

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## *Rising to the Challenge*

Growing up Natalie lacked a stable home life and dependable role models. At 16 years old, Natalie found herself making bad decisions and she became pregnant. Upon hearing the news of the unplanned pregnancy, her family asked her to leave home and suddenly, she no longer had a place to live. She was placed in the state's foster care system. Natalie had hopes and dreams to graduate high school and provide a life for herself and her unborn son, but without a place to call home, she found herself alone and scared.

When Natalie's case manager, Mallory Pike with Epworth's Foster Care Program, received her file, she wondered where she could place a now 17-year-old with a baby. It would take an extraordinary individual to open their home and heart to a teenager and her son, Kayden.

Ms. Denise Smalls, a caring and dedicated foster parent in the Epworth Foster Care Program, immediately

came to Mallory's mind. Ms. Smalls had recently retired from the airline industry and most notably had recently transitioned 14-month-old twins to their forever home. Her emotions were a little fragile as she worked to navigate her new normal without the robust toddlers under her care. Mallory reached out to Ms. Smalls, and she listened intently to Natalie's situation. Despite living in the same region, Mallory did not expect Ms. Smalls to say yes. Her foster care placements in the past were always for children under the age of two. Little did Mallory know that Natalie's life drew a parallel to Ms. Smalls' early adult life. Ms. Smalls was willing to rise to this unique challenge.

"I found myself in a similar situation as Natalie when I was a teenager," said Ms. Smalls. "I was a young mother of two and homeless. But a village surrounded me and my children and helped me to get established. I felt called to mentor and guide Natalie to be an

*Continued on page 7*



# Supporting Kinship Caregivers

Fall 2022

A Message from Beth Williams  
President

September is declared Kinship month in South Carolina. You may be asking yourself what does that mean and what does it have to do with Epworth? September is the time of year where we celebrate grandparents and others who have stepped forward to care for children and youth, often without any financial assistance or resources. Specifically, kinship care refers to a temporary or permanent informal or formal placement in which a relative (such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle), or a non-related adult, has assumed the full-time care of a child whose parents are unable to do so. Frequently, these kinship caregivers have an existing close relationship or bond with the child(ren) for whom they choose to provide care.

The primary purpose of placing a child with a kinship caregiver is to maintain a child's familial, cultural, and community ties, to provide safety and stability, and to enable a child to live in the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, trauma may be lessened with youth who are placed with kin caregivers as they are often able to stay connected with or be placed with their siblings. Across South Carolina, over 69,000 children were in kinship care placement between 2018-2020 (KIDS COUNT data). This number by far supersedes any other placement type in our state.

Since Epworth's beginnings, we have worked with all types of families, including kin caregivers. Over the past few years, this service has increased in various ways. When speaking with kin caregiver support groups, they have shared that, as families, they have many needs. Although, some may need financial support, many need therapeutic services for the child(ren) in their care. Epworth is able to meet these needs in several areas. Our Center for Counseling, based in Columbia, provides individual psychotherapy and family psychotherapy. Our trained counselors are credentialed in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy (TF-CBT) as well as specialized training in other treatment modalities. We recognize that kinship care brings unique challenges for the children, youth, and families; therefore, our staff are trained to meet the needs of these families. In addition to counseling, we offer Circle of Parents® mutual self-help groups where kin caregivers come together and navigate daily struggles and support one another through their concerns. These anonymous groups are led by parents and focus on improving family functioning through the sharing of parenting strategies. They share their stories and learn from one another's experiences.

Epworth also offers other methods of support through our partnership with the United Methodist Churches across South Carolina. Located in the different regions where we have programs, several churches house a Resource Closet where kin caregivers may have access to many tangible items such as diapers, car seats, clothes, household goods and other resources. Kin caregivers who need resources and tangible items of support may be connected to a Resource Closet by reaching out to Epworth.

Finally, we want to take a moment to appreciate our licensed kinship foster homes. We are grateful for all who have made the decision to open your home to a child in need. Although many kin caregivers are not licensed foster parents, there are a growing number of licensed kinship foster homes in this state. Many kin caregivers would not be able to provide the needed care for their relative children without the financial support that comes with being a licensed foster parent. One of our kinship foster parents is spotlighted in this copy of The Record. Mrs. Sanders, our kin foster parent, admits "fostering is the hardest, messiest things we've ever done. It is also the most sanctifying experience that points us to our need for a Savior and the hope we have in Jesus."

We will continue to celebrate our kin families throughout the year and want to thank each of you who make it possible to support them daily. They make a huge difference in enriching and stabilizing the lives of the children for whom they care.

# Kinship Care Testimonial

At Epworth Children's Home, we celebrate and support all of the kinship families who protect and nurture younger family members and family friends! One of Epworth Children's Home's kinship foster parents, Mrs. Sanders, recently gave this powerful testimony:

"My husband and I felt called to fostering and started the licensing process a little over a year into marriage. We then found out we were expecting and decided to take our time with the licensing process. One month before our son was born, we got a call about a kinship placement. The child went to a temporary foster home while we finished our license and had our first baby. One month into parenting our firstborn, we welcomed our first foster placement, a 4-year-old girl. Over time, we were able to build a relationship with our daughter's birth mother, who is a relative of mine. Since adopting our daughter, we have continued that relationship through phone calls and visits. Our daughter, who is now 7 years old, confidently tells people that she has 2 moms and a dad in her life."



## *Epworth's Cottage Partner Program: Building Faithful Relationships*

At Epworth, Cottage Partner Groups host a variety of activities allowing for each member of the group to develop a lasting relationship with our youth. Groups consisting of five or more adults ages twenty-one and older can elect a group leader to be the contact person between the group and our Office of Volunteer Services. Once required background checks and training are completed, groups waste no time in creating their plans and date commitments to support their assigned cottage. The Office of Volunteer Services asks each Cottage Partner Group to commit to a minimum of four visits each year, preferably one each quarter. Additional visits and services are also part of the experience, and groups are asked to visit their cottage assignment monthly.

Are you interested in building a volunteer group and/or joining a Cottage Partner Group already established on campus? The possibilities are immense for every Cottage Partner Group, and we work together to ensure that each group will have a memorable service experience. Diversity and inclusion are vital, and volunteer talents are welcome and encouraged at Epworth. Furthermore, relationships are at the heart of the Cottage Partner Group vision. Epworth invites our supporters and friends to take the first step by creating or joining a Cottage Partner Group, and the holidays or a new year is a great time to begin. The opportunities to provide special programs and opportunities for Epworth's youth are abundant, and our volunteers can be assured that the time and effort given in volunteer service will impact our youth for years to come. We look forward to hearing from many of you who want to help enrich the lives of our Epworth residents through volunteer service. Contact Beth Robinson in the Office of Volunteer Services at 803-256-7394 for more information.





# *Forever Grateful: Oliver's Journey at Epworth's Early Intervention Center*

When Oliver was just a few months old, he had already become a part of the Epworth family. As an infant, Oliver was experiencing developmental delays, and his parents sought out statewide services through the South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. Through Epworth's Home-Based Early Intervention Program, an early intervention specialist began to visit Oliver in his home to provide personalized services that were tailored to his natural environment. Oliver met weekly with his specialist alongside his parents, and they were taught to utilize tools they already had at home to help in the progression of his development.

When Oliver was 15 months old, he started attending preschool on campus at The Epworth Early Intervention Center (EEIC). Oliver's parents wanted him in an environment where he could socialize with peers his age as they knew this would aid in his development. In a lot of ways, life hasn't been easy for Oliver, especially related to his health. According to his mother, Megan, he has had numerous medical issues, many of which have greatly affected his size. He also has hearing difficulties and is mostly non-verbal. The idea of Oliver attending a mainstream school was terrifying for his parents. The staff at the EEIC worked with Oliver's parents so that he could stay there for as long as it was developmentally appropriate. During the six years that Oliver attended the preschool, the staff worked in partnership with his parents to prepare Oliver for the transition to "big" school.

Oliver is now a very silly, smart and courageous 8-year-old. When reflecting on the years that Oliver spent at Epworth's Early Intervention Center, his mom and dad admit that they had full confidence in the staff loving him and keeping him safe. As a non-verbal child, Oliver could not verbalize what he'd done at school each day, so his teachers came up with a plan. Daily notes were sent home from his teachers, and it allowed Oliver's parents to see into his world and communicate with him about his time away from home. That opportunity to connect with Oliver in a way most parents so effortlessly can communicate with their children was an invaluable component of the preschool program. Also, knowing that Oliver was being loved and nurtured, just as much as he would be at home, gave his parents a brief respite each day. "We could always turn to the staff at the EEIC for advice or support when it came to Oliver's care and felt nothing but support and love from them for ourselves as well," said Megan.

Oliver's parents are forever grateful to the "many angels who have helped shape our boy" in his growth and development. We are all excited to see what the future holds for Oliver in this next chapter!



# A Legacy of Care



Charles Hutchins had a most interesting and productive life. He was raised in Oconee County, South Carolina. He served his country in combat during the Korean War in the U.S. Army. He was awarded a Bronze Star for Heroic Service and a Purple Heart among other commendations. Charles was licensed to preach in 1956. He earned a BA from Furman University, and then a Master of Social Work from Florida State University. He was then employed as a social worker at the Holston United Methodist Home for Children in Greenville, Tenn.

In 1973 Charles accepted a position as Associate Executive Director at Epworth Children's Home. He became Executive Director (title later changed to President, CEO) in 1978. Epworth, under Charles Hutchins leadership, began the transformation from an orphanage to a children's home that provided an array of services based on the latest research and child and family care methodology.

After 22 excellent years of service to Epworth, Charles, and his wife Eva Grey Hutchins (Gay) returned to the Holston Home where he served on the staff in several positions including Director of Development, until his death at 90 years of age.

Charles left an amazing legacy of care. He was a tireless worker for children and families. He was a pioneer in his field and was an exemplary churchman. He consulted with dozens of other institutions that provided child care services and he was highly respected by the other professionals in his field. Charles, with the loving support of his wife Gay, lived life as an ambassador of Christ in the best possible way.

He also enjoyed speaking to groups about opportunities to contribute to God's work through family ministries. He also loved church meetings, even Annual Conference gatherings. Most people endure Annual Conference. Charles treated it like an exciting vacation!

He was a fund raiser beyond compare. He didn't raise funds for children by manipulation or guilt. He was authentic and he appealed to the best part of human nature. It is estimated that he raised over \$100 million for the institutions he led and cared for. During his 70 years of ministry, he served thousands of children, youth, and families and placed hundreds of children in adoption.

Charles, when speaking to a group of potential donors, would sometimes say, "We all have at least one thing in common. We are all going to die." He would pause and then say, "And we can't take anything with us, so make out a will. In that will, make sure to take care of your family, leave something to your church, and leave something to the little children at Epworth."

Rev. Hutchins practiced what he preached. He left a legacy of care everywhere he went. He also left a financial legacy to Epworth. Some years ago, he purchased a life insurance policy with Epworth as the beneficiary. Each quarter a check would arrive at Epworth from Charles to pay the premium on the policy. The proceeds from that policy will now become part of the Epworth Endowment Fund as a permanent legacy of care from a person who continues to help children, youth, and families, even in his absence. He is now listed as a member of the Society of 1896 that honors those who have remembered Epworth in their wills or estate plans with a gift of \$25,000 or above.

Thank you, Charles, for a lifetime of compassion and service and for "remembering the children of Epworth".

For information about the Epworth Society of 1896, contact Lisa Fusco at [lfusco@epworthsc.org](mailto:lfusco@epworthsc.org) or John Holler at [jholler@epworthsc.org](mailto:jholler@epworthsc.org).



# Become a Foster Care Church

There are many goals for the church in mission. We want to both introduce people to Jesus Christ and to help those who have already met him grow in their relationship. We want to care for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs with integrity. And we want to engage our communities in ways that grace them with healing, wholeness and transformation.

Churches partnering with Epworth to develop foster care ministries are beginning to see the fruit of this mission in the lives of the missionaries as well as the lives of the children and families they serve.

Bethany United Methodist in Summerville hosts the “Lowcountry Hub” of Foster Care offices on their property. They have stepped into this ministry by responding to the needs of foster families in the Summerville area and beyond. One ministry participant said that seeing and interacting with foster parents and children when delivering meals made her feel “alive” in mission. Another tells the story of picking up a tray of Kings Hawaiian rolls on impulse on the way to deliver a meal. When one of the children unwrapped the rolls and went to town, she made sure from then on, that the family received “MEGA” trays of these favorite rolls! “My takeaway,” she said, “is that the things we take for granted can be just golden to others.”

Stallville United Methodist, also in Summerville, hosts one of two church-run Lowcountry Resource Closets for Epworth’s foster families and community kinship caregivers. Trudy Easton coordinates this ministry on behalf of the church. Trudy has always been passionate about ministry with children and families. “As a former pediatric nurse, I saw some of the most challenging situations in providing safe and loving homes for children,” she said. “The foster parents are inspirational in opening their homes to children in our community, and knowing that we can be a small part of supporting these families reminds me to be grateful for the opportunity we have to share our faith through this ministry.”

Wesley United Methodist in Columbia offered a Parents Afternoon Out for our Midlands foster families and their church members in August. Rev. Tiffany Knowlin said that Wesley United Methodist has had a history of adoption and fostering within the congregation. “We are thrilled to be in a relationship with Epworth and foster families as it reminds us that children, family, and relationships are not limited to biology,” she said. “Our effort to support foster families strengthens our faith as we seek to look outside of ourselves and consider the needs of others. We strive to love our neighbors and impact lives for the Kingdom.”



If your church has the desire to connect with children and families in your community in life-changing ways, we can help. The first step is to pray. Ask God to help you discern your gifts to meet the need of foster families for support and connection. The next step for a congregation wanting to develop a foster care ministry involves an internal assessment or “look in the mirror.” What are the things that the congregation already does well? What is the congregation known for in the community? Are you a Pumpkin Patch or Trunk-or-Treat church? Are you a church full of good cooks or are you mostly a drive-thru, take-out congregation? Determining what you do well, will help your congregation develop a plan to support foster families in your community.

If your congregation is interested in partnering with Epworth to support foster parents in your area, please contact Rev. Kathy James, Director of Church Relations 803-256-7394 or [kjames@epworthsc.org](mailto:kjames@epworthsc.org).

independent young lady and most importantly, a mom. Natalie's circumstance touched my heart."

Epworth's Foster Care Team placed Natalie and Kayden in Ms. Smalls' home this past summer. It was that day, that Ms. Smalls went from being passionate about only fostering younger children, to helping Natalie invest in herself and her future as a mother. Natalie lacked a reliable role model in her life, and she knew very little about taking care of herself or her son. "I gravitate to someone trying to do the best they can with their life, but they can't help their circumstances," said Ms. Smalls.

Ms. Smalls began the process of teaching Natalie to live independently and work towards her future. Over the past six months, they set goals for both personal and parenting achievement. From basic budgeting skills to balancing life as both a teenager and a mom, Ms. Smalls guides Natalie every step of the way. Living with Ms. Smalls is the first step in getting her life back on track.

Placing tremendous importance on academics, Ms. Smalls watches Kayden as Natalie attends high school during the day. Recently, Natalie started her first job. Natalie is saving money for an apartment and maintaining good grades at school. Kayden is a very busy, talkative 1-year-old. He loves attention and is very affectionate. Kayden will crawl up beside case manager, Mallory Pike when she visits the home. Under Ms. Smalls' leadership, Natalie learns fundamental parenting skills to help provide structure and stability for her son. In return, Natalie respects Ms. Smalls and models the parenting behavior that Ms. Smalls teaches her.

Recently, Natalie set a goal for herself to graduate in May and transition to an apartment in an independent living program. Natalie plans post-graduation to attend Midlands Technical College where she hopes to enter the Certified Nursing Assistant program. Once Natalie acquires her certificate, she plans to pursue a health care career. Ms. Smalls' greatest desire is to see Natalie reach these goals and overcome the challenges from her childhood, just like she prevailed as a young mother facing homelessness.

Ms. Smalls is proud of Natalie's accomplishments and cannot wait to see her continue to grow as an individual and a mom. As Ms. Smalls stated, "It takes a village," and thanks to her dedication as a foster parent, coupled with your support of our Foster Care Program, Epworth can help teens like Natalie change the trajectory of their life, breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect, and helping them to become successful, responsible adults---and in Natalie's case, guiding them to become wonderful parents, as well.



## Christmas Giving

The holiday season will be here before we know it. We are so thankful for your generosity to Epworth during this time of year. We ask that you please send in any honorariums and memorials on or before December 1st so that we are able to ensure timely delivery of the card to the recipient. You can also make honorarium and memorial donations online at [www.epworthchildrenshome.org](http://www.epworthchildrenshome.org) to avoid any delays.

Thank you for remembering Epworth during this Christmas season.





**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](http://www.epworthchildrenshome.org)

Beth Williams  
President

© 2021 Epworth Children's Home

*\*Children's names and pictures 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 caring, safe Christian communities, where hurts are healed; hope is nurtured; and faith in God, self and others is developed.**

A thoughtful way to honor or remember a friend or loved one is with a gift to Epworth. The honoree or designee will receive a card notifying him or her of your very kind gift. The form below is made available for your use.

My gift is in ☐ Honor or ☐ Memory of:

(Check one. Please print clearly the way you wish all names to be listed.)

Please notify:

(Addresses required for acknowledgements.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
By

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip

Please include this form when sending in your donation. Donations may be mailed to  
PO Box 50466, Columbia SC 29250. Thank you!

Follow us on Social Media



Epworth Children's Home



@epworthchildrenshome



@epworthch