



Gifts of Giving

Early on Christmas morning, Epworth foster mom Cheryl came downstairs just in time to catch her 5-year-old foster daughter kneeling by the Christmas tree amid half-opened gifts, saying a prayer of thanks to Jesus.

“This was Josie’s first Christmas in foster care and neither she nor her sisters had ever had a Christmas like this,” Cheryl said. “It was overwhelming to them. When Josie realized how much she’d received, she felt a rush of emotion. Her prayer was so deeply felt and pure, it brought tears to my eyes.”

Thanks to the churches and individuals who took part in Christmas with Epworth, Josie and her two sisters – Tara, 3, and Miranda, 7 – received all the presents they asked for – and more. The same was true for their 8-year-old brother, Rory, who lives in a different foster home in the Upstate with his Epworth foster mom, Anita.

After the girls opened their presents, they called Rory to compare notes on what Santa had brought. The siblings have been able to remain in close contact with each other while in foster care thanks to the collaborative, caring efforts of Cheryl and Anita. Both women

realized early on how important it was for the children to stay connected, so they strongly encouraged and enabled the siblings to call each other often, sometimes daily.

“We also have the kids over during the holidays, back and forth,” Cheryl said.

Cheryl, who is 48, and Anita, who is 38, are both single, and they met through their work as Epworth foster parents. Cheryl is a bus driver for a local high school. Until she began to foster, she was an empty nester and mom to two young adult children. Anita is a social worker for an organization that helps people find housing. She loves children and felt called by God to become a foster parent.

Over the past year, as each went out of their way to do what was best for the children in their care, Cheryl and Anita have grown to be remarkably close friends.

“Our friendship has been an unexpected, wonderful blessing, and we talk all the time,” Cheryl said. “Anita has been fostering longer than me, and it feels good and reassuring to have someone to talk



A Shining Light for 130 Years

Winter 2026
A Message from Beth Williams
President and CEO

On a cold January day in 1896 two young sisters arrived at Epworth on its opening day and became the first children Epworth would serve in a long and continuing legacy. These two young girls were the first to feel the warm and compassionate light that Epworth would come to shine on all the successive generations of children and families it has served over the years. In fact, this year Epworth is celebrating its 130th anniversary and for a century and three decades has provided children and families across South Carolina with programs and services they need to stabilize and improve their lives and mitigate the suffering from abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, poverty, and other types of trauma that have affected their lives and potential for future stability and success.

Established by the Methodist Church, Epworth has filled many decades with loving support for thousands of children and their families. That same light that began to shine in 1896 continues to illuminate and transform the lives of those Epworth serves today.

On that first winter day back in 1896, Epworth began a legacy for children when its light turned their fears into feelings of security and belonging, and their sadness at leaving their homes evolved into the happiness they experienced with the love and support from Epworth staff members. Originally established as an orphanage for children in South Carolina whose parents had died or who were unable to care for their children for other reasons, Epworth was a secure haven for them. They had a safe, warm place to live; they had nutritious food; they were supported in a new class in a new school; they found a spiritual home; and most of all, they were wrapped in the compassion and nurturing that Epworth gave them. This legacy continues today in 2026, not just in its residential program, but in all the areas into which Epworth has expanded its vision and mission to help children and families in South Carolina.

Epworth's service to children and families in South Carolina has evolved from its initial role as primarily a residential setting to today when Epworth's initiatives span a wide spectrum of services to children and families across our state. The residential program has shifted its

emphasis over the years to focus on older children and youth and a wide array of other service areas have been developed to address the changing panorama of needs in South Carolina for children and families, many of whom have been underserved for many years.

The need is greater than ever for Epworth's light to shine in assisting families and children in our state. Epworth's original mission was to enrich the lives of children who live on the Epworth campus and receive its direct services; Epworth now offers an array of programs and services that include a foster family recruitment and training program which offers extensive services for Epworth's foster families; a kinship care program which offers specialized foster care to those families who must assume the responsibility for a child or children in their extended family; an early-childhood center focusing on children with special educational needs; a family care center where mothers in recovery from substance use can live with their children and learn parenting and life skills; a counseling center that serves not only Epworth children and youth, but also those in the community referred by social service agencies, juvenile justice agencies, and through private referrals; and an independent living program, which houses older youth who have aged out of foster care and offers them a place to live with supervisory staff while they work on post-secondary education or enter the job market.

Epworth's newest initiative is the establishment of the Family Resource Center on its campus in 2025. Funded by a grant from the South Carolina Department of Social Services and in partnership with this agency, the center serves families by offering holistic, family-centered support designed to strengthen and empower households facing a variety of challenges from poverty to family dysfunction.

During its 130-year history, Epworth has grown to encompass two campuses in Columbia, as well as regional offices all over the state. With the opening of satellite offices across South Carolina offering many of its programs to more children and families, Epworth is shining its light in expanding its legacy of hope, support, and

compassionate assistance to many of our state's most vulnerable citizens.

Over the years, Epworth has become recognized as one of the state's leading providers and policymakers addressing the needs of children and families who are at risk. Epworth enjoys partnerships with several state and community agencies, as well as with non-profit child and family welfare organizations, local law enforcement agencies, and various business and civic organizations. Epworth's light is shining in collaboration and service along with those of these other agencies, bringing focused resources to our state's most vulnerable citizens.

Epworth was established in 1896 to address the needs of children at the turn of the 19th century. This same mission and compassion continue today with Epworth's light focused on giving hope and guidance to successive new generations. Scripture from Matthew 5:16 tells us "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." We at Epworth thank you for the support, guidance, and love that you have given us over these 130 years and for the way your light has combined with ours to glorify our Father in heaven through the help we give to those most vulnerable among us.

Thanks to everyone who blessed the children and families served by Epworth by participating in our annual Christmas with Epworth campaign. We celebrated the season in so many other ways as well. Here are a few highlights.

Holiday Highlights



Epworth holds Christmas parties throughout the state for Epworth foster families. Our Upstate Foster Care staff invited Buddy the Elf to the party this year.



Santa's surprise appearance thrilled the students in the Early Intervention Center's Christmas concert



Students in Epworth's Early Intervention Center program performed in their annual Christmas concert.



The Richland County Sheriff's Department, Lady Gamecock Coach Dawn Staley, and American Legion Post 6 always throw a memorable Christmas party for Epworth residents.



Churches and individuals donated thousands of gifts to fulfill the wishes of Epworth residents and foster children. Here, Development and Communications Director Lisa Fusco accepts a box of gifts from Lori Torbett of Lexington United Methodist Church.



Epworth President and CEO Beth Williams with Copeland Kapp and Greta Thomas, who represented Edens company at the Epworth Tree Lighting. Edens donated and planted a beautiful new Christmas tree on the Epworth circle in the fall.



Faith Formation Director Jenn Stanley and Activities Director Tom Parker at the campus Tree Lighting.

Navigating Unplanned Detours



Susan always assumed that by the time she turned 64 she would be nearing retirement. For decades, as the divorced administrative assistant worked full-time and raised her children, she invested small sums in a retirement account. She envisioned retirement as a time of travel, hobbies, socializing with friends, relaxation, and spoiling grandchildren.

But retirement is off the table for Susan for at least another 8–10 years. That’s because the Columbia resident is raising and supporting her grandsons, who are 11, 12, and 17 years of age. Rather than spoiling the boys as their Mimi or Gran, she became the boys’ full-time kinship parent four years ago.

Susan loves the boys fiercely and she is grateful that they are in her care rather than in the precarious environment surrounding her adult daughter’s alcohol and drug addiction. But she has depleted her modest retirement account to pay custody attorneys and provide the boys with food, clothing and supplies. She spends every penny she earns covering necessities and extras like the fees that allow the boys to play sports. She vows that the boys will attend college if they choose to and says she will continue working for as long as she can to make that possible.

Not only is Susan facing a far less secure financial future than before, but she also has less energy and stamina than she did as a young mom.

Susan’s challenging reality is shared by thousands of other South Carolina grandparents, family members, and family friends who are travelling a similar road, raising children not their own.

These are the families served by Epworth’s Kinship Navigator program. Using a grant from the S.C. Department of Social Services, Epworth launched the program two years ago to give kinship parents in the Midlands and Pee Dee regions the support and services they need to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing home for the children in their care. At no charge to kinship parents, Epworth offers one-on-one case management; guidance on legal and financial aid; access to diapers, food, clothing, and hygiene and household essentials; notary, copying and scanning services; referrals to local programs and agencies; caregiver training and peer support groups; and always, a compassionate listening ear.

Susan found Epworth’s Kinship Navigator program through a co-worker’s recommendation.

“I am the kind of person who finds it very hard to ask for help,” Susan said. “But I was struggling to provide the boys with everything they needed and my co-worker saw that.”

Susan called Epworth to ask if the agency might be able to give her boys school bookbags. The friendly Epworth staff member she spoke to urged Susan to drop by.

“When I arrived, she had three new book bags, one in each boy’s favorite color, waiting,” Susan said. “She had filled them with all the school supplies the boys would need for the year! I became so emotional, I cried.”

The staff member connected Susan with Epworth’s Kinship program, where caseworker Allison Clapp is now helping Susan apply for financial aid. Ms. Clapp also offers ongoing emotional support.

“When I got my grandsons, friends of 30 or 40 years disappeared on me,” Susan said. “Their calls dropped off, I guess because they were retiring, and my life suddenly no longer looked anything like theirs. So, I appreciate having someone to talk to.”

Susan told Ms. Clapp about her adult children, who are all in their 40s now. Two of the three are thriving with college degrees, professional careers, and families of their own. But from the age of 15, one daughter floundered. Her substance use, abusive relationships, and mental illness eventually exposed Susan’s three grandsons to deprivation, stretches of homelessness, chronic absences from school, and domestic violence.

For years, Susan and her ex-husband did everything they could to help their daughter get well. But neither medical treatment programs, counseling, nor jail worked for long.

When the boys were younger, Susan kept them for weeks or months at a time, whenever her daughter’s life spiraled downward.

“I once drove in the middle of the night on Christmas Eve to pick up my (then) 3-year-old grandson from a truck stop,” Susan said.

Susan’s daughter overdosed multiple times. Child welfare authorities would intervene and place the boys in foster care. Susan would contact the case worker to ask if the boys could stay with her instead. Then, whenever her daughter recovered temporarily and found housing, she wanted the boys back. The cycle repeated.

“The back and forth was so hard, and when the boys were with my daughter, I worried myself sick about what was happening to them,” Susan said.

As time went on, trauma and stress took a tremendous toll on the boys. One developed tremors; another tics. All three were failing in school. Susan finally hired a lawyer to pursue permanent custody, and the courts agreed that the boys would be better off with her.

Today, Susan’s daughter calls sporadically and Susan allows her daughter to visit the children in a neutral location whenever possible. But the meetings are hard for her. On top of the pressures and challenges of raising her grandchildren, Susan, like many kinship parents, is bearing the anguish and sense of helplessness that come from watching a beloved adult child struggle, her health deteriorating, from drug and alcohol addiction.

“The last time I took them to see her, I almost didn’t recognize my daughter, she was so thin,” Susan said.

Other kinship parents are grieving the death of their adult child, not only from addiction but from other kinds of illnesses or accidents. As kinship parents cope with these complex troubles, their sense of isolation from others in their community or church can deepen.

Epworth has helped ease Susan’s loneliness. She and the boys enjoy meeting other kinship families at monthly gatherings organized by the Kinship program. At the recent Thanksgiving celebration, in addition to a delicious meal, the Kinship staff gave Susan gift certificates for the boys and a large basket of household supplies.

“All of it helps,” Susan said. “More than that, the program has made me feel cared for and heard. I love everyone in Epworth’s program,”

Faith in God, Epworth’s support and the empathy of other kinship parents sustains and strengthens Susan. Today, her grandsons are doing well in school. One is playing soccer, another is playing golf, and two play instruments in the school band.

“However hard, the sacrifices are worth it to me,” she said. “One day my grandsons will understand just how much they were loved.”

Do you know a kinship parent who might benefit from Epworth’s Kinship Navigator services? Encourage them to call us at 1-888-561-2932

Epworth Kinship Navigator Program

Program launched in 2024 serving:

- The Pee Dee region of South Carolina including Horry, Florence, Georgetown, Marion, Williamsburg, Chesterfield, Marlboro, Dillon, Darlington, Sumter, Lee and Clarendon counties
- The Midlands region of South Carolina including Richland, Lexington, Fairfield, Kershaw, Lancaster, Chester, York, Newberry, Saluda, Edgefield, Aiken and Barnwell counties

What is a kinship family?

- Grandparents, relatives, or close family friends caring for someone else’s child.

Number of kinship family members served by Epworth’s program in 2025:

- 633 caregivers and 794 children



Valencia Steps Up

Seventeen-year-old Epworth resident Valencia recently made her high school honor roll for the second semester in a row. Her cottage coordinators and Epworth tutors joyfully celebrated her achievement. It was especially impressive because just two years ago, Valencia was failing all her classes.

“Before I got here, my grades were horrible,” Valencia said. “There were no adults guiding me and I was basically able to do whatever I wanted. I lived with a relative and the home environment was not physically or mentally safe for me. It was full of toxicity and noise, which made it impossible to sleep at night, so I could never wake up in time for school.”

The S.C. Department of Social Services removed Valencia and her older sister from their Lowcountry home due to long-term neglect and brought them to live on Epworth’s residential campus in Columbia.

Valencia said that before coming to Epworth, she viewed her education as a lost cause. She said the one positive thing in her life then was her part-time job at a fast-food restaurant.

“I have had to pay for pretty much everything I needed since I was 15,” she said. “But I liked having a job. Work kept me going. I knew that if I had to, I could always support myself.”

A lot changed when Valencia arrived at Epworth. While she wanted to immediately find a similar job in Columbia, her tutors and counselors told her she would only be allowed to do that if she worked hard to improve her grades.

“I didn’t like that at first,” she said. “For a month or so after I got here, I really wanted to go back home, even though it was so bad for me. But after I accepted that this was the way it would be and I started trying in school, I realized that staying at Epworth was what was best.”

Not only did Valencia’s desire to get a part-time job motivate her to improve her grades, watching her older sister and other Epworth residents embrace the opportunities Epworth offered inspired her.

“They went through some very bad things too, but I saw them getting their act together,” she said. “I thought if they can do it, so can I.”

Valencia worked with Epworth’s teachers to create a plan to catch up with her age group in school. The process was not easy. Valencia had to take online classes in addition to the classes she was taking in school. There were setbacks along the way. But she faced every setback head on, accepted responsibility, and used each challenge as motivation to push herself further.

As Valencia met with increasing success in school, she upgraded her personal goals – from improving her academic performance so she could get a job, to graduating from high school on time.

Once she improved her grades, Epworth staff followed through on their promise to let her get a part-time job. Showing maturity beyond her years, she saved every dollar she earned. Because she felt self-conscious about her smile, she saved enough money to pay for braces all by herself. She has since used her part-time earnings to buy a used car. Valencia did all this while keeping her grades high.

Valencia’s academic achievements, financial discipline, and insights drawn from Epworth’s counseling sessions and faith formation activities have boosted her self-confidence and given her hope for the future.

“After I was able to work hard to pull my grades up, I realized I might as well go to college,” Valencia said.

When she graduates from high school in May, Valencia will move into Epworth’s Independent Living Center. The supportive residential program for young adults who have aged out of the foster care system will enable her to pursue her college education without worrying about housing, food, and other basic costs.

Valencia’s long-term goal is to become an elementary school teacher. She has already applied and has been accepted to Midlands Tech for the fall semester, where she plans to earn an associate degree. She then plans to transfer to the University of South Carolina to earn her bachelor’s degree – and perhaps even a master’s degree – in early childhood education.

Epworth’s Director of Academics Christy Mooneyhan said Valencia’s story shows how determination, hard work, and the right support can completely redirect a young person’s future.

Valencia said she had no doubt that she would be heading down an altogether different path in life had she not come to Epworth.

“I had a lot of friends where I lived before, but they were not good influences,” she said. “Had I not come here, I would probably still be in the ninth grade and working at my job. I would not have a car. There is no way I would be thinking about college.”

to about the different things that come up. I consider her a sister because I can call and talk to her about anything.”

Epworth encourages both single adults and married couples to apply to become foster parents. Single adults sometimes shy away from fostering, worried that they lack the support system needed to foster a child successfully. Mutual support networks like the one forged by Cheryl and Anita can make all the difference.

Anita said their friendship was crucial in helping each of them navigate the challenges they faced in giving the siblings the care they needed. She offered examples.

“For the longest time after Rory came to live with me, he was like a little squirrel,” she said. “He would stuff so much food in his mouth when he ate, he couldn’t even swallow. He was also hiding food in his pillowcase. This was even though food was available to him whenever he wanted it.”

In discussing Rory’s issues with Cheryl, Anita learned that his sisters, too, were showing some of the same food hoarding behavior. Cheryl and Anita had to repeatedly reassure the siblings that they would never have to go without food. They also had to teach them basic hygiene practices like how to brush their teeth and how to use a towel to wipe their hands.

“The oldest girl, Miranda, was a special challenge because she is the one that experienced the most trauma and she really has not had much of a childhood,” Cheryl said. “She is only 7, but she was raising her younger siblings. So, when she came to live with me, she would not play. Instead, she would sit on the stairs and watch over her younger sisters as they played. I had to tell her repeatedly, I’ve got this, I’m the mother, you’re the child, I’ll take care of them. It took her a long while to realize she is a kid and can play.”

None of the four children attended school until taken into foster care, so Cheryl and Anita also worked hard to get them into predictable routines, acclimate them to school, and line up the developmental, academic, and mental health services each child needed.

Epworth’s foster care staff are also a crucial part of the mom’s support network.

“I have a wonderful relationship with Everson Greene, my Epworth caseworker,” Cheryl said. “He communicates with me so well and he even steps in if I need extra help, like when I’m stressed trying to make sure all the kids get to their eye and medical and dental appts. When Miranda had her tonsils out, he was there. I can call him anytime.”

Similarly, Everson helps bridge gaps in Rory’s care whenever needed and is always available to Anita with a listening ear, emotional support, and problem-solving assistance.

Both say the rewards of fostering have been immense, and they’ve come to deeply love the children in their care. Each said they would apply in an instant should the children become available for adoption.

Both Cheryl and Anita were drawn to fostering because of their love of children and family life. Cheryl grew up in family of eight children and in addition to her two adult children, she is a favorite aunt and backup parent to her nieces and nephews. Anita’s mom was herself a foster parent, so Anita grew up with foster brothers and sisters. Anita also empathizes with children experiencing unusual and difficult circumstances because she endured severe health challenges as a young child. She said when she told her mother she had applied to be a foster parent, her mom was not a bit surprised.

Both women admit that the thought of one day having to return the children to their biological family is tough. But whatever the long-term outcome, they said, they are thankful for the opportunity to give the siblings a stable, loving home for as long as they can. Cheryl has found it deeply gratifying watching the girls grow comfortable in her home, learn age-appropriate skills, succeed in school, and have more fun than ever before. Caring for and loving Rory has been such a gift to Anita, and she feels at peace in the certainty that she is following God’s plan for her life.

“I know I’m here for a reason,” Anita said. “My purpose is to give back in whatever way God wants, and God wants me to give back to His children.”

Save the Date
May on Millwood
 Celebrating Epworth’s 130 Years
Saturday, May 30th
 Details to Come





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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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