm
at MyCarolina Alumni Center in Columbia

The Friends of Epworth invite all supporters of the children at Epworth to a fun night out featuring live music, great food and drinks, a silent auction and a special message from an Epworth college-age resident. Sponsorships and tickets are now available at friendsofepworth.org.



9th Annual Cookout-for-Kids

Saturday, April 8, 2017
at Epworth Children's Home

The Epworth Alumni Association will host its annual fundraiser featuring fresh cooked pork and chicken barbecue, live music, classic cars and fun for the entire family. Please mark your calendars, more information coming soon.



More than Just a Joyful Christmas Morning

Each year on Christmas morning the children in the cottages at Epworth awaken to a joyful scene of a fully trimmed Christmas tree with a plethora of neatly wrapped gifts tucked under and around it. Some children here have never experienced a setting with gifts under the tree because in years past they have heard such things as “Santa did not get our change of address this year” or “We don’t have enough money for Christmas.” At Epworth, we strive to make Christmas special for every child.

For some children at Epworth, emotions run especially high because this is their first Christmas apart from family. The staff in the cottages, those who themselves are working on Christmas morning, do everything they can to make the day special and enable the extra phone calls or letters to family whenever possible.

Christmas morning is indeed special at Epworth. It is a team effort from the community to ensure that these children do not feel forgotten on this day. Epworth begins planning in June for Christmas. All fall, donors are matched with special wishes from the children. In December the gifts roll in and each one is carefully wrapped and waiting for Christmas morning. The support from donors and the community is breathtaking.

However Christmas is just one day in the year. The truly special gift is that the community is ensuring that these children have all they need for all of the 365 days of the year. In-kind donations from body wash to new outdoor furniture provide items that both support the children in special ways and limit the expenditures needed in the Epworth budget. Monetary donations, no matter the size, provide those things that make caring for children in need possible.

One such example is from an anonymous donor who reached out to Epworth with only the name “The Cheerful Giver.” Without any desire of being personally recognized, this faithful and generous donor just wanted to provide for the needs of the children at Epworth. The gift provided items like tutoring for a middle school boy who is striving to make honor roll for the first time in his life. It provided a skating trip for the girl’s cottages when school let out for the holidays. The Cheerful Giver’s gift provided for those little things that make childhood special.

Yes, Christmas morning is a joyful and special time, but during this Season of Giving, we at Epworth give thanks for the many people from near and far who give generously to provide for the children at Epworth. It is because of you that there is not just one—but 365—joyful mornings at Epworth each year.





Epworth
Children's Home

PO BOX 50466
COLUMBIA SC 29250

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Columbia, SC
Permit No. 424

Invest. Care. *Transform.*
(803) 256-7394
www.epworthchildrenshome.org

Rev. John. E. Holler, Jr.
President

**Children's names have been changed for confidentiality.*

In an effort to be good stewards of God's gift, please help maintain current records to help with mailing costs.

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

- ☐ Name Change
- ☐ I receive more than one copy
- ☐ Address change
- ☐ I'd like to receive this publication by email

☐ Please remove me from the mailing list

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.

Foster Families Needed

There are over 4,000 children in foster care in South Carolina but only 1,400 foster homes to meet this need. Earlier this year, Epworth Children's Home began recruiting and training foster families in the greater Columbia area. Epworth is answering the call to recruit, train & support caring foster parents to help foster children through their journey toward healing & hope.

Do you feel called to provide a nurturing foster home to a child who needs a stable environment in which to live? To learn more about being a foster parent with Epworth contact 803-256-7394, esanchez@epworthsc.org or visit us on the web at www.epworthchildrenshome.org.

