

From the Heart

A Publication for Friends of Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services

Spring 2016

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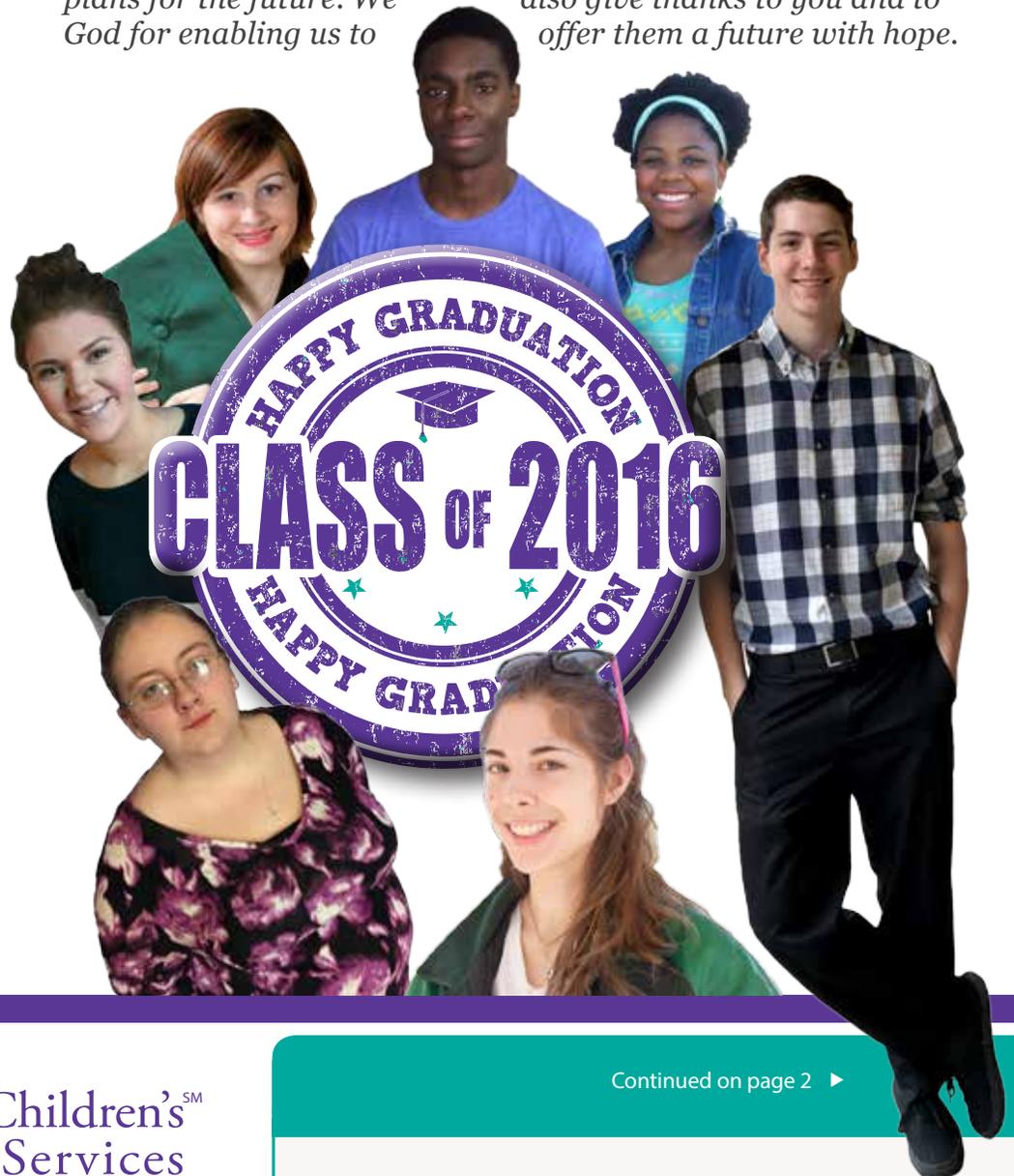
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CONGRATULATIONS To This Year's Graduates!

In this issue, we celebrate our graduating seniors who are headed to college in the fall. We also celebrate our college graduates. You'll read about where they are going and their plans for the future. We also give thanks to you and to God for enabling us to offer them a future with hope.



Continued on page 2 ▶



Presbyterian Children'sSM
Homes and Services
of Texas and Louisiana

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO



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

It's that time of year again. Along with their peers across the country, many of our young adults are about to graduate from high school and college with new challenges and vast opportunities before them. Long-time supporters of Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services have heard me say many times, this is when I worry about our young people the most. When they become more distanced from the regular support and nurture we provide them, that's when we see how much healing

has truly occurred. Overcoming the scars of past trauma often leaves vulnerability that can intensify when new and unfamiliar stress arises. That's why we do all we can to remain an accessible community of caring adults that will be a resource to them as they move ahead with their lives.

As you read about each of these amazing individuals who will soon graduate, look beyond the obvious potential they reveal. Each one has many strengths. But, strengths and potential by themselves are not enough for success in life. These characteristics must be guided by emotional intelligence. Look carefully at their own words for any gems of wisdom they may reveal. After all, that's our real goal at Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services, to prepare the whole person to engage the demands of life with confidence, competence, and caring. It's a marvelous experience to watch them continue to mature after they leave our care. Thank you for your help in making this possible.

CLASS OF 2016 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES



Tiffany Rastella

What year did you come into PCHAS' care?

In 2014. I was in the middle of 11th grade.

What are your plans after graduation?

I will attend Navarro College in Corsicana. I will study technology.

Are you involved in sports or other extracurricular activities at school?

I am involved with technical theater. I build the sets for school plays.

What are your interests outside school?

I participated in church camps.

What are you known for?

I am known for being kind, for my unique character and for my tender love to anyone and everyone.

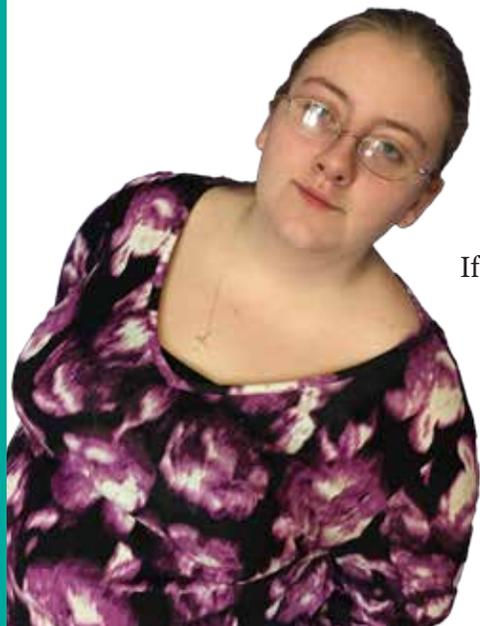
What is one of your favorite memories from your time with PCHAS? Who will you miss the most when you leave school?

I will miss the campus and I will miss EVERYBODY at PCHAS, both the children and the adults.

What else is interesting about you that you think we should know? What are some of your favorite things in this world?

I am really good at acting. Some of my favorite things are pandas, Hershey's chocolate, Dr. Pepper, *Heaven is for Real* and *Left Behind*. My favorite band is Bring me the Horizon and my favorite singer is Toby Mac. I am also a Christian. I was baptized on February 16, 2016! Another favorite day is February 18, Tiffany Sweet's birthday. (Please see page 6 for a profile of Tiffany Sweet).

Brekiyia (Breze) Nutt



What year did you come into PCHAS' care?

2014. I came to PCHAS during my freshman year.

What are your plans after graduation?

I hope to go to college. If I don't get into college, I will look for a job.

What are your interests outside of school?

Hunting, fishing, reading, playing video games, drawing

What extracurricular activities are you involved in?

Camp Gilmont Adventure Camp

Have you won any awards or received other honors at school, church, the community, or at work?

I was student of the year and student of the month.

What are you known for?

I am funny, loyal, protective of friends and family. I am also known for my love of reading.

What are some of your favorite memories from your time with PCHAS? Who will you miss the most when you leave school?

When Ms. Shirley, education coordinator, taught me how to use a sewing machine. I also will miss Brad and Brandy, my Group Home Parents.

Lamine Zimba



What year/grade did you come into PCHAS' care?

7th grade. Age 12.

What are your plans after graduation?

I will attend Weatherford College. I plan to study science, geology in particular.

Are you currently employed or have you been in the past?

No. I am very involved in sports, and that has prevented me from working.

Are you involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities at school? Which ones?

Tennis (I played for one year), basketball (four years), football (two years) and track (two years). I am very involved with United States Tennis Association (USTA) and I also play percussion instruments in the band.

What are your interests outside of school?

Tennis, video games, hanging out with friends, travel

What are you known for?

I am known for being athletic. I play basketball and tennis at a very advanced level. I am also known for playing percussion in the band and for making sure I always have good grades. I am also known for being "calm-spirited," being laid back, "chill." I have also been described as having a "noble" character and "chivalrous."

What is one of your favorite memories from your time with PCHAS?

I will miss the opportunity to play sports, our Colorado vacation trip, and receiving Christmas gifts from PCHAS supporters.



Marisa Somers

What are your plans after graduation?

I will attend Hill College or Weatherford College. I am interested in studying nursing. I am also interested in cosmetology.

Are you currently employed or were you employed in the past?

I am seeking summer employment after graduation.

Are you involved in sports or other extra-curricular activities at school? If so, which ones?

I run track. I also take Suzuki violin lessons. I have been playing the violin since I was 6 years old.

What are your interests outside of school?

I like reading (especially science fiction), cooking and gardening. I enjoy church-related activities like choir, working in the church nursery and participating in Vacation Bible School. I also enjoy pizza!

Paschal Miller

What year did you come into PCHAS' care?

I came into PCHAS' care at age ten; I was in the fourth grade.

What are your plans after graduation?

I will go to Austin Community College to earn my Associate's degree, then I'll transfer to University of Texas at Austin to earn my Bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

Are you currently employed or were you employed in the past? If so, what do you like about it?

I work at TaMolly's Mexican Kitchen and used to work at Tuscan Slice in Waxahachie. I enjoy my job as a server.

Are you involved in sports or other extracurricular activities at school?

I am a member of the National Honor Society, Men's Leadership Club, Delta Phi Beta Chi Science Club. I am also involved with cross-country, and I ran track during my freshman year.

What are your interests outside of school?

I have helped with Vacation Bible School and summer activities for youth at Central



Presbyterian Church in Waxahachie. I also have done volunteer work at Paws for Reflection, a dog shelter.

Have you won any awards or received other honors at school, church, the community or at work?

I was awarded student of the month three times and have received numerous "Highest GPA" awards from PCHAS.

What are you known for?

I am known for my sense of humor, my love of God, family, work and video games! I am known as a mature young man who sets goals and accomplishes them.

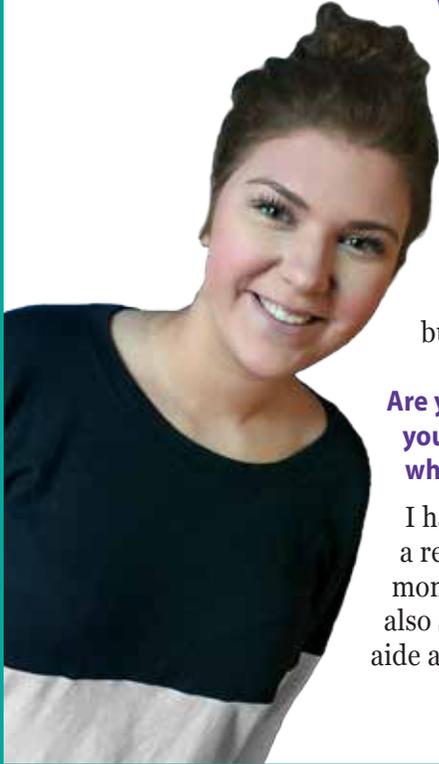
What is one of your favorite memories from your time with PCHAS? Who will you miss the most when you leave school?

I will miss the PCHAS office staff and my Home Parents. My favorite memory is going to Schlitterbahn, a water park, with my Home Parents.

What else is interesting about you that you think we should know? What are some of your favorite things in this world?

I plan to be a successful millionaire one day! I also want to write a book about my life which will hopefully inspire kids and adults. I want them to know that they can be successful no matter how difficult their lives are or have been. This is something I learned at PCHAS.

Allison Taylor



What year/grade did you come to PCHAS?

2013. Ninth grade.

What are your plans after graduation?

I will attend Weatherford Community College. I will focus on psychology and business.

Are you currently employed or were you employed in the past? If so, where did you work?

I have worked at Raising Cane's, a restaurant, for the past three months. I enjoy getting paychecks! I also served for four years as an office aide at school.

Are you involved in any other extra-curricular activities? If so, which ones?

I'm interested in cosmetology and I've completed 250 hours of training at Hill College.

What are you known for?

I have a good sense of humor. I work really well with makeup and hair.

What is one of your favorite memories from your time with PCHAS? Who will you miss the most when you leave school?

Our South Padre Vacation Bible School trip in 2014. I will definitely miss Brad and Brandy, my Home Parents.

What else is interesting about you that you think we should know? What are some of your favorite things in this world?

My favorite animal is an elephant; my favorite color is pink; my favorite movie is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

HATS OFF



TO OUR 2016 COLLEGE GRADUATES

Julia Nguyen

When will you graduate and from which college?

I will graduate from the University of Houston with a Bachelor's degree in finance in May.

Best college memory?

Professor Dale Rude, who taught Behavioral Finance, is a favorite professor of mine. He is not only an excellent teacher, he was very encouraging.

What is the most valuable lesson you learned during your college years?

The most important lesson I learned was this: Don't let insecurity stop you from achieving your goals! I learned to not let fear stop me. I learned I have to work for my success and that things are not achieved without effort. I learned to just DO IT!

What is your next step after graduation?

I will seek employment in the field of business. I hope to find a position that challenges me every day.

Support system during college:

The care packages that I received from Presbyterian Church groups during my college years were greatly appreciated! The cards and packages made me realize there are good people in the world. They made me feel so special! The packages always arrived at the best times when I needed encouragement.

Past employment:

I worked as a Mobile Sales Representative and was awarded Top Sales Representative! I also worked as a Front Desk Agent at a Hilton hotel.

About me:

I have two beautiful baby girls –Juliana, who is two years old, and Alexandra, who will be four months old by the time I graduate in May!

Tiffany Sweet

What year/grade did you graduate from PCHAS' care? What high school?

I graduated in Spring 2013 from Waxahachie Global High School. In two years, I was able to graduate with my Associate's Degree even before I got my high school diploma! Global's partnership with Navarro College made this possible.

What colleges did you attend?

I will graduate from The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) in May. Because I already had my Associate's Degree, I had a lot of credits under my belt going into college, so it took me only three years to graduate. My major is 3D animation.

Are you currently employed or were you employed in the past?

As a Terry Scholar, all my college fees are paid for, so I don't have to worry about working and can focus on my studies. In high school, I worked at the *Waxahachie Daily Light* newspaper so I could save some money for college. During my years there, I served as a cartoonist, videographer, photographer and reporter. I enjoyed the work, as I was allowed to do so many creative things.



During college, were you involved in activities on/off campus? Which ones?

In college, I served as Vice President and Art Chair of the UTD Ballroom Dance Club and as the historian of UTD's Animation Guild. I also attended a semester-long leadership program and was a member of the Student Game Developer Association. I was on the Dean's List and was named UTD Student of the Year of the Arts and Humanities department. I also received the Workforce Youth Participant of the Year Award from Workforce Solutions of North Central Texas.

What are your plans after college graduation?

I have been applying for internships at animation studios and will continue to work on my "demo reel," a compilation of the animation projects that I completed in college.

Are there other interesting things about you?

I like to write music! As a singer-songwriter, I have performed in coffee shops in El Paso and at UTD. I enjoy reading, and here's a fun fact: I can say the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish, but that hasn't really come in handy...yet!

For more about Tiffany Sweet:

<http://texas.pchas.org/2014/03/21/blog-former-foster-care-child-path-succeed-atec-student/>

"Congratulations to our hardworking high school and college graduates. We are so proud of you!"



From left to right:

Shirley Anthony, Virginia Knight and Gayle Jordan, the PCHAS Education Program team, with two of last year's high school graduates, Tiffany Yarber and Kat Perkins.



A PASSION FOR EDUCATION

Virginia Knight

By Cynthia Hartman and Margaret Barry

PCHAS Director of Education Virginia Knight is passionate about education. Her mother was a civil engineer in Mesquite, Texas at a time when female engineers were scarce; Virginia had a great role model growing up. She earned a bachelor's degree in speech pathology and a master's degree in education. She worked as a speech therapist, then as a public school teacher, focusing much of her 25-year teaching career on helping children who struggled with reading.

When Virginia retired from classroom teaching ten years ago, she learned that PCHAS was planning to expand its education program. "PCHAS had a wonderful program to support our students who wanted to go on to college or vocational school, but it had nothing formal to support the younger children. I joined PCHAS to help develop a program to support them," she said.

Virginia believes that education is the key to a successful future for all young people, and that it's especially important to support those who may be struggling with difficult or traumatic family circumstances, like the children in PCHAS' care. The PCHAS Education Program helps by providing the children in its Group Homes with tutoring services and emotional support.

Each Group Home campus provides tutoring sessions three times a week. The program also focuses on building strong relationships with local schools. A PCHAS education coordinator attends parent-teacher conferences and advocates for the students' special needs.

"Every day presents another challenge, and we couldn't do it without the dedication of the Home Parents and our hardworking staff, Shirley Anthony and Gayle Jordan. We make a great team," Virginia said.

When asked about what fuels Virginia's passion for the PCHAS education program, Gayle said, "Virginia knows that if kids have a solid education it can change the course of their lives. Because of the years she spent in

the classroom, she has first-hand knowledge of children's unique learning styles. What works for one child might not work for another. This approach guides her—and us—to consider how best to help each child. She believes that there are no cookie-cutter approaches to education and that we need to look at the whole child, to help them succeed academically."

Virginia is justly proud of the service learning programs she helped create. Every summer, the children in the Group Homes choose a service learning project. In the past, projects have included volunteering at a facility that serves people with Down Syndrome and sharing fire safety tips from the local fire department. Other recent projects include volunteering at an animal shelter where the students bathed, groomed and fed the animals.

Group Home residents can also choose to compete in a summer reading program in which they set reading goals. At the end of the summer, PCHAS hosts a campus-wide celebratory event whereby Group Home residents present their service learning projects and receive awards for meeting or exceeding their reading goals. Virginia says the kids love the event, but it's apparent from the way she speaks of the program that she enjoys it as much as the children do.

"One summer, for their service learning project, the children in one of the Group Homes refurbished some old bicycles. The Home Parents supervised and helped with the work. It was such a pleasure to see the kids' enthusiasm as they shared their project at our service learning celebration."

When asked what she enjoys most about the PCHAS education program, Virginia thinks for a moment and answers, "continually thinking about how to do things better. We are constantly reevaluating and looking at our outcomes. We can see an overall improvement in school performance, and we are always asking ourselves, how can we help the students succeed? That's what guides us."

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.

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Contact us:

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info@pchas.org

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You're Invited!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services cordially invites you to attend one of its 2016 Hope for the Children Fundraising Luncheons. Help support children and families in need!

May 18th: Austin Luncheon

Contact Allison Harris or Jamie Buchanan,
Allison.Harris@pchas.org; 512.922.1683
Jamie.Buchanan@pchas.org; 417.894.2968

October 12th: San Antonio Luncheon

Contact Allison Harris or Jamie Buchanan,
Allison.Harris@pchas.org; 512.922.1683
Jamie.Buchanan@pchas.org; 417.894.2968

November 2nd: Dallas Luncheon

Contact Sara Newell,
Sara.Newell@pchas.org; 417.576.0124