



From Childhood Dream to Reality

*Epworth's growing **Foster Care** program recruits and supports foster families with training, services, fellowship with other foster parents, and more. When a foster parent chooses to adopt the child or children they are fostering, Epworth supports them through that journey as well. Here is a story about a past Epworth foster parent who is now the adoptive parent of three young girls, sisters, who came into her life through the Epworth Foster Care program.*

As a child, Rebekah Carpenter daydreamed about one day growing up to adopt children "who didn't have a chance."

As an adult, she occasionally contemplated her childhood dream, but most of the time, it rested in the back of her mind while she built a career as a leadership development educator and author. It remained there when, in her late 40s, she enrolled at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, to become a Presbyterian minister.

"I kept telling myself, I'm single, I'm not wealthy, I don't know how to be a parent," she said. "The truth is, I was scared to do it."

After her ordination in 2018, however, Rebekah took a friend's wise advice to heart.

"My friend said if you can give a child love and stability, that's it, you can do it, you'll figure the rest out," she said.

Months later, while working as a pastor of Sion Presbyterian Church in Winnsboro, South Carolina, and as a transitional pastor for New Hope Presbyterian Church in Gastonia, North Carolina, Rebekah applied to become a foster parent with Epworth.

"When Ms. Carpenter expressed interest in fostering, I told her all about Epworth and began supporting her through the licensing process," recalls Haley Huff, then a recruitment coordinator for Epworth. "Upon my first visit to her home, I could immediately tell what a warm and friendly lady she was. She was motivated to make a difference in the lives of others— an extension of her work as a pastor. Also, as a pastor, life is very busy, so we worked together to make the licensing process more manageable and to ensure she didn't feel alone in navigating the requirements."

After Rebekah was licensed as a foster parent in Epworth's program, two little boys – toddlers who were twins – came to live



Whatever it Takes

Winter 2025

A Message from Beth Williams
President and CEO

From the Scripture, James instructs us in Chapter 2, Verses 14–17 to consider action to help others: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Over the past few weeks, I have heard the phrase “whatever it takes” repeatedly. This phrase is being used in regard to helping our youth in Richland County find placement and stability. I have had opportunities during recent months to consider this very issue: How do we do more to help others? I have been serving on the Richland County Task Force, appointed by the South Carolina Department of Social Services to serve under the directive of Judge Richard Gergel, US District Judge of the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina. This task force is charged by Judge Gergel with addressing ongoing problems in child welfare in Richland County and our state and finding solutions to solve them. In essence, the Judge is asking us to identify the needs of others and act through providing aid and solutions.

Often during meetings, I hear the Department of Social Services representatives discussing the ongoing crisis of more children in need of placement in foster homes and other resources than are available, resulting sometimes in these children having to sleep in offices in the Department. As a result of this crisis, the notion of “whatever it takes” was born. This is a noble goal, implying that actions will take place and policies will be developed to solve these ongoing crises.

This phrase “whatever it takes” in terms of solving a problem is not a new phrase and it’s certainly not a new concept in handling a crisis. At Epworth, we have been doing “whatever it takes” for years to solve a myriad of challenges and problems that our children and their families face continually. We pride ourselves on squarely facing individual situations that

arise and in finding solutions to assist whoever has asked for our help.

For example, Epworth provides scholarships to its older youth to attend college even when their Department of Social Services tenure has expired. Epworth has helped raise money from churches across the state on occasion when a family needs immediate assistance in paying rent to prevent eviction. We take in children on an emergency basis and provide them with our services. At Epworth, if a family calls us in a crisis and needs placement for their youth, we don’t turn away them away for inability to pay.

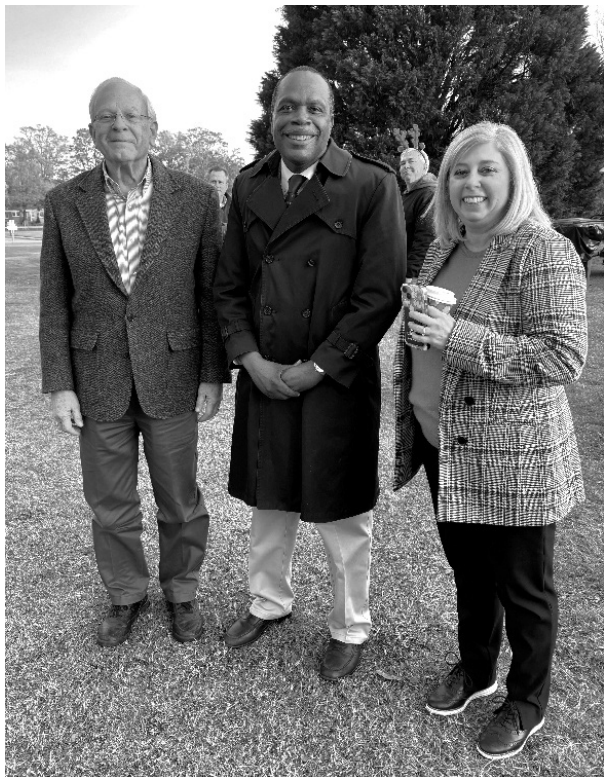
In short, Epworth “does whatever it takes” to avert crises with the children and families we serve. From the church perspective, as Christians we all have a duty to give to those who need our assistance. Galatians 6:2 tells us to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Epworth has many opportunities for churches around our state to help us “do whatever it takes” to improve the lives of children and their families. Helping to give our older youth a chance at a more stable future by providing scholarships, volunteering to help on Epworth’s campuses and in our programs across the state, becoming a foster parent, or contributing to the Resource Closets through which Epworth provides clothing, supplies, and furniture to kinship caregivers and others who need immediate tangible assistance, are but a few of the ways that you and your church congregation can help us do whatever it takes to make the lives of our children and their families safer, healthier, happier, and more stable.

This issue of The Record contains stories of individuals who have been assisted by Epworth in creating new lives for themselves and their children. There are so many more children and families who need our help. Hebrews 13:16 states: “Do not forget to do good to others, and share with them, because such sacrifices please God.” Those of us here at Epworth welcome you to join us in following this Scripture in doing good and sharing with others.

Christmas Memories 2024

Thanks so much to everyone who made Christmas with Epworth so incredibly special in 2024. Our holiday season was filled with celebrations and constant reminders of the true meaning of Christmas. Here are a few highlights.



Epworth was delighted to welcome Bishop Leonard Fairley from the S.C. Conference of the United Methodist Church to our campus Christmas Tree Lighting. Here he is with the Rev. John Holler and Epworth President and CEO Beth Williams.



As they do every year, USC Lady Gamecock Coach Dawn Staley and The Richland County Sheriff's Office threw a fabulous Christmas party for Epworth residents.



Santa attended the Christmas party along with Officer CJ, a crisis intervention dog, and his handler, Allison Farrell.



Here is one of the pre-school students who sang in our Early Intervention Center's annual Christmas Angels program.



About a dozen deputies with the Richland County Sheriff's Department helped make the Christmas party special.



Epworth staff dressed festively to deliver all the gifts to residents and foster children that were collected during the Christmas with Epworth campaign.

Continues on page 5



A Renewed Chance in Life

Epworth's unique Family Care Center gives mothers who are recovering from addiction and alcoholism a chance for a brighter future, not only for themselves but their children. Most moms have either temporarily lost their children to foster care or are facing that threat. While living at the Family Care Center, once a mom makes sound progress in Epworth's care plan, she is typically reunified with her children. The children benefit from the additional attention they receive from Epworth staff while living at the center with their mom. Here is one mom's story of renewal and hope.

Angie*, a 37-year-old mom, graduated from Epworth's innovative Family Care Center this winter. Her caseworker from the S.C. Department of Social Services attended. Epworth staff sent her on her way with a celebratory luncheon and a carload of household supplies and gifts. Angie also left Epworth with a renewed sense of purpose and responsibility for the wellbeing of her children, and with a solid job to support herself and her children.

"Through this great program, God rebuilt me," Angie said that day with tears in her eyes. "I'm so thankful."

Angie had arrived at the Family Care Center six months earlier after her world nearly collapsed from substance abuse and untreated mental illness.

The Family Care Center gives women like Angie a safe, supportive refuge for six months. While enrolled, moms work closely with Epworth staff and outside counselors and support groups to fortify their recovery, build up their confidence, learn and refine parenting and job skills, and develop and deepen their spiritual life to boost the odds of staying healthy and stable long term.

Each mom's background story is different. Angie said her trouble began when she was a teenager. Although she was later diagnosed with a mental illness requiring medication, she wasn't aware of it at that age. Emerging symptoms of her undiagnosed illness, along with stress, anger and grief that Angie experienced after her parents' breakup and what she saw as her father's abandonment, increased her vulnerability to harmful influences as a teen.

Angie's periodic use of drugs and alcohol from that point forward may well have been a way for her to self-medicate her mental illness. Whatever the reason, the substance use contributed to strife in her personal adult relationships for two decades. In other ways, though, she continued functioning normally on the surface. A valued and caring employee, she kept her job and provided for her children. With assistance from her mom, Angie took good care of her kids, whom she loved dearly.

She says that like her own mother, she was strict. But one of her priorities was to maintain open communication and trust with her children. Once, when her teen son admitted he had lied to her about something that was going on at school, Angie felt mortified.

"I had always vowed I would not be that parent whose children were afraid to confide in her or trust her," she said.

From that point on, Angie set aside one day each week for a pizza and family night. She told the children that whatever frustrations or fears or anger they were harboring toward her or others could come out in absolute safety and the entire family would support them for their honesty. The children loved family night and their trust in their mom grew.

But about three years ago, something changed, threatening the progress the family had made. Angie's mental state deteriorated after her brother died from gun violence and when months later, she lost her godson to an overdose.

"Up until then, I was always able to keep it together for the sake of my children no matter what," she said. "But I found myself in a dark place. My passion has always been taking care of people. I'm someone who

always tells others I'm fine, no matter what. But I never took time to take care of myself."

After the deaths in her family, Angie's anxiety soared and she began relying on drugs or alcohol to calm herself at night.

Angie's children and adults who were close to her began noticing a shift in her behavior. A family member called the S.C. Department of Social Services to report her erratic behavior, which led to an investigation. Angie's mom stepped in to take care of several of the children full-time. A positive drug test a few months later led to her other children going to live with relatives.

After medically detoxing from drugs and being placed on medication to stabilize her mental health condition, her Department of Social Services caseworker told her she was in danger of losing her children permanently. The caseworker told her about Epworth's Family Care Center program. Unable to bear the thought of losing her children, Angie welcomed the chance to try the Epworth Family Care Center approach.

At Epworth, Angie learned many important lessons. She learned that the extreme anxiety she was experiencing probably stemmed from trauma. She learned alternative, positive coping mechanisms to help her resist the urge to use substances. She learned how to take better care of herself. She learned to rely more on God when she was frightened. Her confidence as a mom and an employee, confidence that had been eroded by drug use, slowly returned. She began making amends to her children and repairing the damage to their trust. Her previous employer invited her to return to her job.

On graduation day, Angie beamed as she looked forward to going home, returning to work, and especially, having all her children back home with her.

"I feel that my life will be better than ever now," Angie said. "I can feel the blessings rolling in. I feel relieved of stress and anxiety and I'm living in faith again. I hope to one day be able to be a mentor to others, maybe through my church, to use my experience to help those walking the same path."

**Our client's name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

Christmas Memories Continued



Epworth's Faith Formation Director Jen Stanley delivered an inspiring message at the campus church service.



Staff with Epworth's Early Intervention Center Pre-School did a beautiful job readying the children for the Christmas program.



Santa and an elf made a special stop to visit with students in Epworth's Early Intervention Center program.



A Full Circle Legacy

Sometimes in life we're lucky enough to see things come full circle. At Epworth, for instance, we love seeing those who receive help from our services as children grow up into happy and successful young adults who want to give back. A recent example is a young man named Lonnie.

Last summer, when 18-year-old high school senior Lonnie Lee set out to plan and coordinate a public service project to meet the requirements for his Eagle Scout badge, he and his parents thought at once about Epworth. As a toddler, Lonnie needed speech therapy, so his parents had enrolled him in Epworth's Early Intervention Home-Based program.

Epworth's Early Intervention Center offers services to very young children who need a little extra help to prepare them for success in kindergarten and first grade. We offer these services through our on-campus pre-school and in family homes.

"The Epworth early intervention therapy really made a difference in Lonnie's development," said Lawrence Lee, Lonnie's dad. "His Epworth therapist, Page Mangum, used to come to our house once a week when Lonnie was 2 years old, and she was wonderful. She made a huge difference. She knew to suggest things that we would never have known about to help him."

Page Mangum, who is now in her 26th year as an early interventionist with Epworth, remembers Lonnie and his family.

"In-home early interventionists work with families that have a child with developmental disabilities or delays," Mangum said. "We're not the same as schoolteachers. We work with each child, but we also work with the entire family in the home environment to suggest follow up measures the family can take to help the child advance."

Decades ago, Epworth's Early Intervention Center was one of the very first to serve Midlands children with developmental delays or disabilities. Today, pediatricians and other health care providers routinely refer children to BabyNet, South Carolina's interagency early intervention system for infants and toddlers. BabyNet, in turn, provides parents with a list of early intervention programs like Epworth's that can provide developmental services to a child from birth through age three.

Page's work with Lonnie helped prepare him to attend school. He grew up to succeed academically, become an active Scout in Troop 95 based in Irmo, South

Carolina, and to thrive in his youth group at Riverland Hills Baptist Church.

For his Eagle Scout project, Lonnie contacted Epworth to ask what kind of work might be helpful. Epworth's Volunteer Coordinator Sydney Kerr offered several possibilities, including construction of a circular prayer labyrinth to complement Epworth's meditation garden near the Epworth chapel. The idea immediately appealed to Lonnie.

Lonnie's grandmother had passed away recently, and among her other personal possessions, she left stacks of garden pavers and stones to Lonnie's family.

"I was excited because the project would let me use some of my grandmother's pavers and stones for the labyrinth," Lonnie said. "I thought that using the stones she bought for her garden but never got to use would be a way of honoring her. I know she would like them being used in this way."

Lonnie researched how to create a labyrinth and drew up plans for the project. He brought his fellow troop members together on a late summer day to clear the space and lay the stones. The troop returned later to plant wildflowers on the site.

Today, the meditation garden and labyrinth serve as a peaceful place for young people living on the Epworth campus to think and pray.

For Page Mangum, the labyrinth is a reminder of the long-term influence that she and her early intervention colleagues at Epworth have had on the lives of hundreds of Midlands children over the past three decades.

"Seeing these children grow up and thrive is the best feeling in the world," Mangum said.

If you or your group would like to perform a volunteer project at Epworth, please contact Sydney Kerr at (803) 681-0304. For information on Epworth's Early Intervention In-Home Program, please call Nikki Happe at (803) 681-0182.

with her. They stayed with her several months before being returned to their birth mother who had successfully completed a treatment plan.

After a few months, she contacted Epworth to say she was open to taking another child or children. This time, she asked to be placed on a list of foster parents who were interested in possibly adopting a child.

Epworth next placed three young girls in Rebekah's home, twin sisters Auriana and Izabella who were four, and their younger sister, Olivia, who was three. It was not the sisters' first time being placed with a foster family.

The girls had been in several foster homes between attempts at reuniting them with their birth families. By the time they came to live with Rebekah, they had been through much upheaval and uncertainty.

Rebekah arranged for the sisters to attend pre-school to help them overcome developmental deficits, but not long after, Covid shut down everything.

"The daycare service I had lined up for them closed," Rebekah said. "At first, panic. But in the end, the shut-down ended up being the best thing for the girls. They got to bond with me in a way that they wouldn't have if I was away working every day."

Rebekah said the extended time at home gave the girls the close attention and quiet they needed to detox from accumulated anger and confusion. Every day, she spent hours on the floor with them as they played. She let the girls decide what to call her; they chose "Mama Becka."

"As soon as they were comfortable with me, I started taking the time to hold them for about half an hour every morning, when they woke up," Rebekah said. "It was a beautiful way to begin our day, and it seemed to make a huge difference. They seemed calmer, more secure all day."

She contacted the other foster parents who had cared for the girls to gather as much solid background information as possible. She also took the three girls to more than 150 medical or professional appointments for counseling, speech therapy and other needs.

"The reward was that over time, they stopped feeling so angry," Rebekah said. "Signs of trauma faded; they didn't cry as much. Every six months or so, it was so clear, the emotional temperature in the house went down."

The first three years she cared for the girls, she was unsure if the biological parents would ever relinquish custody. So, she focused on helping the girls make progress educationally, socially and spiritually and on making fun, wholesome childhood memories that she hoped might keep their hearts warm in years to come.

Rebekah's parents and friends also surrounded the girls with love and support. At some point, the girls stopped calling Rebekah "Mama Becka" and began calling her "Mom."

Throughout the pandemic and the year afterward, Epworth foster care staff stayed in close touch with Rebekah. In addition to arranging for the girls to get bikes, Easter baskets, and Christmas gifts, Epworth's staff helped Rebekah through rough spots.

"Epworth staff showed unbelievable empathy, and they always made sure that I and other foster parents felt appreciated and cared for," Rebekah said. "They were so dependable and always told me the truth about the girls and what was going on. Their follow-through was exceptional."

The girls thrived in Rebekah's home. When the twins completed first grade, they ended up jointly winning "Student of the Year."

When it became clear the girls might become available for adoption, Rebekah applied. In the weeks before the court procedure where the adoption decision would be finalized, Epworth's director of church relations reached out to her.

"The faith piece of Epworth's support was huge for me," she said. "In addition to all the support I received from the foster care staff, Epworth's chaplain called me and prayed with me before the court date."

The day the adoption went through, Rebekah Carpenter marveled that her lifelong dream had finally materialized. She wanted to do something symbolic to help these three young girls, who were now officially her daughters, remember the day that they became a permanent family.

"It was the girls who came up with the idea to put identical streaks of color in our hair," she said. "I thought that sounded perfect. We went down to a local hair salon and we each had a streak of color in our hair to represent that we were now a permanent family."

Today, she says, the girls sometimes ask questions about their biological parents and what happened in the past. She lets them talk about it and lets them know their parents love them and want what is best for them.

"A lot of the topsy turvy stuff is gone now," she said of her family's day-to-day lives. "Like a lot of families, instead of a new car, we spend money on babysitters and things the girls need. I live in gratitude every day. I'll never be able to put a price on what I received from fostering and from Epworth."

Rebekah strongly encourages anyone who might be drawn to fostering to go ahead, take the leap, and grant themselves the grace to follow that holy calling.

"Fostering isn't something you do that makes a difference only in the moment," she said. "It has eternal ramifications. A foster parent affects the lives of children, and of any children those foster children may have one day. Foster parents make a positive difference in the world, forever."



If you are curious about the rewards and realities of fostering, learn more by contacting Epworth's Foster Care staff at (803) 256-7394 or visiting maybeme.org.



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.epworthsc.org

Beth Williams
President and CEO

© 2025 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

Epworth's mission 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 acknowledgments.)

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 SC



@EpworthSC



@epworthch



@epworth-children's-home