

From the Heart

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Transitional Living Program Gives Jessica A Second Chance

Learn how PCHAS helps Jessica overcome drug abuse and homelessness

Jessica came to the PCHAS Transitional Living Program after many struggles. She began using street drugs at the age of 15. Her disruptive behavior resulted in Jessica being kicked off the school swim team and eventually out of her high school. As her drug use and dangerous behavior continued, her mother found the PCHAS Group Home Program. Jessica's life began to improve in the group home. She shared the home with seven other girls and received much love and support from the two home parents. For the six months that she stayed in the group home, Jessica attended school and avoided drug use. But one day, things changed. Jessica decided to run away and move in with her new boyfriend. When the police located Jessica one week later, she was returned to her parents.

While she was able to complete high school and begin work at a sandwich shop, Jessica spent most of her money on drugs. She became homeless when her parents realized that she was using drugs again and insisted that she leave their house. As she looks back on her period of homelessness, Jessica remembers contemplating suicide many times. She believes that God is the only reason that she survived the spiraling drug use and the dangers of living on the street.

Jessica was in a desperate circumstance before PCHAS provided another opportunity to her. The PCHAS group home parent who had cared for Jessica earlier never forgot her. When the new Transitional Living Program opened in San Antonio, her former group home parent reached out to Jessica.



Presbyterian Children'sSM
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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO



PCHAS President and CEO, Dr. Ed Knight, with Group Home Residents

Throughout the different articles in this issue of our newsletter, you will encounter individuals who have experienced some of the darkest moments that life can offer. I know it doesn't make for comfortable feelings as you read their dramatic stories. I share in that discomfort also. In fact, I have those feelings every day that I work in this field. Young people should not have to experience such hurt and damage. But there is good news. These stories have happy endings.

These are resilient young people who have survived and are growing stronger thanks to our skilled staff and the prayers and support of people like you.

These true stories also reflect why it is important for PCHAS today to offer a wide range of programs. There is no such thing as a "one size fits all" program to meet the various needs of youth, young adults and families today. As a PCHAS supporter, I hope you will take pride in the continuum of care offered through our programs of group care, foster care, adoption, transitional living, child and family, single parent family and education services.

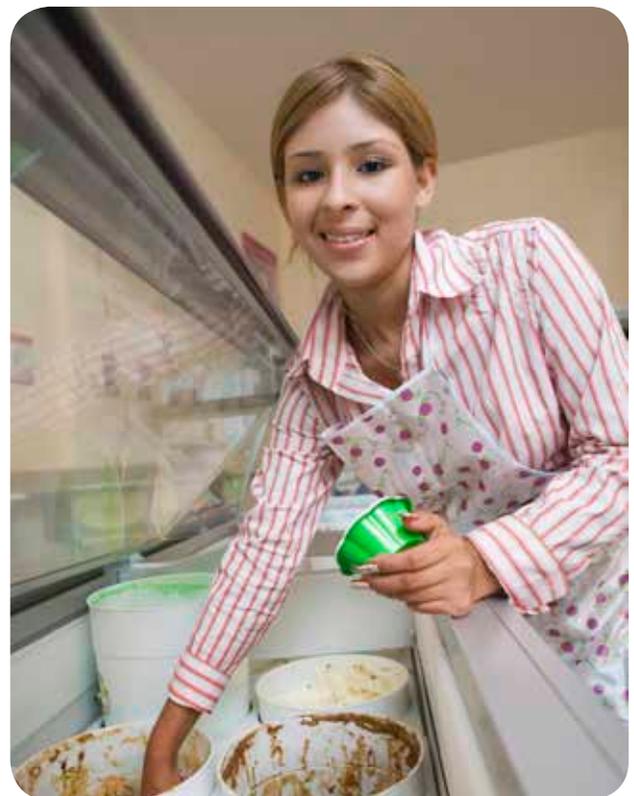
Through the dedication of excellent staff, committed volunteers and compassionate supporters, we will continue to offer young people the opportunity to move from despair to a future with hope. Thank you for all you do to make this possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ed Knight".

◀ Continued from cover

She explained to Jessica that this new residential program helps young people who have "aged-out" of foster care by offering financial, emotional, and housing support. The Transitional Living Program was just what Jessica needed to gain her footing on a new path. Jessica, like so many young people who age-out of foster care, are at-risk for homelessness, incarceration, poverty and unplanned pregnancy. By providing guidance and support during this pivotal period of her early adulthood, the Transitional Living Program enabled Jessica to establish new patterns of self-care and responsibility.

For Jessica, the Transitional Living Program changed the course of her life. She says, "I couldn't be more thankful to PCHAS for giving me a secure and safe home and for offering the necessary support to overcome drug abuse." Currently, Jessica is working full-time and saving money for professional training in cosmetology. "I've never been more grateful to any organization in my life," she says. Her appreciation extends to the caring PCHAS staff and to all the donors and volunteers. For all those at PCHAS who helped give her a second chance, Jessica offers an enthusiastic expression of her gratitude: "THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart!"





Child and Family Program Leads Lauren to Healing

In her own words, this single mom describes her devotion to healing herself, her children and her community

“I am a single mother who works hard to manage my depression and anxiety so that I can provide my children with the best life possible. Recently, out of commitment to my healing and to the well-being of my children, I ended a relationship with my daughter’s father, who was abusive and violent. His abusive treatment of me undermined my confidence and motivation and created a frightening home environment for my kids.

As I work toward continued healing for my children and me, I am careful to avoid isolating myself from others. Social isolation makes my depression worse. Josh, the Child and Family Specialist who counsels me, helped me to recognize the harmful impacts of social isolation. He connected me to mental health resources and helped me secure a job, through which I have been able to build a community and achieve financial stability. I am so proud to be a working mother and continue to strive to make improvements for my family.

The Child and Family Program has nurtured me and my children in many ways. I have gained skills to better communicate with my children. And, the program has helped my daughter and son set and pursue their own goals. My daughter is intent on completing her education and my son is making plans for his future.

I am so thankful for the Child and Family Program, which has helped me emotionally and spiritually. I don’t know where I would be today without the help of Josh. Thanks to this program, I have a more positive outlook on life and have even started giving back to my community as a regular volunteer. By helping to heal and strengthen my family, the Child and Family Program has allowed me to make life better for others in my community.

Meet Mark, Melissa and Baby Joe

PCHAS’ Adoption Services Helps Create a Forever Family

The day they adopted baby Joe was a day Mark and Melissa Buchanan and their daughter, Rachel, will never forget. Mark and Melissa had been hoping to adopt a baby for some time, so when the phone rang and it was their PCHAS social worker, they held their breath. They had been waiting for a call from the PCHAS social worker – a call regarding a baby that might be available for adoption.

The baby had tested positive for cocaine and needed a foster family to care for him. Mark and Melissa knew there was a chance Joe would return home to his birth family, but in the meantime they wanted to provide a loving home for him.

Mark, Melissa, and Rachel fell in love with Joe. They wanted what was best for him and supported Child Protective Services’ goal of family reunification. They

participated in family visits with the birthmother, birthfather, aunts, cousins and siblings. Mark and Melissa took advantage of having time with his family so they could gather photos for Joe’s baby book.

Joe’s birth family did not follow the plan set forth by the court, a judge terminated parental rights, and Mark and Melissa looked forward to adopting Joe. Just one year after accepting emergency placement of Joe, they finalized their adoption and welcomed Joe into their forever family.

Thanks to the love and support of Mark and Melissa, one year later Joe is thriving. He’s a happy baby who smiles easily and shows signs of being a highly intelligent child. Mark and Melissa could not be happier. And they are grateful to their PCHAS social worker who supports them every step of the way. Thanks to God for loving people like Mark and Melissa!



Why I Volunteer

by Beth Flowers, M. D.

When Molly Jensen, PCHAS Director of Development, asked me to write an article about why I serve as a PCHAS volunteer, I was reluctant. But after considering Molly's idea that this profile might inspire others to consider ways they might give of their time and talents, I have agreed to answer the questions of how and why I am involved with PCHAS.

I have had a life-long involvement with the Presbyterian Church. My core beliefs stem from my mother, Maydell Ramsey Blanton, a stoic, hardworking single mother of four. Lessons such as "always be kind to others, help others who are less fortunate, feed the hungry, use your gifts and talents to serve the community around you" were drilled into me from the time I was a very young child. I believe that you might not change the world, but perhaps if you try you can improve small parts of it.

My mother grew up in Itasca, TX near the first of the Presbyterian Children's Homes, and her life-long best friends grew up in "The Home." My earliest years were spent living in Itasca during the summers. I grew up being taught about the special services provided by "The Home," a unique place where children from all types of difficult -- and often chaotic and dangerous -- backgrounds could be offered a loving, caring environment to grow up in safely. Her life-long interest in "The Home" in Itasca kindled my passion for what later has grown into Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS).

As an adult, my involvement with PCHAS has evolved with time. Over the years when my children were young, I would send care packages to the Itasca Home with gently used clothing from my children along with new packages of various sizes of socks and underwear -- items I knew

could and would be used. I have helped with numerous back to school and Christmas drives with donations. Through the years, I have enjoyed hosting tables for the annual Houston PCHAS luncheon. I've never had difficulty finding enough people willingly to come to what they know will be an "ask" luncheon, a luncheon during which they will be asked to prayerfully consider supporting PCHAS. Guests are always inspired by what they hear about services that PCHAS provides. Two years ago, at the luncheon, I was asked to be a speaker and share my story of involvement with PCHAS. I also officially did "the ask" -- I asked others to commit their donations. That was a powerful experience.

During the past two years, my five young adult children have all left home, and I found myself with more time. I felt a need to do more with my volunteer time and felt called to get more involved with PCHAS. My church, St. Philip Presbyterian in Houston, has long-standing relationships with many mission partners. One such partner is PCHAS.

I heard through PCHAS and St. Philip of a new program in Houston and I explored ways to get involved from the ground up, hoping that some of my skills, life experience and/or just time could be of help. The Single Parent Family Program, with completely furnished duplexes housing single mothers and their children, is a unique, though small, part of PCHAS. I was fascinated by the concept of giving homeless (or nearly homeless) mothers and their children the opportunity to live for 12 to 18 months or more in these duplexes, which gives them hope and support to get back on their feet. The PCHAS Single Parent Family Program inspired me to get involved, knowing there was nothing else like the PCHAS Single Parent Family Program in Houston.

St. Philip Presbyterian Church contributed funds for one of the units in the Single Parent Family duplexes and I hope that with their long-term mission interest in PCHAS, we will eventually get more hands-on involvement from other volunteers. Connecting others interested in the SPF program to help as mentors or teachers of life skills is greatly needed.

During the past 18 months as the Houston PCHAS Single Parent Family Program has evolved, I met regularly with the program director and talked about the challenges her clients are facing as she got the program up and running. I was asked to teach the mothers a parenting class using a wonderful curriculum that easily brought practical, logical understanding to many aspects of parenting.

I am a psychiatrist in private practice with 30 years of experience helping others in pain get back on their feet after life has challenged them beyond what they thought they could tolerate. I had a growing sense of being called to do something more.

Meeting every two to three weeks, with homework assignments and discussions about difficult parenting problems, the moms in the program gradually opened

up more and more and we came to enjoy the groups. Once the parenting classes were finished, our groups have continued on a monthly basis as a support group, discussing subjects such as anxiety and fears about the future, confidence and competence building, using their real-world problems as the basis for challenging conversations. One mom shared that she cried for weeks after entering the Program because she felt so hopeless, ashamed and lost. Other mothers chimed in and said they had felt the same. But all agreed that what this PCHAS program has done for them is to save their lives and give them hope. Recently one of the moms asked me if I would be her advocate and help her solve some problems she was having. I told her “no,” explaining that I see my role as a volunteer, a tool to help them find their own voices so they can solve their own problems and be the best possible mothers that they can be.

Though I wonder sometimes if this small effort to help others makes any difference, I leave each group with a renewed sense of hope, and only God knows how this volunteer role will evolve from here. I hope my story inspires others to volunteer.

A Handful of Photos from the Austin, San Antonio and Dallas Luncheons





PCHAS FINDS FOREVER HOMES

For 53 Children in 2015



Did you know PCHAS operates adoption programs in six Texas cities? Houston, Dallas, Wichita Falls, Waxahachie, Austin and Corsicana. In 2015, we found forever homes for 53 children!

PCHAS' adoption services include "fostering connections" (kinship placements, children placed with relatives or friends), foster-to-adopt and infant adoption.

The infant adoption program helps both women experiencing unplanned pregnancies and families looking to adopt. If life circumstances prevent a mother from raising her child, PCHAS helps her create an adoption plan for her baby. We provide counseling for the birth mother before and after her pregnancy.

For more information about our adoption services, please email adoption@pchas.org.

FOSTER CARE'S CHURCH-BASED INITIATIVES

PCHAS Foster Care and Adoption staff have created two church-based initiatives to engage your congregation in the ministry of foster care. The first, **Mission 1:27**, is rooted in James 1:27, "to care for orphans in their distress" and teaches church members about the need for caring and loving foster parents through a one- to four-week awareness campaign. Churches who elect to participate in the campaign will receive, free of charge, posters and bulletin inserts, four videos, suggested liturgy and informational meetings conducted by expert PCHAS foster care and adoption staff. The videos include testimony by foster parents and pastors committed to caring for local children in need of families.

The second, initiative, **my faith FAMILY**, is designed to help churches provide support for foster parents in their congregations. PCHAS believes it takes a village to support foster parents so that they, in turn, can

provide the love and care children in foster care need and deserve. If your congregation has members who are foster parents, you'll want to explore **my faith FAMILY** to see if your church would like to participate in this unique initiative. PCHAS will support your church every step of the way. We don't need just any families; we need the **BEST** families, families that feel called to love children unconditionally.

Join the seventeen churches that have already scheduled Mission 1:27 campaigns for 2016 and the two churches that are currently participating in the my faith FAMILY ministry.

For more information about Mission 1:27 and my faith FAMILY, please contact Blaine Hamilton at mission127@pchas.org



MISSION 1:27
A voice for local children needing families



FROM RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTER TO HONOR ROLL STUDENT

Lisa Thrives in a PCHAS Foster Home

As an 11-year-old, Lisa was sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend, and was removed from her home by Child Protective Services. She was placed in a foster home, but because she'd been cutting herself, her foster parents and the psychiatrist she was seeing at the time were concerned for her safety. Lisa was placed in a residential treatment center, whose staff has special expertise with children who cut themselves. There's no one cause that leads someone to injure themselves. Self-injury is usually the result of an inability to cope in healthy ways with psychological pain. Lisa had a hard time regulating, expressing or understanding her emotions. The center's psychiatrist said that Lisa was feeling worthless, lonely and rejected.

Two years later Lisa was welcomed into in a PCHAS foster home. Her foster parents were concerned because Lisa was withdrawn and suffered from bouts of deep depression, but they provided her structure, stability and love. PCHAS began supporting these first-time foster parents long before they welcomed Lisa into their home. They attended special classes for foster parents, in which they learned effective methods for helping children heal from neglect and abuse. PCHAS also surrounded the foster parents with a community of care, including a support group of foster parents and a faithful case manager. By the time they were called to become Lisa's foster parents, their case manager knew them well. She assured them that she would be with them every step of this journey of love. And she was.

Over the course of her first year, she made significant progress. She joined the basketball team, and won the "most valuable player" award. Her foster parents attended all her basketball games, and the night that she won the award, they were so proud! A naturally gifted student who especially enjoys math and science, Lisa

eventually brought her grades up from C's and D's to A's and B's. She was on the honor roll! She knew her foster parents would be thrilled with her progress in school and she beamed when she showed them her report card.



Lisa still has scars from her days as a "cutter." She also has nightmares from the years of sexual abuse she suffered in the past. She is grateful to her PCHAS foster parents, who provided love, hope and healing during one of the darkest times of her life. Once so fragile, Lisa exceeded all their expectations. She cannot imagine what her life would have been like without them.

Without you, our supporters, we would not be able to do the work that we do. Our clients and our hardworking staff members thank you from the bottom of their hearts. You allow us to extend compassion and hope to a child in need. Your support will enable PCHAS to connect more children like Lisa with loving foster parents. Thank you!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services is a 501(c)3 charitable organization. All gifts are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. We do not render professional tax advice. Each person should consult a professional advisor.

Are you receiving duplicate mailings or no longer wish to be included on our mailing list?

Contact us:

1.800.888.1904

info@pchas.org

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services
Central Office
4407 Bee Cave Road, Suite 520
Austin, TX 78746

Be sure to include your complete name and address.

Connect with PCHAS



texas.pchas.org



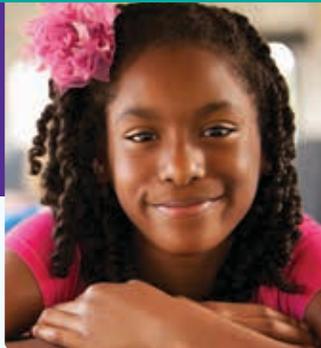
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Your support will make a big difference in the lives
of at-risk children. Each year, Presbyterian Children's
Homes and Services helps more than 4,200 children
and families.

Lend your support today

To donate online, visit:
texas.pchas.org/donate

You're Invited!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services
cordially invites you to attend these exciting
events this spring, summer and fall:

March 23rd: Baton Rouge Luncheon

Contact *Lynn Howard*,
Lynn.Howard@pchas.org; 225.276.1421

April 21st: Houston Luncheon

Contact *Sarah Cleary*,
Sarah.Cleary@pchas.org; 512.731.2571

April 23rd: Super Saturday

Contact *Jennifer Quintero-Pitts*,
Jennifer.Quintero-Pitts@pchas.org; 512.476.1234

May 4th: Fort Worth Luncheon

Contact *Ginny Lynch*,
Ginny.Lynch@pchas.org; 972.896.5318

May 18th: Austin Luncheon

Contact *Allison Harris*,
Allison.Harris@pchas.org; 512.922.1683