

The Record

News from Epworth Children's Home



Home for the Holidays

Often when people think of foster care, children's homes, and residential care, the first thing that comes to mind is the separation of a child from their family of origin. While walking through that separation is a large part of what happens in the different programs at Epworth, for reasons of safety and best interest, there is also another side of care that we get to be a part of, reunification. Reunification happens when a child's home is safe and stable for them to return home. It is often laced with big emotions, hope, and excitement. This past year, Epworth was able to witness an incredibly special reunification of father and son that will warm our hearts for many years to come.

For Andy*, his world was turned upside down in the early 2010s when his mother tragically passed away. The years that followed her death were

tumultuous and after a series of events, Andy was placed in foster care, then eventually at Epworth Children's Home. During these years, he did not see or have contact with his father. Andy's time at Epworth was incredibly beneficial, and he was able to receive care and counseling to help him work through the tragedy and heartbreak of the last nine years. However, Andy still greatly desired to see and know his father again and the hurt from not seeing him for the last nine years weighed heavily on him. Epworth, in partnership with the Department of Social Services, was able to find and reach out to Andy's father. One sunny Thursday afternoon, Mr. Barry*, Andy's father, received a phone call asking if he would be willing to bring Andy home. Mr. Barry was shocked and speechless and had only one question for the person on the other end of the line,

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Better Together: A Year of Community

Winter 2022
A Message from Beth Williams
President

As we celebrate the gift of our Savior and look toward the dawn of a new year, it is good to reflect on the transitions, challenges, and opportunities of the past year.

At Epworth, we place high value on the support for children that comes through community and connectivity, especially in our residential and foster care programs. With the rise of new variants of COVID-19, we continued for most of the year our pandemic practice of no group gatherings and no volunteers on campus. Staff and clients alike were impacted through personal illness, losses of family members, and the general loss of connectivity with each other.

Upon entering the Advent and Christmas season, we have slowly begun gathering at Epworth as a community again. We have been able to resume group gatherings and enjoyed our first Christmas tree lighting event in several years. It was wonderful to see the youth excited to be together and singing carols and sipping cocoa. Epworth even live streamed the event to our outposts and had staff from all over South Carolina participate. Several of our United Methodist churches blessed our staff across the state by providing hot cocoa bars in each location.

The campus is coming back to life again after what feels like hibernation. Volunteers (for outdoor projects only) have returned to spread cheer through campus landscaping and decorating for Christmas. Our youth received the blessing of shopping trips with donors such as the UofSC football team, a trip to the movies, and other events. The high school boys have been able to participate in the Methodist basketball league again and recently won their first game of the year. The youth were elated and proud to see their practice and hard work pay off. These small things make Epworth the community it is here in Columbia.

As we continue to grow our programs throughout the state, the Epworth community has blossomed outside of Columbia with the continued growth of the foster care program and the addition of our newest program, HOMEBUILDERS®. Epworth began working with this national model for family preservation and crisis stabilization last year. Beginning in the summer, we had teams in Charleston, Columbia and Greenville working with families and preventing out-of-home placement for children. Staff across the state are assisting families through a crisis and empowering them to be successful after we finish our intensive work in their home. Our church connections have provided tangible support to our clients through existing church programs that address basic needs.

Churches across the state have continued to offer direct support to our foster families. Foster families under quarantine received meals and groceries on their doorsteps from generous United Methodists. Invitations to church children's programs and community events are regularly extended to our foster families. Newly licensed families are receiving welcome baskets assembled by small congregations, and churches of all sizes are assembling "first night" bags for children newly placed. These gestures of kindness and care enhance the expert support given by our foster care staff, and both together help families continue the challenging vocation of providing a safe home environment for children.

An Independent Living Christmas

Epworth's Center for Independent Living focuses upon the needs and success of older residents who have graduated from high school yet are without family and community support to assist them as they learn to find jobs or continue their education. Often the Independent Living staff members are the only support system these older youth have. The need for this support can be important during the holidays, especially between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The holidays are difficult even for the adult clients in the Center for Independent Living. Hurt, frustration and anger at family separation looms at the surface and spills on to other clients and staff as the holidays arrived. I checked in frequently over the Thanksgiving weekend and reminded our excellent staff of our trauma informed training. The residents were calling, coming to the offices, and texting staff frequently about small things, seeking advice and comforting. The residents asked me to make them some brownies, which I did. One of the girls said quietly as she savored her snack, "I have not had a real brownie in years." It seemed like the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas were filled with little moments like this.

One evening over the Thanksgiving weekend, the Independent Living cottage was buzzing with holiday spirit. A big slumber party was happening in the girls' living room. Piles of blankets covered the girls sprawled on the couches. The staff and girls were talking excitedly while watching a movie. In the dining room, a different scene unfolded. The other staff member was giving a manicure to one of the girls. They were talking gently as our client soaked up individual attention.

The Life Skills Specialists caring for clients 24/7 are often unsung heroes, especially during the pandemic. We are so grateful for all they do for the residents, which is often seen only by God.

"Love's pure light" beamed on our IL residents this holiday season and indeed, all was calm; all was bright.

– Written by Laurie Brandes



A Year in Review



The Epworth Basketball Boys

“I can accept failure; everyone fails at something. But I can’t accept not trying.” – Michael Jordan

For the first time in a few years, Epworth’s Residential Program has formed a boy’s high school basketball team to play in the local church league. The games are held on Epworth’s campus or at other local United Methodist Churches. Despite none of the boys on the team ever playing organized basketball before, the boys and coach have rallied together, refusing to quit or stop trying. Although the learning curve was steep and hard work was going to be required, the team was ready to take on this new challenge.

After a few tough losses in the first couple games, it would be understandable if heads were hanging low and team moral was down. However, quite the opposite happened. The team approached their coach, Coach Matt, and asked if they could start practicing 7 days a week. They were highly motivated, humble, and ready to improve. The team got busy and started working on the basics – good defense, good communication, and most of all, good teamwork. Although some of the boys don’t get along very well off the court, once they step into the gym all those differences were put aside for the sake of the team.

In a conversation with Coach Matt he indicated that he was so proud of how far the boys have come since they first started practicing together. But rather than being blown away at the improvement he has seen in their shooting, defense, technical skills and speed – he is much more impressed with their attitudes. Before, during and after the game they have had excellent attitudes and sportsmanship, initiating shaking hands with the other team even after a loss, and maintaining great rapport with the referees. They have played as a team from start to finish, picking each other up when they were knocked down. And these improvements weren’t just seen on the court, but off the court as well. By placing the team first, the boys were motivated to attend all their study halls, stay out of trouble at school, and get all their schoolwork done in a timely manner so that they are able to continue playing. The impact of this team is being felt across campus, and two of the younger boys who aren’t old enough to join the team have joined as “team managers” to assist with practice, getting water, and learning the game.

The Epworth boys were able to pull out their first win on December 17th. They hustled, played impeccable defense, communicated well and played an excellent game of team basketball. They were ecstatic for their first win and it was a pleasure to be able to see the fruits of all their hard work come to fruition. After the big win, I was able to connect with one of the players to get his take on the big win. Jake* had this to say: “We had a rough start to the season, but we are really starting to turn it around. The keys to the first win were defense, communication, and playing as a team. Talk to each other and you will be successful.”

For the Epworth boys, this is just another tangible example of their perseverance. Life has continually thrown curveballs at them, and yet here they are. Practicing hard and moving forward, refusing to stop trying. While they may not go on to win a championship or play in the NBA, the skills they are learning on the basketball court will carry them for many years to come. No matter the outcome of the rest of the season, I believe I speak for all of Epworth when I say we are so proud of this team. Go Eagles!



Major Endowment Fund Established



Russell F. Powell was the oldest of four children and his father Claude was youngest of 13 children. Russell was reared by his parents Claude and Bettie Powell of Lyman, South Carolina. His mom grew up in Duncan, S.C. and after marrying Claude Powell she moved five minutes away from Duncan to Lyman to live 100 yards away from Ray and Mary Powell, who were Russell's grandparents.

Russell reports his father's parents and his mother's parents shared the same values of hard work, perseverance, trust in God, and giving back. They taught and modeled those values for their children. Russell also reported learning the value of money and thrift. Once, when he was a youngster, he was asked to clean out one of his grandfather's large chicken houses. Russell was just old enough to push a wheelbarrow. He worked for two long hot days cleaning the chicken house. After he cleaned and freshened the house and passed grandad's inspection, Russell

received his grandfather's thanks and a quarter. Russell was not all that pleased with his wages for two days of work and after he had walked back home, he told his father that he was not going to clean anymore chicken houses. His father responded, "Yes you will, if we tell you to." Russell didn't spend that quarter frivolously!

While growing up Russell worked in the peach orchard, maintained the areas around the pay-to-fish pond, and any other jobs that were to be done around the farm and home. Russell said with a smile, he learned it would be much easier just to play football than to stay around the farm in the afternoons. He excelled in football in high school and was awarded a full scholarship to play football at Carson Newman. His parents did not have the opportunity to go to college, so with great energy, Russell seized the opportunity to play football, and to major in math and physics.

After college Russell and his wife Connie shared many years together as they lived in several states and cities as Russell used his expertise in helping to keep power plants online and operating at peak capacity. He and Connie moved to Hartsville when Russell was assigned to the nuclear plant located there.

During Russell's career with energy and power generating plants he studied for and received his license to become a securities advisor. He then started a small investment company. Then, after he retired from his first career, he began to devote his time to the investment business. He grew the business into a successful enterprise and is now channeling some of that success into changing lives.

When asked why he chose Epworth as a recipient of some of the fruits of his business success he stated that both of his parents were enterprising, and both gave back to the community. He said they, Claude and Bettie, were church people. His mother played the organ at Zoar UMC and his father never missed church and held about every position there was to hold in the church. Russell is also a life-long Methodist. They were passionate about helping and making things better.

Russell also replied that over the years he had seen many people who did not grow up in stable environments. He had also seen it first hand as he was growing up when his parents would host children from Epworth during the children's summer vacations.

Russell concluded his statements by saying that in over 30 years in the securities business he had learned a lot about families, and one important thing he has learned is, "There are solutions." He also said that he has seen that "expansion is necessary, and we need to keep reaching – reaching a little further."

Russell Powell has created a permanent endowment fund: **The Claude and Bettie Powell Memorial Fund** in memory of his parents who taught him the great lessons of life that include faith, industry, generosity, and kindness. He also recognizes that Epworth Children's Home has been a great change agent for the past 125 years and he sees that continuing well into the future.

“Can I go get him right now?” The hope of being able to bring Andy home for Christmas was more than he could believe.

Shortly after Mr. Barry said yes to getting Andy, Epworth’s Case Manager Laurie was able to sit down with Andy and tell him about the new plan for reunification with his father. Andy had no words for Laurie, just tears of relief and hope. As soon as it was possible for the paperwork to be processed, Mr. Barry arrived at Epworth to pick up his son. The papers were signed, and a flurry of hugs and tears ensued. Andy’s grandmother was able to come as well and all she could say was prayers of thankfulness for the day. When the tears had slowed enough for Mr. Barry to speak – he took Andy’s face in his hands, looked him in the eyes, and simply said “You have been lost to me for nine years, but you will never be lost again.”



Although the road ahead is a long one, and Andy is still healing, his family is so grateful to have him back home. They are grateful to have the resources of Epworth and the Department of Social Services to ensure that Andy continues receiving the help that he needs. Andy has a better chance than ever to step into the light and lay aside the burdens he has been carrying, starting with being home for Christmas.

Better Together Continued

Growth in our foster care program remains on track with some surprises as well. Unexpectedly, we have added a new foster care office in Rock Hill to serve the upper counties of the Midlands region. Although York County and its neighboring counties are a growing area, it was not identified for a new office in 2021. While not part of our original plan for expansion, the level of inquiries from potential foster parents was great enough to warrant the opening of this office. Bethel United Methodist Church hosts our offices. This congregation has adopted our foster care staff and treats them like part of the family. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the staff in their Bethel office, and one of the church’s most beloved members, Ms. Ruth, welcomed me with hugs and some wonderful baked goods. It is this display of love and kindness that we see throughout the state of South Carolina.

As we look to 2022, we know that our community will continue to grow. We are already working with churches in Beaufort County to bring foster care and counseling services to the Low Coastal region of the state. St. Andrew by Sea United Methodist Church has graciously offered us space to continue building our programs and serve the surrounding communities.

As we continue to navigate the challenges of the pandemic world, I am thankful for the many opportunities before us to make a difference in the lives of children and families in our state. And in this season of joy, I am deeply grateful for the generosity and joyful offerings of our volunteers, donors, and church partners. I am excited for what the new year holds!

The Epworth Foster Care Support Network

Epworth is proud of our close connection with United Methodist churches and celebrates the ways that congregations are supporting foster families and the children in their homes. On Friday, December 17, a newly licensed family had a young child placed in their home. On Saturday, December 18, a church responded to a request for support of the child. Early the following week, a Sunday school class provided clothes and Christmas gifts for the little boy as well as some additional support for the family. Since Christmas, the pastor has checked on the family to see if they have ongoing needs. In this very difficult time for the child, the family was able to focus on him and his needs without having to scramble at the last minute to provide a positive Christmas moment in the midst of the child’s trauma. Our partnership with churches means that support can come at just the right time.

-Rev. Kathy James, Director of Church Relations



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Children's Home

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Beth Williams
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.

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