

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Epworth Children's Home

Celebrating 125 Years

"Being at Epworth really grounded me." -Maria

As a teen girl, Maria is wise beyond on her years. She is a member of the ROTC, Youth Council, and this past semester she made all A's and B's on her report card. However, success has certainly not been handed to Maria, she has had to fight for it every step of the way. However, with the help of Epworth's Residential Program and her own hardworking spirit, Maria is thriving!

After originally being placed elsewhere, Maria made the decision to come and live at Epworth Children's Home. Although she loved her first placement dearly and enjoyed living there, Maria knew that Epworth would provide her with opportunities that it could not. She knew that it was an established place with the structure and programs she needed to propel her forward in life.

Maria talks about how her life before Epworth was less than perfect. She was making bad decisions and was not working toward her future or her goals, caught up in all the hard

parts of being a teen. The decision to come to Epworth was the first step in getting her life on the track she wanted to be on. Since coming to Epworth, Maria has done better in school than ever before and she even got a job to pay for classes to learn a second language that is not offered at her high school. She hopes to use this second language to pursue a career in the military. Maria says that she credits this turnaround to the programs that Epworth has in place, the staff that work so hard to make Epworth feel like home, and the change in her environment. While Maria has big goals and dreams, she is also enjoying where she is right now. She loves games and movie nights with her cottage and is looking forward to all the green bean casserole and mac and cheese to come during the holiday season.

Staff in Maria's cottage are so proud of her and cannot wait to see her continue to grow!



A Century and a Quarter *1896-2021*

Winter 2021

A Message from The Rev. John Holler President

One hundred and twenty-five (125) years ago on January 20th, 1896 the first two children came to live at Epworth Orphanage from Lynchburg, South Carolina. They arrived by train and lived in the only house on the campus, along with the superintendent, his family, other “orphans” as they were admitted, and the helpers as they were added as the population rapidly grew.

Thus, began a century and a quarter of service to children and families in South Carolina. During these one hundred-and twenty-five-years Epworth has grown, changed, and evolved and served children and families in a variety of ways as the times, circumstances, and resources have dictated. What has not changed is the commitment to serve all the children we can, as well as we can, with all the resources we can gather.

The story really began in earnest when the Rev. E. A. Wilkes wrote a letter to the Christian Advocate in early 1894 calling attention to the numbers of children who were facing poverty, wandering the streets, begging and stealing to get by, and the children whose fathers had died, and whose mothers had no means of support.

According to The Epworth Story written by Eva Grey Hutchins and Alan Keith-Lucas, The Rev. T. C. O'Dell proposed that an orphanage be established. His proposal drew strong support and at the Methodist Conference in November 1894. A committee was appointed and three days later the Annual Conference adopted the committee's proposal that an orphanage should immediately be established, and the orphanage was to be named Epworth Orphanage in honor of John Wesley's boyhood home in England.

After considering offers from the towns of Gray Court, Spartanburg, Rock Hill, Union, and Manning, the members of the 1895 Annual Conference decided to locate Epworth on 131.4 acres of farmland east of Columbia. The land was purchased for just over \$6,000, of which the City of Columbia contributed \$5,700 and promised to run a streetcar line, telephone service and electricity at a very moderate price.

Citizens, church congregations, civic organizations and business partners rallied to support the new mission, yet money was scarce and a poor economy in a poor state dictated that work for everyone was the order of the day. Epworth quickly became an orphanage-farm where much of the food and milk that was consumed was produced by the staff members and the residents. Order, work, religion, and academic instruction was thought to produce solid citizens. Thus, for many this became “the Epworth way” for rearing children. When older Epworth alumni gather for alumni weekends, they always tell stories about the life lessons of faith, responsibility, and hard work that they incorporated into their lives while at Epworth.

As time passed, innovative programs were introduced that emphasized skills that could be used to earn a living later in life. Carpentry, secretarial skills, monument making, electrical skills, and college scholarships were available. Throughout its history Epworth has emphasized producing productive citizens rather than simply feeding, clothing, and giving a child a place to live.

There have been thousands of young people who have called Epworth “Home”, and who have later settled in every part of South Carolina and beyond to make their marks in their communities. Also, many families have been reunited, children adopted, and generations of young people given opportunities they never dreamed of before.

Now, with the purchase of Epworth’s second campus of 19 acres and 14 buildings, and the establishment of the Institute for Child and Family Wellbeing, Epworth looks to the future as missional Hubs are being established across our state. These Hubs will enable children and families not only to be served on one of our two Columbia campuses, but also to be served in the communities in which they reside. Epworth is also moving “upstream” with services that help strengthen families and prevent children from having to leave their homes and schools for reasons where safety is not an issue.

During 2021 we invite you to join us in giving thanks for a fruitful 125 years as we look toward tomorrow and the next 125 years. From an idea, to a committee, to an orphanage-farm, to a children’s home, to a multifaceted organization that continues to change lives every day, Epworth has been true to its founders and its mission – the Mission of Epworth Children’s Home is to serve children, youth, and families through caring, safe, Christian communities where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self, and others is cultivated.

The Fonte Family - Adoption Story

The Fonte Family became a foster family through Epworth in 2018 and were placed with their son when he was just a newborn. While fostering their son, they kept a close relationship with his birth parents and kept them updated on all the milestones along the way. After two years of fostering, the adoption of their son was finalized! One of the most special things for the Fonte family has been the relationships that were built with their son’s birth family over the years. He has a whole team of people who love him dearly.

"When reunification was not able to happen and family placements were not available, we knew that being a permanent home for our son who we had a deep love and bond with would be ideal." - Mrs. Fonte

Mrs. Fonte talks about life as a multi-racial family and how adoption has impacted their family culture for the better.

"Because our family is a multi-racial family now, we are embracing our son's unique cultural and racial identities so we can support him well. We are learning about how his family celebrates various holidays, favorite meals and more so we can incorporate elements of that in our home as we raise him. We know that we must be committed to continually learning and improving in our roles as foster and adoptive parents, and as a multi-racial family."



Siblings Stay Together at Epworth

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Epworth received a call about a large sibling group that needed a safe space immediately. The sibling group was too large to be accommodated by one foster family and it was in the best interest of the children for as many of them to stay together as possible. Leaving the only home one has ever known is scary and having your siblings close by can help tremendously to ease that transition. Epworth was more than happy to step in and take the group! One infant sibling was able to be placed with an Epworth foster family and the other nine children were placed in our residential program.

Cottage staff was creative and worked tirelessly to provide a caring, fun, and age-appropriate care for each child in this sibling group. Toys were quickly shopped for, pajamas provided, and comforters with fun characters and favorite colors covered the beds. Staff brought out their favorite bedtime stories to read to the little ones and pulled out their best character voices. Cottage movie nights commenced with popcorn, candy, and comfy socks. Giggles and barbies covered the rooms and staff played more games of Candy Land, UNO and Monopoly than they had in years. The siblings made new friends and bonded with cottage mates of their own age. The children adjusted quickly and treated campus as if they had always been here.

Throughout the children's stay, Epworth was able to keep the siblings together, and the infant that was placed in the Epworth foster home came to visit often, keeping the siblings in each other's lives as much as possible. After a while, the siblings were able to be reunified with their family and Epworth was thankful to be a safe, loving, caring environment for the children to have while they were away from their parents. During their stay at Epworth, they were able to strengthen their family bond and return home without missing a beat and are home for Christmas with their whole family. Even though the children had left Epworth by Christmas time, Epworth was still able to deliver a few special Christmas presents to the family, which the parents were deeply grateful for.



Ty and Hanna Mentee and Mentor Relationship

When a Stokes Cottage Case Manager completed the mentor interview with Hanna, she wanted to match Hanna with Ty because of their shared connection to Bible Study and their shared faith. Hanna dedicated her time and energy to getting to know Ty and planning activities according to her interests while also encouraging Ty to step out of her comfort zone and try new things. As soon as she was able to take Ty off campus, they participated in a 6-week pottery class through the City of Columbia that gave them an opportunity to ease into a comfortable relationship together. They meet weekly and enjoy going out to eat, seeing a movie, visiting the Columbia Riverwalk and going to Soda City Farmers Market, to name a few of their favorite outings. Hanna has attended almost every extracurricular event that Ty has participated in, including chorus concerts, musicals, talent shows, and family day events on Epworth's campus; and she even came to spend time with Ty after her wisdom tooth was removed. She and Ty have developed a close bond, and during the COVID-19 pandemic Hanna has texted Ty consistently to check in since she cannot visit in person.

Ty has officially made the transition into her college career at Columbia College, and is doing well as she wraps up the first semester of her freshman year. Although it has been an unprecedented year, Ty is thankful for her relationship with Hanna!



I am continuing to learn that so much of mentorship is just friendship. I have loved getting to know Ty and always enjoy our time together, even if we're just walking loops around campus. I can't wait to watch her transition into college life!

– Hanna, regarding her relationship with Ty.

If you have an interest in becoming a mentor, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Beth Robinson. Beth can be reached by email at brobinson@epworthsc.org or by phone at 803-681-0304. We are looking to host virtual volunteer training as we adapt to maintain safety during this pandemic. Each child who has requested a mentor has the ability to be matched with an adult 21 years of age or older. Mentors share a one year commitment and meet with their assigned mentee for a minimum of four hours each month.

Rev. Jack C. Washington Endowed Fund established at Epworth Children's Home

Throughout his life and ministry, the Rev. Jack C. Washington was driven by a passion to help those in need – and he had a special place in his heart for children.

Whether it was a little girl standing at a bus stop on a frigid morning wearing no coat or socks, a hungry boy with no option for a healthy meal during the summer months when schools were closed, or a young man struggling to stay in school while taking care of his younger siblings – Rev. Jack was there for them all.

That commitment to helping the youngest among South Carolina's most vulnerable will continue beyond Rev. Jack's passing in 2019, thanks to the creation of The Rev. Jack C. Washington Endowed Fund at Epworth Children's Home.

Rev. Jack's family – including his spouse, Johanna Anderson Washington, and her children – established the fund to support the educational needs of the residents of Epworth.

"Jack was big and bad, but his weakness was for the children," said Johanna Washington, who herself was orphaned at birth. "Children would mellow him out in a flash. When Jack christened a child, his sermon to the parents would always be, 'You cannot push a chain, you have to pull it. If you pull a chain, it will go wherever you go.'"

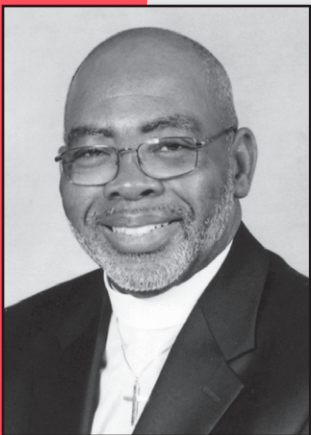
"Jack loved Epworth, and we hope others will help us continue to pull that chain with Jack by supporting his legacy through this endowed fund."

The Rev. John E. Holler Jr., Epworth's president and CEO, was Rev. Jack's longtime friend and colleague. In more recent years, they would josh each other about whether it was time to retire or not.

"He would flash that smile of his and say, 'I don't ever plan to quit!'" Rev. Holler recalled. "That was Jack: warm, approachable, dependable and always working to lift up those who needed a little help to get them through tough times – and he never quit.

"We are grateful for what Jack did for children and for Epworth during his ministry, and for his family's kindness in providing a way for others to extend his warm legacy of caring into the future."

Since 1896, Epworth Children's Home has been a place for children to grow, to learn and to be loved. Children ages 12 and older from severely stressed family systems come to Epworth to be safe and to receive education, counseling, medical care and spiritual enrichment.



Want to help?

To donate to The Rev. Jack C. Washington Endowed Fund, please:

- Go to epworthchildrenshome.org/give, set "Designation" option to "Other," and type in "The Rev. Jack C. Washington Endowed Fund."
- Mail a check payable to Epworth Children's Home – with "The Rev. Jack C. Washington Endowed Fund" in the memo line – to Epworth Children's Home, P.O. Box 50466, Columbia, SC 29250.

Blooming With Hope

For the Westharts, deciding to serve through foster care was a long time in the making. Raising their 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old twin boys in a culture and church that celebrated and championed foster families, the decision to foster was a family decision. Ultimately, the whole family agreed that fostering was something that they wanted to do. After a lot of prayer and family discussions, the Westharts were licensed with the Epworth upstate office as foster parents this year. They felt a specific calling to care for teens or teen moms. Quickly, after being licensed, Epworth called the Westharts with their first placement, Cassie, a 17-year-old girl with two children. For the Westharts, it was an easy yes. They had been praying for Cassie long before they ever knew her name.

On the very night that Cassie was placed, she was missing her biological mom whom she had not seen in a few months. After an emotional facetime call between Cassie and her biological mother, Mrs. Westhart and Cassie jumped in the car and drove a three-hour round trip on a weeknight so that Cassie could hug her mother in a McDonalds parking lot. It was an important and necessary sacrifice. On the return trip, Cassie expressed her gratitude for the visit and the sense of peace it gave her to be able to see her mother.

For the Westharts, life with Cassie and her girls is natural. The twin boys love two-year-old Chloe, and their 13-year-old daughter is building and growing a relationship with Cassie a little more every day. As for Cassie, she is blooming with hope. For the first time in her life, Cassie can see her future as bright and promising. She sees that a healthy family life in a loving home not only exists but is attainable for her. She is excited for the future with her family. She is thankful for the chance to break the cycle. Thanks to the Westharts, a family full of life and love is possible for not only her, but for the generations after her too.

The Westharts have also gone above and beyond for her family, reminding Cassie that they are all family now. Every Sunday, Cassie's biological family, siblings and their children, the father of her children, and anyone else is invited to attend church with the Westharts followed by a homecooked Sunday lunch. Mrs. Westhart describes every Sunday as a holiday, with laughter, memories, games, cooking and joy.

It is messy and loud and really good. It is family.



Every Child Is A Miracle

Cassie's newfound hope is made possible because of support for Epworth's Every Child Is A Miracle financial campaign. This campaign has allowed Epworth to expand its scope of services as well as its geographic outreach. The Westharts were licensed by Epworth's upstate foster care office and continue their walk as foster parents with the upstate foster care staff.

Thank you for helping us to help children and families like the Westharts and Cassie and her children. The Every Child Is A Miracle campaign allows Epworth opportunities to expand its services statewide while also ensuring its ability to serve families and children in the future. If you would like to learn more about helping with our Every Child Is A Miracle campaign, please contact John Holler (jholler@epworthsc.org) or Lisa Livingston Fusco (lfusco@epworthsc.org) at 803-256-7394.

We would like to recognize and thank those individuals, churches, businesses and organizations that have joined the Bishop's Committee for Children by giving a minimum of \$10,000 in support of the Every Child Is A Miracle Financial Campaign. These gifts were received by December 10, 2020.

Anonymous	Mr. and Mrs. Ladison L. Hamm	Mr. and Mrs. Kevin B. Marsh	Rev. and Mrs. Jerry E. Temple	Dominion Energy Charitable
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Gary and Rebecca Bernson	Rev. and Mrs. John W. Hipp	Cindy Nord	Barbara Ware	Shandon UMC
Clay and Marie-Claire T. Brittain	Rev. and Mrs. John E. Holler, Jr.	Rita and Tom Orr	Revs. Molly and Tom Wilkes	JWF Company LLC
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The Rev. John E. Holler, Jr.
President

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

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The mission of Epworth Children's Home is to serve children, youth and families through caring, safe Christian communities, where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self and others is developed.



Epworth is pleased to announce that Reverend Kenneth Middleton has joined us as Chaplain as of December 2020! Reverend Middleton comes to Epworth with a wealth of knowledge and experience working with youth.

Reverend Kenneth Middleton serves as the Pastor of Bluff Road United Methodist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He was appointed to this role in July 2019. Reverend Middleton also previously served as the youth pastor for the North Springs United Methodist Church in Sandy Springs, Georgia, working with students in 6th through 12th grade.

Reverend Middleton is dedicated to his entire community, helping people to see themselves in the Bible and affirming who they are as children of God. His work is particularly focused on the youth and the elderly and he is passionate about using his ministry to help bridge the generational gap and build mutual respect and love in the community. Reverend Middleton is an advocate for transformative social justice and is actively engaged in community projects focused on educating and advancing disenfranchised communities.

Reverend Middleton completed Bachelor of Science in Christian Ministries at Point University and is a graduate of Gammon Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Care and Counseling. He is a veteran of the United States Navy, serving from 1987 to 1997, during Desert Storm.

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