

From the Heart

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

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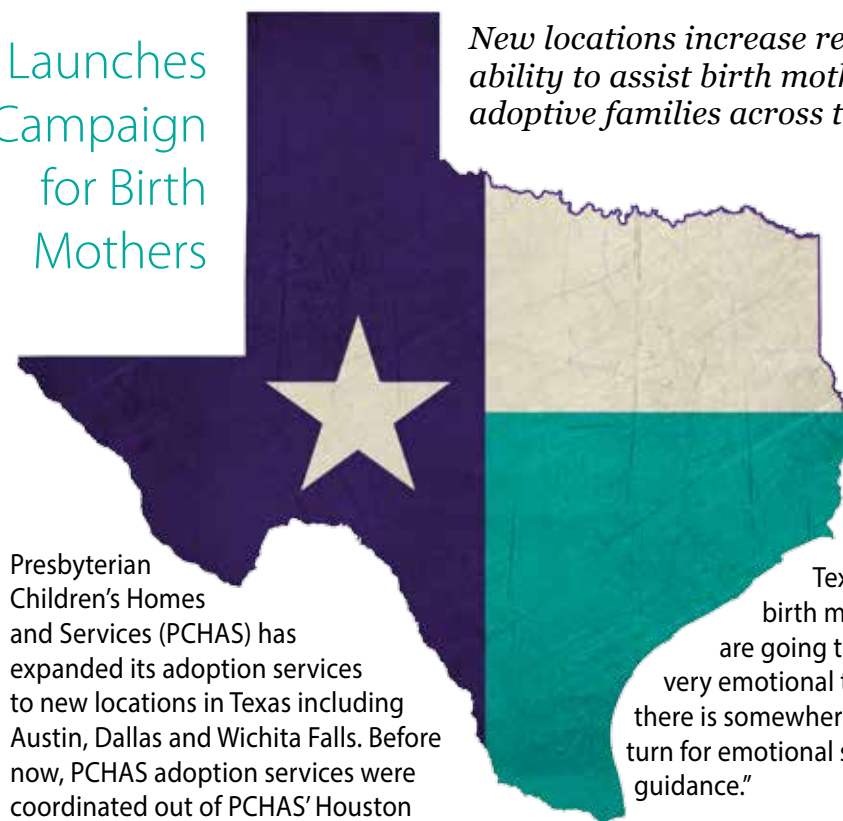
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PCHAS Expands Adoption Services!

Launches
Campaign
for Birth
Mothers

New locations increase reach and ability to assist birth mothers and adoptive families across the state



Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS) has expanded its adoption services to new locations in Texas including Austin, Dallas and Wichita Falls. Before now, PCHAS adoption services were coordinated out of PCHAS' Houston office. The expansion coincides with the launch of an educational awareness campaign focused on birth mothers.

"This is an exciting time for us. We will continue to serve those in need across the state as we increase awareness of PCHAS' adoption services to the ones who need it most—children, birth parents, single parents and adoptive families," says PCHAS president and CEO Ed Knight. "We will be paying special attention to birth mothers as we expand

to larger markets in Texas. We want birth mothers who are going through a very emotional time to know there is somewhere they can turn for emotional support and guidance."

The expansion paves the way for the "Silent No More - #BirthMomStrong" campaign, which aims to give strength and voice back to birth mothers across the state telling the (mostly untold) story of the birth mother and by educating the public on the adoption process. PCHAS is leading the charge to give strength and support to a birth mother's most difficult decision: placing her child with a loving family.

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO



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

“When you care enough to send the very best.” Most people will recognize this phrase as a Hallmark cards slogan. This successful American-based company first adopted the slogan in 1944 and still uses it today. It’s a great slogan that succinctly conveys a powerful message. Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services (PCHAS) also cares enough about those with whom and for whom we work to always contribute our very best. I believe you will see this message revealed as you read this edition of *From the Heart*.

Never an organization to sit still, I am excited to share with you our efforts to expand our voluntary adoption services throughout the state to better serve children, adoptive parents and birth parents. In so doing, we also hope to better inform our readers about the life-long benefits of open adoption. We are also proud to showcase our award-winning foster parents, Pat and Syvilla Stacy. They have been named Foster Parents of the Year by the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards. They also won an award from the Wichita County Child Welfare Board.

Finally, I hope reading about the experience of our youth with “Mobile Camp Gilmont” will make you smile, just as it did me. Our youth in care at our Waxahachie and Itasca campuses came together for a week with Camp Gilmont counselors and PCHAS staff to interact in life-changing ways.

PCHAS cares enough to send our very best in all that we do. Thank you for your support in this effort.

◀ Continued from cover

Through in-person support groups, speaking opportunities and online conversations, the agency will encourage birth mothers to tell their story and be silent no more. Instead of being silenced, PCHAS will offer birth mothers an avenue for their stories and voices to be heard.

“I am very pleased that PCHAS is focusing its efforts on adoption services across the state,” says Celeste Ross, associate vice president for PCHAS Adoption Services and Regional Director. “At a time when non-agency adoptions are on the rise and birth moms are left without rights or due legal process, it is critical that they know they have an agency they can trust to be their voice when all feels lost. We are proud to be ‘birth mom strong’ here at PCHAS.”

By offering additional adoption services in Austin, Dallas and Wichita Falls, PCHAS will focus its efforts on a larger population of birth parents and adoptive families. This year, PCHAS hired additional adoption specialists and program directors to implement the expansion of its adoption services. Specialized, experienced staff have been selected for their years of experience working with children and families.

PCHAS’ adoption program offers “wrap-around services,” which include counseling, guidance, adoption, help with proper legal process and education of all of the options

available to birth parents and their adoptive families. Learn more about the support PCHAS offers to birth parents on our website: adoption.pchas.org/how-we-can-help

PCHAS serves maternity clients, birth parents and adoptive parents across the entire state of Texas. For questions related to PCHAS’ expansion in Texas or to refer someone to our adoption services, please visit us at adoption.pchas.org or email us at adoption@pchas.org.



**TEE IT UP...
FOR THE KIDS!**



**Monday, Oct. 3, 2016
WestRidge Golf Course**

The Wes Geary Memorial Golf Tournament is Trinity’s sixth annual event benefitting Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services (PCHAS).

Sponsored by the Men’s Ministry of Trinity Presbyterian Church, McKinney, TX.
For more information contact: Bob Wilcox / boliwilcox@tx.rr.com / 972-832-1760.

Pat and Syvilla Stacy

PCHAS' Award-winning Foster Parents

By Margaret Barry



Pat and Syvilla Stacy with two of their sons

Pat and Syvilla Stacy, Wichita Falls foster parents with Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS) since 2007, have provided love and support to nearly 60 children in their home over the years (41 children through PCHAS; 19 through Child Protective Services). They have recently been named Foster Parents of the year by the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards. This is a state-wide award. They also won the Patsy Baggett Award from the Wichita County Child Welfare Board. The award is given each year in April during National Prevent Child Abuse Month. Prior award recipients include judges, senators, Child Protective Services (CPS) staff, District Attorneys and other foster parents. The Stacys were celebrated with a luncheon provided by the Child Welfare Board and were honored by PCHAS at the PCHAS Board of Trustees meeting in June. The Board gave the Stacys a standing ovation.

Pat and Syvilla will never forget their first placement. It was 2:00 a.m. and the Child Protective Services (CPS) social worker was in the car next to theirs filling out the paperwork as they picked up two children, eight months old and two years old, both in dirty t-shirts and diapers. This night-time exchange of paperwork and children who need care has happened many times since then. Recently they cared for a four-year-old who had been in 13 homes in 11 months.

Being foster parents is challenging to be sure, but Pat and Syvilla see it as their calling. They have two biological sons, one son whom they adopted through foster care, and they are in the process of adopting a second child who is currently in their care.

Sibling groups often suffer in foster care, as there aren't many foster parents who will care for them. The Stacys, however, consistently care for sibling groups. When this is not possible, they make sure that the children have regular contact with their siblings each week. This is not always easy to do, as

families often live far apart from each other, but the Stacys find a way to make it work.

Syvilla stays at home with the children while Pat works at the Petrolia Independent School District. Pat is the Foster Child Liaison for Petrolia ISD. In this role, he helps smooth the way for other foster parents whose foster children are having trouble at school.

Pat spends countless hours training other foster parents. He teaches several courses to PCHAS foster families, other foster care-related agencies and CPS. In addition to training foster parents, Pat coordinates four PCHAS "Super Saturday" training days each year. Super Saturdays provide eight hours of training for foster families in the area. He works with PCHAS volunteer groups to ensure child care is provided so foster families can attend this training. (PCHAS is always looking for volunteers to help with child care at Super Saturdays in Wichita Falls and the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. To help, see texas.pchas.org or contact Jennifer Quintero-Pitts at Jennifer.Quintero-Pitts@pchas.org or 800.888.1904).

Pat is the president of the Wichita Falls Foster Parent Association, and also leads outreach activities featuring children who are waiting for adoption.

Pat and Syvilla are truly exceptional advocates for children in the foster care system. They willingly sacrifice their personal time to ensure children have the best care while away from their families. Pat and Syvilla are an inspiration to all who know them.



Camp Gilmont

A Week of Fun and Bible Study

By Margaret Barry

Summer is a joyful time filled with sports and other outdoor activities. When Camp Gilmont, Grace Presbytery's 75-year old Christ-centered camp in Gilmer, Texas, comes to town, it's also a time for Bible study and reflection. Marie Nelson, Associate Director at Camp Gilmont, said that the camp is about connecting with God and with fellow campers. "The camps are jam packed full of fun and spiritual growth, but most of all they are about building relationships," she said.

Camp Gilmont has donated scholarships for the children in PCHAS' Group Homes for many years; this year the camp came to PCHAS' Itasca campus, where 33 children from both our Itasca and Waxahachie campuses participated in what some PCHAS staff lovingly refer to as "Mobile Camp Gilmont."

The campers participated in typical camp activities like swimming, water games, arts and crafts and archery. The children began each day with dancing, which was a favorite activity of the 11 and 14-year-old girls interviewed for this article. But the camp had a serious side too. The curriculum was based around four main principles from the Bible: the courage to show up, the courage to trust, the courage to forgive and the courage to change.

The "courage to show up" (Gen. 12:1-8, Gen. 12:7-8) segment taught the children to acknowledge fear of new experiences and rejection, a very important lesson for children – especially children who have experienced rejection by their biological families.

The "courage to trust" (Ruth 1:16-18) segment taught the children to reflect on the consequences of broken trust and to acknowledge fear of betrayal.

The "courage to forgive" (Gen. 45:1-15, Gen. 14-15) lesson allowed the children to experience the transformative power of forgiveness in relationships, explore giving and receiving grace and acknowledge fear of being hurt again.

The "courage to change" (Acts 10, Acts 10:44-45) helped the children learn that change is inevitable and taught them to celebrate change.

The "courage to forgive" lesson resonated with most of the children, many of whom have had tumultuous relationships with their biological families or have experienced neglect. "After this lesson," said Kyle Mitchell, Residential Program Director, "one of the children asked me if we could provide transportation to her mother's house so that she could have a counseling session with her. She told me she wanted to tell her mom that she forgives her. This was the highlight of the camp experience for me – to see a child transformed by the lessons she learned at camp."

Mary Henderson, one of the Camp Gilmont counselors, said that she and the other Gilmont counselors want to bring the camp back to Itasca. "The highlight for me," she said, "was building relationships with the campers and sharing during our Bible study time. They opened up and shared their stories, their questions and their testimonies. They shared specifics of the ways Jesus has helped them in their lives, how they have grown in their faith and how God has provided for them."

The Gilmont counselors have the privilege of working with remarkable children every day, said Mary, but she says they had a particularly meaningful time with the PCHAS campers. "The PCHAS kids are at a different stage in their faith journey than most of the children we work with," she said. "The counselors had deeper conversations with them about the Bible than they do at most camps. They are further along in their faith journey than most children."

Mary had glowing things to say about the children at PCHAS. "The PCHAS kids are so awesome," she said. "They are very welcoming; not shy, and very helpful. The oldest teenagers surprised me with their excellent leadership skills. Some were preparing to go to Corpus Christi to lead Vacation Bible School at Island Presbyterian Church, and they will be great leaders."

This praise of the children was music to Kyle's ears. Because many of the children have been abused or neglected, he said, some of them are, understandably, "rather difficult to connect with," he said. But there was a lot of "connecting" at camp – not just with Camp Gilmont counselors, but also with each other. "It makes me happy to see the children on the Waxahachie and Itasca campuses getting to know each other and form friendships. They often feel isolated, so it's important for them to build friendships with one another. And I love them all, so it's nice to see them discover the neat things about each other," Kyle said.

All in all, "Mobile Camp Gilmont" was a huge success and Kyle hopes to host it again next year and invite children from the community to participate along with the children from the Group Homes. "The children in the Group Homes sometimes feel isolated from the children at school; this will bring them closer to their school friends. This would be a dream come true for us," he said.

James Hilliard, Executive Director of Camp Gilmont, worked diligently with PCHAS staff over a period of several months to ensure that the camp would be a safe and enjoyable experience for all, said Kyle.

"It takes a community that is willing to dig in and get involved to pull off a successful traveling camp," said James. "And we found PCHAS staff and volunteers to be very welcoming and hardworking. Gilmont is thankful to have a ministry partner in PCHAS!"

*Initial funding for **Mobile Camp Gilmont** was provided by the Prairie Valley Legacy Fund, managed by First Presbyterian Church of Ft. Worth in cooperation with Grace Presbytery. PCHAS-related expenses were underwritten by Alpine Presbyterian Church of Longview, TX. PCHAS is extremely grateful for these generous sponsors.*

Photos from our 2016 Austin, Fort Worth and Houston Luncheons



Acknowledgement of donors

We are very appreciative of the following people and congregations that provided leadership gifts prior to each of our Spring, 2016 luncheons:

Austin Luncheon:

- Polly and Phil Diebel
- Susan and Steven Foy
- Claire and Carl Stuart
- Charla and Vance McCracken

Fort Worth Luncheon:

- E.T. and Anna Bradley
- Billye B. Bradley
- Les and Brenda Staples
- First Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth

Houston Luncheon:

- Anonymous
- Uncle Anonymous
- Carol and Richard Harris
- Sheila Liu
- The John P. McGovern Foundation
- Bill and Laura Parker

Hannah and Aaron's Journey to Adoption



Meet Hannah and Aaron Bunker of Houston. A creative soul, Hannah is a talented blogger and producer of a lively YouTube channel. Aaron has his own marriage counseling practice. Hannah and Aaron were ready to start their family when they discovered they could not conceive. They decided to adopt a child in 2012.

Like most who seek to adopt, Hannah and Aaron were filled with questions. How do we get started? What is the legal process? Hannah took to Google and asked friends for recommendations. Through a support group for prospective adoptive parents, Hannah and Aaron were referred to Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services (PCHAS). They had also heard great things about PCHAS from close friends who were going through PCHAS' Foster-to-Adopt program.

Hannah and Aaron set up a meeting with PCHAS and met with Celeste Ross, a PCHAS Regional Director based in Houston. During this meeting, they learned about the "wrap around services" provided to both birth parents and adoptive families. "Celeste and the PCHAS team were so comforting to me. Celeste made me feel right at home and so calm about the entire process. I knew PCHAS was the right choice for our adoption," Hannah recalled.

Hannah and Aaron were assigned to PCHAS Adoption Specialist Amanda (Mandy) Oakes. "Mandy was incredible to work with. I couldn't give a more stellar review. Through the whole process I knew we needed to be professional, but I couldn't wait until the process was complete so Mandy and I could be friends in real life!" said Hannah.

"Everyone at PCHAS is so friendly, warm and welcoming. I never felt like a bother no matter how many questions I asked. Just like how you should turn to your doctor and not Google for medical questions, you should turn to your adoption agency with the hard questions. I turned to PCHAS—they were my 'adoption doctor,' and I trusted my team's professional advice," she said.

PCHAS Adoption Specialists play a vital role throughout the adoption process helping and representing both the maternity client and adoptive family with counseling and education, including information about the (rather involved) legal process. "We didn't know if it would be better to have an Adoption Specialist that represented both the birth mom and adoptive parents, but it definitely worked out in everyone's favor. All parties stayed informed and communication flowed smoothly," Hannah recalled.

Within two weeks of signing paperwork, Hannah and Aaron received a call that a maternity client and her partner had selected Hannah and Aaron as the adoptive family for their twin babies. As a next step, Hannah and Aaron met the prospective birth parents. "The first meeting was awkward; I'm not going to lie. There was an 'elephant in the room.' It is such a difficult decision for a birth family to have another family parent their child, and we were grieving for them. It was bittersweet for us. We talked with the birth parents for a long time. It was great to get to know them."

The meeting went well and the birth mom and dad selected Hannah and Aaron as the adoptive family for their baby twins. The Bunkers and the birth parents agreed to an open adoption. They wanted their children to know their adoption story and to think of their birth parents with honor and mutual respect, just as Hannah and Aaron think of them.

"We could not have been more excited. Aaron and I were shopping at IKEA getting nursery room ideas when we got a call from Mandy who said, 'don't spend too much money yet, but you may want to pick up two car seats for the arrival of your new twin babies, a boy and a girl.' We were elated!"





The official placement and the assigning of parental rights was a meeting filled with intense emotion. Hannah and Aaron were grateful to be blessed with such beautiful twin babies but Hannah recalls, "I remember after we signed documents to affirm our official parental rights, we were in a room together with the birth parents and the babies. These were some of the sweetest and saddest moments of my life. We wanted to celebrate, but we also grieved for the birth parents. We looked into each other's eyes, tears flowing, and were bonded from that moment forward. I will never forget that day"

As a way to honor the birth parents, the Bunkers used the names the birth parents picked out for their babies as the babies' middle names; and the babies, Cason Carmelo Bunker and Grace Camille Bunker, could not be more loved by both

their birth parents and adoptive parents. Hannah sends Mother's Day cards to the birth mother and shares how the children are doing on a regular basis.

Hannah and Aaron want to reassure other adoptive moms and dads out there, "There is not a picture perfect story. Your adoption journey might not go the way you are imagining it. But when you're holding those children in your arms, when you finally get there, however long you've been waiting, all the pain just melts away. There is nothing more beautiful!"

Now toddlers, Cason and Grace, fill their parents' lives with joy and giggles. Hannah and Aaron love watching them learn and grow. They could not be happier about these rambunctious additions to their family, a true blessing.

RUN WITH US!

If you or anyone you know is interested in running the 2017 Houston Marathon, please consider joining our team!

Sunday January 15, 2017

For detailed information on how to sign-up, please visit:

texas.pchas.org/2016/08/11/the-houston-marathon/
or contact: sarah.cleary@pchas.org



Presbyterian Children's
Homes and Services



L to R: PCHAS' Amanda Oakes, Stephanie Lou, Michelle Hoevker

Grace Presbyterian Church Goes Above and Beyond for PCHAS

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services is grateful to Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston for their support of our Houston area programs. Grace's Vacation Bible School raised more than \$3,000 for children and families in need. In addition to this monetary contribution, the children in the VBS program (and their parents) brought in much-needed items, including 1,600 diapers and 100 packages of baby wipes, 187 rolls of paper towels, 368 rolls of toilet paper, 122 boxes of Kleenex. The paper products alone make up a year's supply for the families in our care and will save them more than \$1,000. PCHAS is overwhelmed by the generosity of Grace's VBS.

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



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We're Moving!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services' Central Office is moving to a new location. As of January 1, 2017, our Central Office (including Austin Foster Care and Adoption) will be located at:

**5920 W. William Cannon Drive, Building 3,
Austin, TX 78749**

Please stay tuned for information about our 2017 Austin Central Office Open House, to be scheduled in early 2017. Please continue sending all donations to:

P.O. Box 140888, Austin, Tx 78714-9981

or donate online at:

texas.pchas.org



You're Invited!

Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services cordially invites you to attend one of these upcoming events:

2016

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

2017

March 3rd - 4th: Ambassador Retreat

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

April 19th: Austin Luncheon

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