

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## *The Bond of Brothers*



Up until the start of summer vacation, eleven year old \*Randy, and his two younger brothers shared a room and bed together in the home where they lived with their parents. The normal flow of life included sleeping in while their mother and father came and went. The boys were very close, and very much dependent on one another. Other than their time in their classrooms at school, they were not apart from each other, so when DSS showed up at their door to remove them from their home and parents, there was much to consider.

Rather than separating the boys into individual foster homes unable to take all three boys together, they were placed at Epworth, and in fact, because they were all in elementary school, they were able to stay in the same cottage. When Epworth staff learned during the admission process that the boys had never slept apart from each other, they made adjustments to keep them in the same room as well.

Though they were still together, the first few nights were full of anxiety and tears. Being in a new place with strangers, and not having any control over the environment is scary and unsettling for children. On the first night the Epworth cottage parents learned quickly that “never sleeping apart” did not simply mean they shared a room, but rather that none of the boys had ever slept in a bed alone before. While they could not share beds at Epworth, the staff utilized their trauma informed training, and thinking quickly, made a game out of pushing the three twin beds together, side by side as tight as they could to “make one big bed.”

When the boys climbed in their beds, the staff tucked them in by playing a new “game” called “Snug as a Bug in the Rug.” They tucked them in nice and tight, like a bug in a rug, and the boys giggled with excitement. The game played multiple purposes. The first was to create

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# Looking Forward

## Fall 2015

A Message from The Rev. John Holler  
President

One year ago the Epworth Board of Trustees adopted new strategic goals and objectives to replace the strategic plan that had largely been completed. Then, this past summer, as Board members worked to develop concrete initiatives that would enable the three primary goals to be reached, it became abundantly clear that exceptional missional opportunities are before us.

In these next few lines I will highlight the three primary elements in Epworth's strategic plan and briefly describe several of the possibilities that each presents.

The first strategic goal is to continue the pursuit of becoming a Superior Residential Child Care Ministry in every facet of service. Our campus slogan is "In the pursuit of excellence, aim higher." The thought here is that we can always get better in all that we do. Our Performance and Quality Improvement program spotlights the areas where aiming higher will help us hit the precise marks we seek to hit.

Several of the bullet points under this first goal are: 1) continue to recognize residential group care as the core ministry of Epworth Children's Home; 2) ensure the highest standard of care by employing a nurturing and highly qualified staff; 3) provide individualized comprehensive care to every child; 4) maintain safe and supportive facilities and grounds; 5) establish Epworth as a leader in child care in South Carolina and beyond.

The second strategic goal is to achieve the Financial Stability to be Able to Operate Independently of Government Funding. In this time of unpredictable state reimbursements and rates, and changing state and federal regulations child care agencies that depend too heavily on government sources run the risk of failing financially, or having to constantly change their programs in order to secure funding. Fiscal

responsibility includes building as solid a financial base as possible in order to insure the longevity and consistency of the ministry to children and families.

Bullet points under this goal are: 1) strengthen, deepen, and expand relationships with the S.C. Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church; 2) expand Epworth's financial and volunteer support base within the local and wider communities; 3) increase the value of the endowment in order that funds from the endowment can underwrite a greater percentage of Epworth's core child care program.

One large faith based children's home in our state, because of the size of its endowment and contribution base, receives only 3% of its budget from government sources. This creates the opportunity for financial stability and programmatic independence.

The third strategic goal is to Expand the Missional Impact Beyond the Campus Boundaries. It appears that the time is right for Epworth to help meet more of the unmet needs that an increasing number of children have for stability, care, educational and emotional support.

The major headings under this goal are: 1) develop the capacity to offer related and effective program services to non-residential children and families on and off campus; 2) establish and strengthen partnerships that expand the reach for referrals and the development of effective comprehensive services; 3) advocate at the state and federal level for child protective services reform.

The Epworth Board members, at the most recent Board retreat, worked on the "who, what, when, and how" answers for these strategic goals. So, stay tuned. The future looks to be an exciting one!

fun and giggles before bedtime. The second was to make sure they were comfortable and warm for the night. And the third was to make sure they did not roll out of one bed and into the other. Over the next few weeks as the boys adjusted to being at Epworth and were taught some new coping skills, the staff gradually pulled the beds farther apart, until eventually they were back in their original places.

Each of the boys have a sweet and affectionate demeanor. They are very close to each other and used to doing everything together, but that didn't make them an exclusive group. Within their cottage they embraced the other boys and treated them just the same as their own brothers. Every morning the brothers gave each other a hug and then they went around giving hugs to the rest of the boys and staff. After a few days, the hugging activity became routine for all of the boys. They even took their "hug show" on the road, and visited the learning center and administration office to give hugs to Epworth administrative staff.

As the weeks of summer vacation passed, the brothers started showing signs of growth. They attended Zoo Camp together at Riverbanks Zoo. They played around the zoo, learned about the animals and even made matching necklaces out of beads made from koala poop. They went to Fort Jackson Water Park during one of the hottest days of the Columbia summer. In addition to

water slides and games, the youngest brother learned how to swim. Later, they attended an open house event with the University of South Carolina Men's basketball team at the Colonial Life area. After playing with the team and getting to know the players, each boy grabbed a poster and

gathered autographs. One of the boys created his own unique approach. He approached each player and said very quickly, "What's your favorite pet? Mine's a fish. Can I have your autograph?" Every team member graciously honored his request.

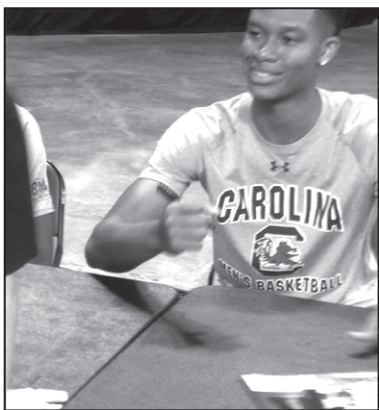
The brothers enjoyed time together but they also gradually began doing more things individually and developed their own unique personalities. They no longer slept with their beds jammed together and occasionally one would have a "sleep over" with their friends in the room across the hallway. Helping the boys maintain their close relationship while learning individual coping skills and life skills was a critical part of their individual Comprehensive Care Plan Goals. The

staff in the cottage worked diligently and creatively to help the brothers to this point, because they knew that as the school year approached, the oldest brother, Randy, would be starting middle school, and would move up to be with the other boys his age.

When the day came for Randy to move to the middle school age cottage next door, the boys were sad. The change was hard at first, but the boys had been sufficiently prepared and their new coping skills were kicking in. They knew and looked forward to the idea that they were still able to eat together in the dining hall, play together outside and go to church together on Sunday mornings. Randy's new cottage staff encouraged him to visit his brothers every day. They sat on the floor and played Pokémon for hours. Before they knew it, they were used to being in different cottages.

Today, the three brothers have had a great start to a new school year. They are all in new schools, and they are doing exceptionally well in their classes. Because they were behind academically when they arrived, they were matched with tutors at Epworth to help them catch up to their grade level assignments. They recently began individual counseling sessions at Epworth to provide ways to process the events of their childhoods and of the last few months. Another one of their goals is to be reunified with their family. Epworth is working to help make that a successful transition. The boys recently received care packages from their family that included family pictures and a few toys. Their parents are starting treatment programs to receive the help they need, and are looking forward to staying in touch with their sons throughout the process.

Until reunification is possible, Epworth will be here for Randy, and his brothers doing the little things that will help them break the cycle of abuse and neglect in their lives. Sometimes those "little" things are helping a child feel safe by ensuring time with a sibling, other times they are counseling and tutoring sessions, other times, a trip to the zoo. Whatever the case may be, Epworth will continue to assess our children and youth and match goals and services to ensure they are transforming and healing. Epworth will continue to support, nurture and encourage Randy, his brothers, and the other 80 children who call Epworth home.





# Preparing for

## *Epworth Expands Services for Older Residents*

Again last May, Epworth celebrated 100% of our high school seniors graduating high school. Together the entire campus celebrated the successes of eight young men and women and walked with them as they transitioned out of the cottages of Epworth's residential program and into the apartment-style areas of the growing Independent Living Program.

As those graduates step forward into their futures, they are doing more than deciding their own trajectory in life. They are also creating a path for younger Epworth residents who look up to them. The rising high school Juniors and Seniors see these successes and are moving forward with their own plans for the future.

These two groups of residents, the oldest cottages and the independent living students, represent the largest growing population at Epworth. As their numbers grow, Epworth is meeting the need by expanding programming. A significant portion of these expanded programs are through the Next Steps Program, an initiative funded by a generous grant from Aflac.

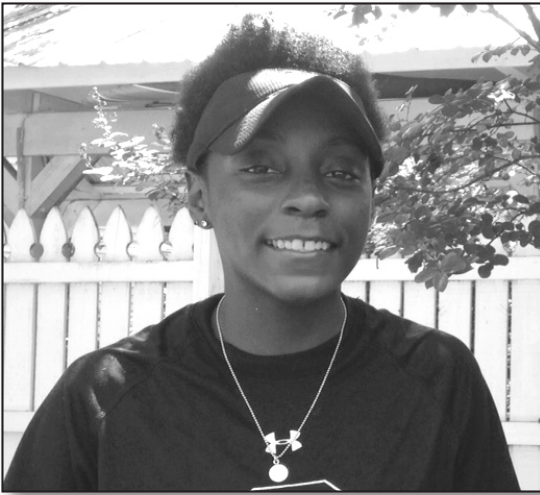
As clients transition into young adulthood, The Next Steps Program provides Epworth's oldest residents with a series of services that prepare them for higher education and job training programs. The program, directed by Mrs. Laurie Brandes, includes college-prep academic tutoring, expanded life skills curriculum, as well as college and career exploration.

In addition to the Next Steps Program, Epworth has opened additional living areas for college students during the summer and holidays, as well as added two additional case managers to serve independent living clients. These case managers check-in with the clients while they are on and off the Epworth campus, and provide on-going support as they move forward in achieving their educational and vocational goals.

"We consistently encourage residents to aim higher and pursue excellence in everything they do" said the Rev. John Holler, President of Epworth. "Expanding these services for our older residents strengthens their opportunities to do just that. Epworth is going to continue to be right there to guide and support them as they transition into independence. Our thanks to Aflac for joining us to expand this vital program for our students."

# the Next Steps

## *Helping Maria Get Back on Track*



After growing up at Epworth for 7 years, Maria is taking charge of her future. She initially headed off to college on an athletic scholarship two years ago, but struggled with the freedoms of living in a college environment. She was not pleased that she lost her scholarship and needed to leave school. However, Epworth opened an apartment for her, helped her enroll in a local community college and assisted her in evaluating new life goals and plans. This second chance has been just what she needed. She's making excellent grades (including Honor Roll during her summer term) and preparing to transfer to a four-

year college in the near future with hopes of renewing her track and field career.

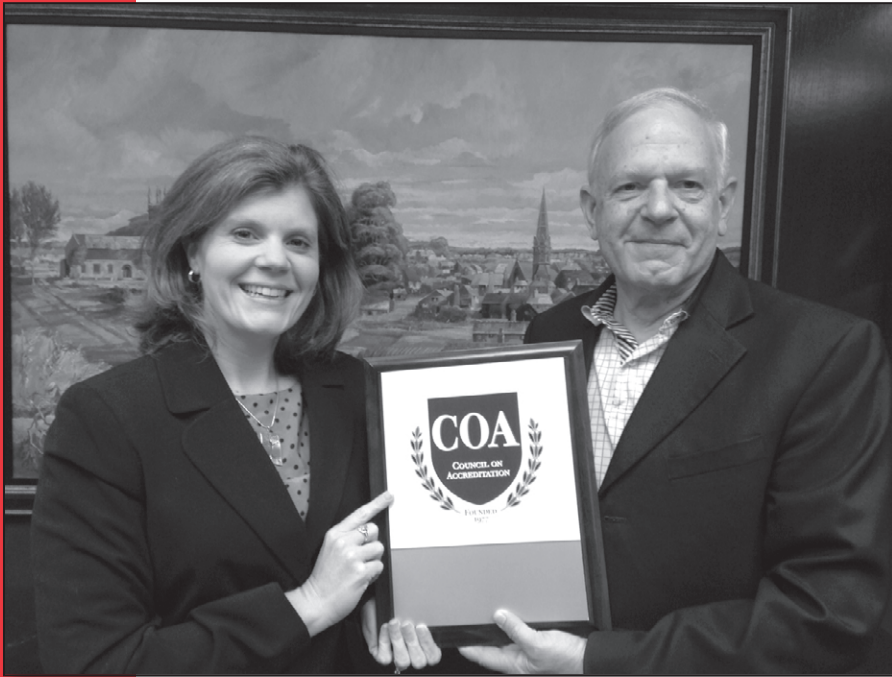
## *Did you know?*

Epworth's independent living students are all over South Carolina and even just across the state line in Charlotte! Students enroll in a variety of educational programs from job training to 4-year degree programs. While in their higher education setting, students are expected to maintain academic progress, experience new social settings, work part-time, and maintain mature behavior. Epworth's commitment is to provide the resources to help them graduate debt free and transition into the job market and independent adult life.

*Epworth Independent Living clients are in colleges and programs far beyond Epworth's campus in Columbia. Each logo represents a location where an Epworth student is currently (or soon to start) studying.*



# Epworth Awarded Four-



In June 2015, Epworth Children's Home was awarded national accreditation for four years by the Council on Accreditation (COA) for its outstanding children's resident group home programs and services. This accreditation reflects Epworth's long history of excellence and accordance with the highest levels of quality standards, as well as the agency's sound organizational infrastructure.

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an international, independent, nonprofit, human service accrediting organization. Founded in 1977, its mission is to work with human service organizations worldwide to improve service delivery outcomes by

developing, applying, and promoting high accreditation standards.

Earning national accreditation from an agency like COA is essential for nonprofits that strive to be the best in a given service area. Accreditation offers a unique distinction and attests that an agency has met the highest possible national standards for quality management and service delivery. According to Jennifer Flowers, founder and president of Accreditation Guru, Inc., "Earning accreditation demonstrates that a nonprofit is effectively managing its resources and providing the highest level of services to all stakeholders, including clients, staff and board of directors, donors, funders and regulators."

In order to earn a four-year accreditation, Epworth worked with Accreditation Guru, Inc. to prepare the agency to successfully participate in a rigorous COA peer review process that demonstrated the agency's commitment to offering programs and services that are measurable, accountable and of the highest quality. COA peer reviewers are trained and experienced individuals who volunteer their time to conduct site visits and assess the accurate implementation of the accreditation standards. They provide each organization with an objective, professional and quality review of their programs and services.

This latest recognition by COA adds to the list of indicators that Epworth Children's Home provides high quality service to its children and families.

# Year COA Accreditation

- Epworth was one of the first institutions in the nation that adopted, and whose staff members were trained in the **CARE model of Creating Conditions for Change** developed by the faculty of the Residential Child Care Project of Cornell University. The Residential Child Care Project at Cornell University has long been a leader in child and youth care training. The Project has brought together in a unified manner the best practices derived from the work and wisdom of the fields best practitioners, with the latest knowledge and framework derived from residential research. Epworth Children's Home continues to be a CARE agency.
- Epworth has also received **Charity Navigator's Four Star Rating** which is the highest rating an institution can receive. Charity Navigator is by far the nation's largest financial rating service for non-profit organizations. It awards four stars to institutions that meet exceptionally high standards for financial responsibility and transparency.
- Epworth is a long time **member of the United Methodist Association (UMA)** which represents over 380 health and welfare ministries in the US that provide loving care in the name of Christ and the church. The UMA family of institutions provides over two billion dollars in charitable care each year through 1,555 locations. UMA promotes, inspires, empowers, and recognizes excellence in healing and caring ministries.
- **Epworth's Performance and Quality Improvement Program** funded by The Duke Endowment is continuing to help Epworth reach its goal of becoming the recognized leader in the region in providing excellent care and achieving positive outcomes for children and families in its care.

The recognitions, standards, and codes of ethics associated with the organizations listed above reflect the philosophy that meeting standards and earning accreditation is not an end, but a means to an end. The endpoint to all of this is Epworth's stability, enhanced growth, and ability to measure results with an unwavering commitment to the rights, health, and safety of the people it serves.







**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.**

## *Leena Continues to Bloom*



Last year in *The Record*, readers learned about \*Leena's preschool graduation from the Epworth Early Intervention Center. Leena is still at Epworth as her family works towards reunification. Meanwhile she finished another year of school and over the summer, Leena enjoyed going to two summer camps with her cottage family. As school begins this year, Leena is officially in school with "the big kids" as she enters Kindergarten at Brennen Elementary School. She is doing exceptionally well at school and in the cottage at Epworth. She is very independent and requires very little assistance with her schoolwork—a big change from the shy and dependent girl who first arrived at Epworth nearly two years ago. Her positive attitude and contagious smile brings positive energy to everyone she meets.