

# The Record

*News from Epworth Children's Home*



## *Lily Looks to the Future*

Many people recall childhood as a time of safety and comfort when mom or dad took care of everything.

Eighteen-year-old Lily carries starkly different memories of childhood.

"My dad was hugely addicted to alcohol," Lily said. "He would promise to work and pay the bills, and he'd have a job for a couple of weeks, but then he would quit or get fired and use most of the money he'd made on weed and alcohol."

Lily's childhood was also shaped by the chaos and trauma of homelessness. Her family moved from a northern state to South Carolina when she was 8 years old. In SC, she attended school for a few months until eviction forced her to enroll in a different school. This happened repeatedly.

Sometimes the family stayed in a motel, other times with acquaintances or in a shelter.

In the last home the family lived in, the water heater barely worked and didn't produce enough warm water for Lily and her brother to take regular baths or wash clothes. Lily remembers going to school in dirty clothing and being bullied by other children as a result.

She was a very bright child, but by seventh grade, she was failing most of her classes.

One day the principal pulled her and her brother out of class to introduce them to social workers with the S.C. Department of Social Services.

"I knew right away that they were taking us," Lily said. "I was anxious thinking about having to live with other kids, and it was scary going somewhere unfamiliar."

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## Journeys

Fall 2023

A Message from Beth Williams  
President and CEO

We use the word “journey” in a variety of ways in our lives, and when we stop to think about it, our lives are comprised of all kinds of journeys, some large and some small, some tangible, some inspirational. However, many of the children and families we serve at Epworth are on journeys in the larger sense—journeys that will take them out of despair and unhappiness into lives where they can find comfort, strength, safety, and self-reliance. Helping those we serve succeed on this journey is a major component of our work at Epworth.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once made a prophetic statement when he said, “If you can’t fly, then run. If you can’t run, then walk. If you can’t walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving.” These words fit our mission at Epworth perfectly. Children and families come to us from all stages in their life’s journey; some of them can’t “walk” when they come to us; some cannot even “crawl.” But it is our mission, using Dr. King’s words, to “keep them moving” toward success and happiness in their lives, providing them with the programs and services that can enable them to move confidently along in the journey of life.

Christ is at the forefront of our work, and our ability to give safety and sustenance to those who come to Epworth for our help is aided immeasurably with Christ’s guidance at the forefront. He is there in all that we do to help us understand how to work with those who can’t symbolically walk or even crawl right now; He is present to guide us, allowing us to be a vehicle of assistance to others through His presence and His teachings. Epworth’s focus on helping children and families to one day “learn to fly” is deeply rooted in our faith and our belief that Christ is walking along with us, as well as those we serve, giving all of us His loving care and His grace.

You will see Christ’s indelible presence in our work at Epworth as you read the articles in this edition of The Record. You will have an opportunity to read about how the journey in life of many we serve is being transformed in wonderfully positive ways, through Epworth’s programs and initiatives. You will read about children and families whose journeys in life are moving forward, some of them inching along, some of them flying, but all gaining the help they need to take those steps that will eventually lead to happy, healthy lives.

A perfect example of helping someone learn to “crawl and then walk” comes in the story of a woman who was helped by Epworth’s Homebuilders program. An in-home service in which a specialist from Epworth works with individuals and families one-on-one in their homes to help establish stability and avert crisis, Homebuilders provided service to a woman who had been abused for most of her adult life. She became paralyzed with fear, filled with emotional instability, and was afraid to go outside of her house, even though her abuser was no longer present. Going into her yard, to her mailbox, or to venture much farther than her front door was impossible for her. Her intense fears hampered her role as a mother to her daughter, a child who also had never really left the house. Homeschooled by her mother in a haphazard sort of way, never taken to the doctor for regular check-ups, never allowed to interact with children her own age, the daughter was living a severely restricted life that was a mirror of the mother’s.

Gradually, over time, with the direct assistance and intervention of the Homebuilders specialist in a concentrated, focused program of support and guidance, this woman began to emerge back into life, overcoming the abject fear that had locked her into a life of seclusion from which she could not seem to escape. Eventually, she and her daughter were able

to leave the house, go outside, venture to the grocery store, and eventually even go to a shopping mall. She first had to crawl, then walk, but she has now been able to set out on her real journey in life. Epworth, through Christ's loving guidance, helped to get her on this path of revitalization.

Dr. King wisely once gave this advice: "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." We at Epworth are helping many children and their families take lots of "first steps," steps taken in faith and with the

knowledge that they will lead to a promising future. With Christ's ever-present love and direction, and with the support that many of you have provided to us over the years, we will continue to help those who once could only "crawl" find their wings to eventually be able to "fly."

Thank you for all you do to help Epworth Children's Home in our mission to provide guidance and assistance to children and families on their own individual journeys to successful, happy lives.

## Gratitude Leads to Open Hearts, Open Home

Ten years ago, Rock Hill resident Hayley Owino's son Gordon was diagnosed with a complex heart and lung disease right after his first birthday. Doctors told Hayley and her husband Arnold that their son needed a heart and lung transplant, but that he could not survive the surgery.

"We refused to accept that, and we took him to a top research hospital, where doctors were able to perform lifesaving open heart surgery," Hayley said. "Gordon is now 11 years old."

The couple channeled their love and gratitude for their son's survival into the creation of a non-profit that helps families with children who have the same health condition as Gordon. In addition, they became licensed to be foster parents through Epworth in 2022.

"We wanted to help children in need, and we knew that having a child in our home would allow us to make the biggest difference," Hayley said.

Because Hayley spends many hours a week running the Gordon Owino Heart Foundation and Arnold works long hours at the bank and the children are busy with sports and other activities, the family at first told Epworth they could take a very young child, but for no more than six weeks.

They were a bit shocked when within days of becoming licensed, they received a call from Epworth – a newborn baby girl needed care immediately. Would they take her?

"It was just after Christmas when they called us," Hayley said. "The baby had been born on Christmas Day."

Hayley said she had four hours to prepare for the infant's arrival. She had no diapers, no formula, nothing in place for a newborn.

"But the children were excited," Hayley said. "Our youngest child had begged us for a little sister for a long time. What better Christmas present for everyone than a newborn baby."

The baby went through withdrawals due to exposure to drugs while in the womb, so the first months were challenging. But the entire family fell "head over heels in love with her," Hayley said. The initial six-week time limit the couple had set came and went, and the baby has now been with the family for nine months.

Hayley and Arnold are deeply grateful that they said yes to Epworth when the call came. Hayley said the support of Epworth foster care staff has helped immensely in dealing with both the practical needs of infant care and the emotional ups and downs of fostering.

Hayley knows – and as a mom, appreciates – that family reconciliation is the goal of foster placements. But for foster parents, "the uncertainty can at times feel crippling," she admits. She said they continue to lean on their faith, courage, and resolve just as they did when their son was facing life threatening surgery, focusing on the things that are within their control and turning the rest over to God.

"We know that God brought her to us, and we remind ourselves that God loves her even more than we do," Hayley said. "We know that we were called to give her the unconditional love she deserves and to make her feel safe and loved in these first months of life which are so very important."

# *This is What Love Looks Like*

**E**ight-year-old Dena's temper tantrums frightened everyone who witnessed them, said Jennifer, a 30-year-old sign language interpreter who, along with her husband, Rick, took Dena and three of her siblings into their modest home in 2022.

"Even the neighbors could hear her screaming," Jennifer said.

A year earlier, Jennifer and Rick had met Dena's 18-year-old sister Lacy through the church where they serve as volunteer youth ministers. Over time, Lacy confided in the couple about her difficult home situation.

Jennifer and Rick learned that Lacy, her 5-year-old brother, and 8- and 12-year-old sisters sometimes went without food.

"Lacy, the 18-year-old, was increasingly despondent," Jennifer said. "She told me things that I had to report to DSS. Once we got to know her, she begged us to let her come live with us. Around that same time, our minister happened to give a sermon about all the different ways to serve God, and he said something like 'some of you may have a spare bedroom that you might open up to someone in need.' Rick and I heard that as a call. Soon – with the mother's full permission – we ended up taking Lacy in, and within the next few months, the three younger children as well."

Because Jennifer and Rick took in the children before the children were removed from the home by DSS, they did not qualify for any financial subsidies to help pay for the children's care as they would have had they

gone through a foster licensing process. They cared for the children anyway. Their goal was to show the four siblings "this is what love looks like, what a Christian family is like."

"My husband especially wanted to find a way to help these kids," Dena said. "He had been terribly abused as a child and he was saved by his aunt and uncle and some good people he met through a church when he was a teen. He identified with the kids and wanted to help them the way he had been helped."

But years of a troubled homelife had left their mark. In addition to Dena's disturbing temper tantrums, the 5-year-old lied habitually and had other behavioral problems. The 12-year-old behaved defiantly and manipulatively. All three of the younger children behaved in disrespectful ways to Jennifer and Rick.

The children found it especially easy to ignore Rick because he is deaf.

"When you are talking to a person with a hearing impairment, you need to look at them when you are speaking so they can read your lips," Jennifer said. "When Rick was trying to participate in conversations with the kids, especially when he would try to correct the 12-year-old, she would just refuse to look at him, essentially leaving him out of everything. The younger two children started doing the same thing."

Jennifer struggled to set boundaries and rules and enforce consequences. While she conferred with Rick on how to handle the kids, he felt less and less connected to the children as the months went by. Increasingly, attempts to correct one child would spiral into upsetting family-wide arguments.

"Eventually, we both just felt overwhelmed," Jennifer said. "We didn't know what to do to fix the behavioral problems. We didn't want to turn the kids over to DSS or send them back to their other home, but we were at the end of our rope. We reached out to DSS to ask if there was any help they could provide."

The DSS caseworker offered to connect Jennifer and Rick with an in-home intensive family counseling service offered by Epworth called HOMEBUILDERS®. Soon after, Epworth counselor Nyasha Reeder began working with the family. For the next six weeks, she spent 10 hours a week with the family in their home.

"Ms. Reeder was a gamechanger," Jennifer said. "She was so lovingly direct, relatable, and a Christian, and

*Continued on next page*



she instantly got the kids' attention. She told them the truth – that our new little family was in danger of self-destructing. She said, 'I'm here to help you keep your family together.' She made a really big impact on the children, and on us."

Epworth HOMEBUILDERS® counselors like Nyasha sit down with the entire family on each visit. The counselor assesses each individual family member's strengths and negative behavioral habits, then helps the family identify the underlying issues fueling conflict, bad behavior and chaos. From there, the counselor works with them to come up with a list of individual and family goals and very specific plans to reach the goals.

"One of the first things she did, and she reinforced this constantly, was she gave us all a mantra – stop, think, then react," Jennifer said. "

Teaching the family to reword how they expressed hurt feelings or anger or disappointment to one another was important, Jennifer said. Nyasha gave family members scripts to read out loud whenever they became upset. This technique helped both the children and the parents learn constructive, effective, and loving ways of communicating.

Setting clear, non-emotional consequences and positive reinforcements for actions was another important part of the plan Nyasha helped the family create and follow.

Nyasha also talked to the children at length about Rick, to help them understand how he felt being shut out of family discussions. She gave the children an assignment each week to learn and practice a sign language phrase with Rick. As the weeks went on and the children learned a few phrases, it sparked their curiosity to learn more. Rick began teaching them.

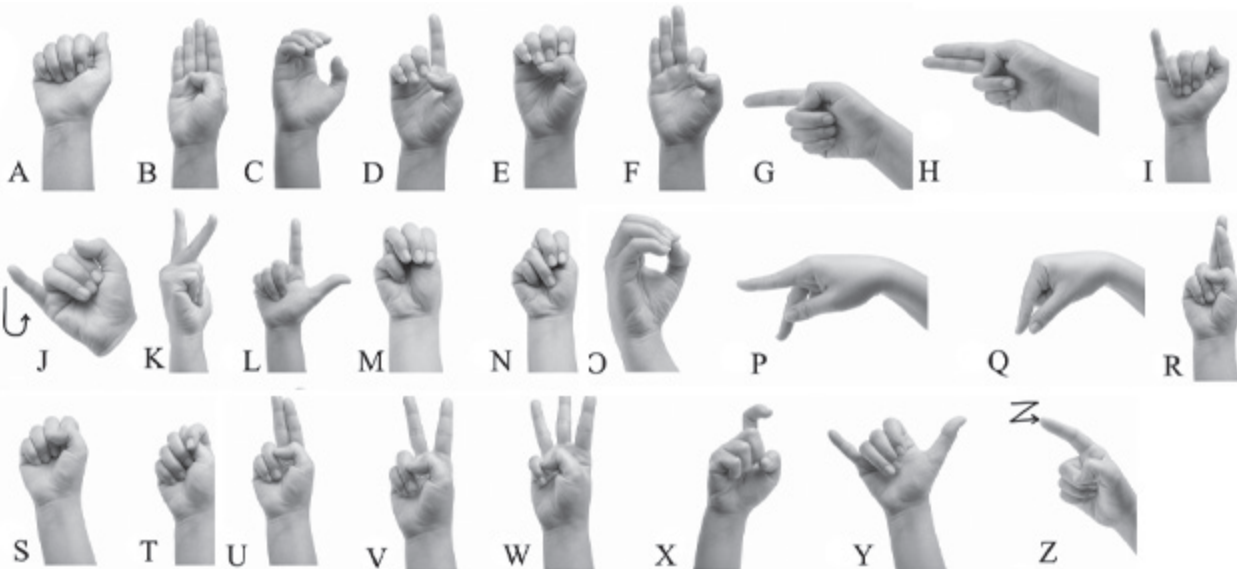
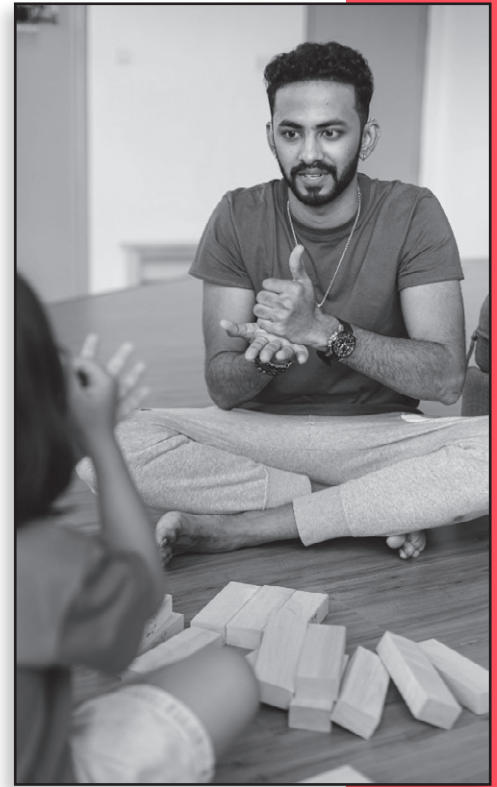
By the end of the six weeks, the family was eating meals together every day, speaking sign language to

one another, choosing their words to each other carefully, going out outings, and whenever upset, pausing to think before reacting.

"Her presence in our home showed the kids we were serious about keeping them with us and creating a home where they could all feel safe and supported," Jennifer said. "Their entire lives, they got many empty promises from the adults in their lives. Participating in this counseling together and setting goals individually and as a family together and being held accountable by Ms. Reeder for following through showed the kids that we cared and that we were determined to make it work."

Even months after Epworth's HOMEBUILDERS® intervention with the family ended, home life remained much more manageable for the couple. The children grew increasingly comfortable with treating each other and the adults with respect. The 12-year-old communicates with Rick daily. Dena's behavior has also greatly improved.

Jennifer and Rick were so reassured by the positive changes they witnessed in the children's behaviors and the increasingly peaceful and loving interactions with one another, they took another huge step. They filed a petition in Family Court and with the mom's permission, were granted legal custody.



# Quiet Life, Remarkable Impact



There are many ways to live your faith. The Reverend James Langley Healan traveled throughout Western North Carolina on horseback in the 1800s, spreading Methodism. More than a century and a half later, his great-grandson, Rock Hill engineer Robert Ward Healan, lived his faith by bequeathing \$1.2 million to Epworth Children's Home. His life changing gift will make it possible for Epworth to give many children and teens who've been neglected or abused the help they need for years to come.

Born in 1926, Robert spent his childhood in Rock Hill, where he, his parents and brother were members of St. John's United Methodist Church. He remained a member of St. John's his entire life. After high school, he joined the Navy and served his country in World War II.

"He was part of the Naval occupation force in Japan," said Robert's nephew, Jack Healan.

After the war, Robert earned an engineering degree from Clemson University. He then went to work for the S.C. Highway Department where, among other projects, he helped survey land for roads being built for Hunting Island and Hilton Head Island. Later, he accepted a job with Southern Engineering. In the 1960s, he co-founded what became a very successful company - Carolina Rebar. He managed the company for several decades and even after stepping down as its leader, continued working for it until he was in his mid-80s.

Outside of work, Robert enjoyed church, occasional travel with his brother and sister-in-law, and listening to classical music. In general, he lived a very quiet life, Jack said.

"Uncle Bob rarely went out," Jack said. "He had friends at work of course, but I don't think he had much of a social life. He lived by himself in the same home he'd grown up in in Rock Hill. He worked a lot. He never married or had children."

Jack recalls other things about his uncle - his enjoyment of fishing, how he continued driving a car into his early 90s, and his lifelong Depression-era frugality.

"He didn't spend a nickel on anything for himself," Jack said, smiling. "I couldn't believe it, when he went into an assisted living facility in his last few years, he was watching a black and white television with a pair of pliers attached to it to make it work."

Interestingly, while some people dread moving into an assisted living or nursing home, for Robert, the move to assisted living in the last few years of his life was "almost like a rebirth," Jack said.

"Suddenly he was surrounded by people," Jack said. "He spent his final years going around visiting other residents daily and enjoying all sorts of group activities like playing Bingo and going on outings. He loved it!"

Before Robert passed away, he asked Jack to serve as executor of his estate. He showed Jack his will and pointed out that he was leaving most of his worldly wealth to Epworth.

"He felt that Epworth was an organization that does a lot of good for kids who wouldn't have much of a shot at life otherwise," Jack said. "I think that growing up attending St. John's, he understood the importance of giving back to help others."

That lesson clearly illuminated Robert's heart and guided his decisions. After a lifetime of frugality and self-denial, and in his characteristically quiet way, he made an incredibly generous gift to Epworth. An engineer to the end - Robert's legacy will for years to come help Epworth build bridges to healing, taking children and teens from painful pasts to promising futures.

*If you or a family member would like to create a lifechanging legacy benefitting Epworth's children, feel free to contact Lisa Fusco at [lfusco@epworthsc.org](mailto:lfusco@epworthsc.org) with any questions you may have.*



Still, she remembers the first night she arrived at Epworth, the sheer relief she felt at finally being able to take a shower and change into clean clothing. When she was assigned a roommate, the girls found they had much in common and became best friends.

When Lily started 8th grade, girls in her cottage introduced her to other kids at her new school. For the first time, Lily began looking forward to going to school. She also spent time each week with tutors at Epworth's on-campus Barnes Learning Center. Her grades improved.

"When Lily came as a middle school student, she was quiet and reserved as many children are in a new environment," recalls Barnes Learning Center Director Christy Mooneyhan. "As she built relationships, her personality began to flourish. I enjoyed days where she would simply stop by my office to say hello or to talk. I knew she felt at home when she would share her frustrations with me and then listen as I offered suggestions or advice."

Once after she moved to Epworth, Lily's mom came to see her on family visitation day.

"It was really good to see her...but that was the last time I saw her," Lily said. "Right after that, she moved out of state and never came to a family day again."

The same is true of her dad – Lily has seen him only once since being removed from the family home.

"I kind of knew I was never going home," she said.

As the years passed, Lily made her way through high school. Neither of Lily's parents had graduated from high school, and Lily had always assumed that she

wouldn't graduate either. But she focused on doing the best she could each day.

"I learned to push through hard moments by staying within the day, within the moment," Lily said.

She graduated from high school last year, the first person in her family to do so. Not only did she earn her diploma, she earned a special certification in business, even while holding a part-time job to earn spending money.

"I feel like had I not been taken into care and ended up at Epworth, I would never have made it, never graduated," she said.

Lily has since moved into Epworth's Independent Living Center, which is a supportive housing program for young adults who've aged out of the foster care system.

"Lily worked very hard to earn the business certificate, and I was happy when she decided to apply for our Independent Living Center program," Christy Mooneyhan said. "She has the ability to achieve anything she sets her mind to, and I believe the encouragement, guidance and support she continues to receive there will allow her to achieve her goals and set her up for success."

Today, Lily continues to work part-time to save for a car. She just started taking classes at Midlands Tech and hopes to become an early childhood educator.

"I'd like to one day work with kids in foster care or at a place like Epworth, helping kids who are in the same situation I was in," Lily said.

## Parents Love the Epworth Early Intervention Center Pre-School!

"Noah is a lot more social. He loves playing with the other children and has learned so many words. He has tripled his vocabulary since he started attending the EEIC."

--Kenika Dindy, mom of 3-Year-Old Noah who is a student in Epworth's Early Intervention Center Preschool

Congratulations to Epworth's Early Intervention Center, which celebrated another graduation over the summer. The year-round, inclusive school founded in 1980 serves children ages 1-5 with and without developmental delays and disabilities. Our school offers children a unique experience to grow and learn with their peers in a safe, nurturing environment.





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Children's Home

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Beth Williams  
President and CEO

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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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