

BARIUM SPRINGS &
GRANDFATHER HOME
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UNDER A NEW NAME



children's hope

— ALLIANCE —

the journey

Spring/Summer 2018

IF NOT US, THEN WHO?

why Children's Hope Alliance is providing hope for kids & families across N.C.

A HOME FOR ANAREE

an adoption journey

BRIDGING THE GAP

with Malik's mom in prison, a family gave him the love he needed.

CLOSE TO HOME

special programs help teens who age out

A LISTENING EAR

growing up is hard, and being mindful of mental health is important





children's hope

— ALLIANCE —

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The Journey, 2018
Volume 4, Number 1

Our mission is to provide a safe, healing journey for hurting children and families - creating hope now and in the future.

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every journey is different...

we're committed to helping children and families along the way

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A few months ago, our CBO, Jason Ainsley, and I attended the Open Minds Conference in Clearwater, Florida. At the conference, we had the opportunity to engage in some very robust conversations around mental health and support systems. While we were there, I met with several stakeholders in Florida, and each of them brought up the recent high school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and other tragedies that have become far too normalized in our society.

As the leader of one of North Carolina's largest child welfare agencies, I'm troubled when I hear countless reports about the attackers' pasts which mirror the pasts of the children in our care. It leaves the impression these troubled children are beyond help, beyond hope, and beyond redemption. They are not. With the right help and support, these young people can have a productive life and a successful future. At Children's Hope Alliance, we are proactive in helping raise a generation riddled with violence, to rise above their circumstances and heal from their past hurt.

These are all of our children – the troubled, the traumatized, the struggling, the hurting. As we look at our agency and make plans for our future, I ask myself time and time again, "If not us, then who?" We do some great work with some very complex children and we are always evaluating and improving our programs so we can do more.

Regards,

Celeste Dominguez, President & CEO

A Home for Anaree

Dot never dreamed she'd be the parent of a baby again. Then, Anaree happened.

by :: Hillary Bennett & Adam Hicks

Children have a funny way of making a home in your heart. Take Dot Mahatha for example. Dot was entrenched in her professional career, and a mother of two grown boys. She had no plans to start raising a child again. Then, she met a little girl who changed everything. Dot's close friend became a foster parent, and really enjoyed knowing that what she was doing was helping children heal, grow, and develop. She encouraged Dot for months, explaining how rewarding it was knowing that she was having a positive impact on future generations. Dot knew her friend loved having kids in her home again. Finally, she convinced Dot to reach out to Children's Hope Alliance and start the process of becoming a licensed foster parent.

About seven years ago, Dot completed her training and licensing process and began providing respite foster care services. Because of her work schedule, she couldn't foster during the week, but she helped by taking children into her home on the weekends to give



MEET ANAREE,
age 1

full-time foster parents a break. Dot was one of Children's Hope Alliance's most steadfast and dependable respite foster parents for several years. After she retired, Dot decided she wanted to get more involved with fostering and transitioned from providing respite care to becoming a full-time foster parent. Dot knew Children's Hope Alliance needed foster parents who are willing to bring older children and teenagers

into their homes. Her goal was to foster children and teens on a short-term basis until their biological family stabilized enough so that they could go back home. That's when she met Anaree.

Anaree was a seven-month-old infant who came into our care through the Guilford County Department of Social Services. Anaree had a broken leg, and was removed from her

This is why we do what we do ::

A young woman recently left Hawthorn Heights, which is one of our group homes located in Bryson City, NC. As she was packing her things and getting ready to go back home, she wrote our staff at Hawthorn Heights a special letter, which you can read below.



It's boys and girls like the author of this letter that provide us with the motivation to go to work every day. We're excited about the life that is ahead of this young lady, and countless others who successfully transition from our 30 specialized programs.

biological parents' custody. The little girl needed an emergency placement into a safe home.

Honestly, I was a little hesitant. Anaree was just an infant. It had been years since I cared for such a little baby.

"Honestly, I was a little hesitant at first," said Dot. "Anaree was just an infant. It had been years since I cared for such a little baby. I was also concerned that I wouldn't be able to provide the specialized medical care she would need with a broken femur. Knowing her background of neglect and abuse, I was concerned for her future, and was worried that permanent developmental damage could've been done. But all those concerns melted away when I saw Anaree's sweet little face. I will forever be grateful that I said yes to this child. She's such a blessing."

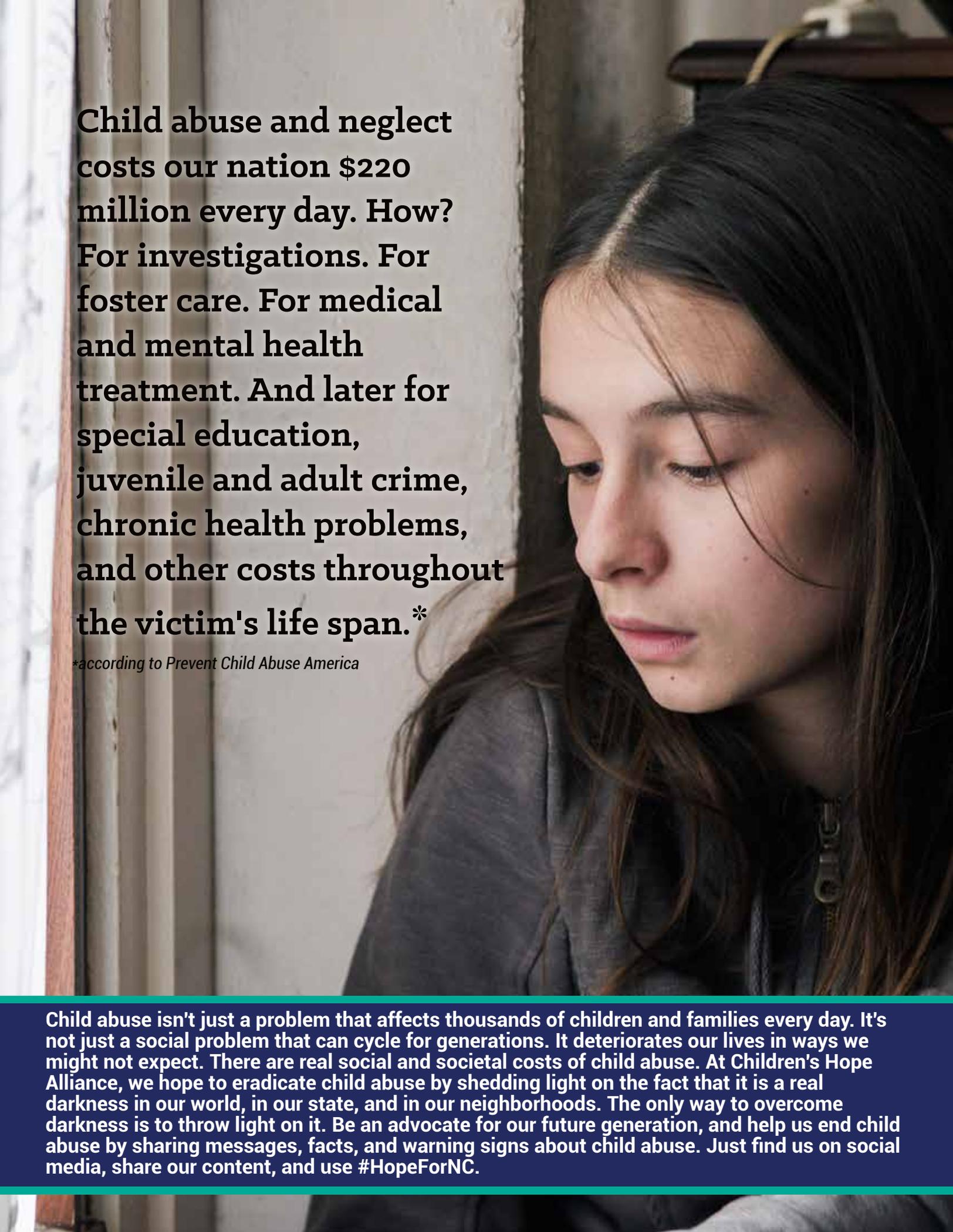
Dot's two older sons and her grandchildren loved Anaree, and the infant quickly became part of the Mahatha family. They'd been through so much together and the bond that Dot and her family also had nurtured with Anaree over the

year and a half was too strong to break. With the support of Children's Hope Alliance Foster Care and Adoption staff and the guidance of the adoption staff at Guilford County DSS, Dot has legally adopted Anaree.

"I'm so thankful for the staff at Children's Hope Alliance. They helped guide me through the entire adoption process," said Dot. "I'm so thankful and blessed to have Anaree in my life. It's a blessing I truly never expected!"

Dot's heart is overflowing with love. Even with two biological sons, several grandchildren, and a little daughter, she said she plans to continue providing respite care for foster children at Children's Hope Alliance. It looks like Anaree will have lots of friends coming in and out of her home for a long time. ✨

Respite care is a constant need since there are limitations on who can supervise foster children. If you have ever considered fostering, but are not sure if you're ready for a long-term commitment, respite care is a great way to help right now and to see if fostering is the right decision for you and your family. Children's Hope Alliance has several families who started their foster journey in respite care. For more info, visit ChildrensHopeAlliance.org and click "foster."

A young woman with long, dark hair is shown in profile, looking down and to the left. She has a serious, contemplative expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a vertical wooden trim on the left side. The lighting is soft, highlighting her features.

Child abuse and neglect costs our nation \$220 million every day. How? For investigations. For foster care. For medical and mental health treatment. And later for special education, juvenile and adult crime, chronic health problems, and other costs throughout the victim's life span.*

**according to Prevent Child Abuse America*

Child abuse isn't just a problem that affects thousands of children and families every day. It's not just a social problem that can cycle for generations. It deteriorates our lives in ways we might not expect. There are real social and societal costs of child abuse. At Children's Hope Alliance, we hope to eradicate child abuse by shedding light on the fact that it is a real darkness in our world, in our state, and in our neighborhoods. The only way to overcome darkness is to throw light on it. Be an advocate for our future generation, and help us end child abuse by sharing messages, facts, and warning signs about child abuse. Just find us on social media, share our content, and use #HopeForNC.



*Child's name and photo have been changed for his protection, but his story is very real.

MEET MALIK*,

age 16

BRIDGING THE GAP

How foster care is helping Malik prepare for a bright future

by: *Adam Hicks*

Malik has had an uphill battle his entire life. Twelve years ago, Malik's father was arrested for possession with intent to sell or distribute a controlled substance. That was his third drug-related offense, so he was facing an extended prison sentence. Malik was four years old at the time his father was arrested, and having his father removed from his home left a void in Malik's heart and his development that no one could fill.

Malik's mom worked hard at the local convenience store, but despite her long hours, she couldn't make enough money

to make ends meet. Between rent, utilities, and putting food on the table for a growing boy, Malik's mom looked to supplement her income any way she could. Through networks Malik's father had before his arrest, Malik's mother was able to get started selling controlled substances. It was illegal, and Malik's mom knew the risks, but it was additional income that was desperately needed.

Because Malik's mom was essentially working two jobs, she was almost always out of the house, and never really saw her son. From a very young age, Malik learned how to take care

of himself. At the age of six, when Malik would get home from school, he would be home alone. Every afternoon, he would run as fast as he could from his bus stop to his house. He would reach under the doormat to get the key, unlock the front door, then turn the TV on to watch cartoons on the local PBS station. With his mother rarely home, it was almost like Malik was raised by Arthur, Bob the Builder, and Clifford the Big Red Dog. After watching a few cartoons, Malik's tummy would start to growl, so he would drag a chair from the kitchen table, and put it in front of the stove, and then start boiling water for

his Ramen noodles. On weeks when his mom picked up some extra hours at the convenience store, there would even be frozen chicken nuggets or pizza bagels in the freezer. Those were Malik's favorite.

Malik's mom would typically get home from work around 8:30 each night. When she would get home, she would help Malik get ready for bed, then tuck him in. There wasn't much time or energy for Malik's mom to invest in talking to him about his day, or checking to make sure he did his homework. She didn't know how much Malik struggled in school.

Malik was very driven, but just didn't have support at home. He learned all he could at school, but by the time he got home, he really struggled completing his homework. Because he didn't really spend time with anyone outside of school, most of his classmates called him nerdy, awkward, and a few even called him much worse names than that. Despite not having many friends at school, and struggling to keep up, Malik scraped by. Year by year, he would test just high enough to advance to the next grade. He seemed to fly just under the radar of his teachers and school counselors. He never excelled, but never did poor enough to warrant any extra attention.

All that changed when Malik was 15. He was called to the principal's office to meet with a police officer, who informed him that his mother was arrested earlier that day after selling

prescription pain pills to an undercover police officer. The officer told Malik that he would have to come with him so they could work out a place for Malik to stay until his mother could return home. The thought of his mother being in prison for trying her best to take care of him flipped a switch in Malik. He saw red and attacked the police officer right there in the principal's office. After knocking the officer to the ground, Malik started hitting him. The principal was finally able to pull Malik off the officer. Now, mild-mannered Malik was not only facing life without his mother, he was facing assault charges.

Malik was taken to the Department of Social Services, who then contacted Children's Hope Alliance for a foster parent referral. "I'll never forget when Children's Hope Alliance called us," said Chris, Malik's soon-to-be foster dad. "They said they had a 15-year-old boy who will need a home for at least a few months. His mother was arrested on drug charges, but she has not lost custody of him. They said the plan was for them to reunify after she is released. Then he paused for a minute, and he said, 'Oh, one more thing ... I just wanted to let you know that when he heard about his mom, he attacked the police officer.' To say I was a little intimidated is an understatement. But my wife and I knew we were supposed to help."

"We've raised 3 boys ourselves," said Sasha. "We're older now. We don't want to adopt, and Chris and I both heard how

it's hard for organizations like Children's Hope Alliance to find placements for older kids, like Malik. I honestly believe that's what we're called to do. We're supposed to help teens who really don't have many options." The next day, Malik met Chris and his wife, Sasha, for the first time. Malik was standoffish, and uncomfortable, but never aggressive. Chris and Sasha did their best to make Malik feel at home. Sasha grilled some burgers for dinner. That was something Malik wasn't used to – a hot meal that he didn't have to cook himself. It was strange, but Malik liked it.

Malik has been with Chris and Sasha for two months now. It took a while, but Malik has come around and opened up to his new foster parents. Now, he and Chris go to the local YMCA to play basketball every Saturday, and Sasha is able to help Malik study for his End Of Course tests coming up in a few weeks. Chris and Sasha even take Malik to visit his mom during visitation hours.

"Mr. Chris and Mrs. Sasha are really nice people," said Malik. "I'm thankful they opened their home to me. I love my mom, and honestly, I can't wait until she gets out of jail so I can move back with her, but I know she's working on some things. I am too. When I get older, I want to get a good job, and make enough money to take care of her, too. My foster parents have been a big help to me. They're really supportive." ✨

*Child's name and photo have been changed for her protection, but her story is very real.

MEET TAMARA*,

age 18



CLOSE TO HOME

Because of a specialized support program, Tamara can stay near her support system.

by :: Adam Hicks

For the first time in her life, Tamara has options.

Three years ago, 15-year-old Tamara came to live at our historic Grandfather Home campus in Banner Elk after coming from an abusive home. Her mother passed away at a young age, and her father sexually abused Tamara for years. In turn, she did what many chil-

dren in her circumstances do. She reflected her abuse onto a classmate in the locker room at her high school.

Tamara was placed in one of our group homes to help her heal from her own past trauma, and to confront her actions in a healthy way. While Tamara was hurt, scared, and angry when she first entered our residential program, her therapists, teachers, and direct-care staff

showed immense patience, empathy, and love. During her first month on campus, Tamara got into several yelling matches with her house mates and therapists. "Once we talked to Tamara about how to process all her trauma in a healthy way, and to confront her feelings head-on, her entire outlook changed," said her therapist. "Seeing where she is now, versus where she was when she first came to us makes me incredibly proud of her. Despite her past struggles, I know she's got a bright future."

After 18 months of living on campus and attending our Charter School, Grandfather Academy, Tamara was ready to transition to foster care. There was, however, an issue with finding a placement for Tamara. "We have lots of foster parents who have been licensed through our agency, but many of them have preferences of wanting only boys, or girls, or younger children," explains Senior Director of Foster Care, Kevin Angell. "Finding families who will take in teenage girls, especially ones with behavioral issues in their past, is very difficult."

"I'm thankful for my time at Grandfather Home, but I didn't really like living there," said Tamara. "It's not like people were mean to me or anything. I was safe and had food, which was good. They helped me work through a lot of stuff in my past. That's what I needed. It just wasn't the same as having a family. Kids are supposed to grow up with a family, not

a group home. I was actually ready to go to foster care after living on campus for about a-year-and-a-half, but I had to wait another four months before my case manager could find a family who wanted me. I get it. I had a bad past. Who would want me, ya' know? Anyhow, the Moretzs were worth the wait! They are amazing foster parents. I love them so much."

"We've fostered several older children, and when one of them was able to transition back to his biological family, we decided to bring Tamara into our home," explained Kelly Moretz. "Tamara and I really hit it off right off the bat. Tamara's mom passed away when she was really young, so she never really had a mother-figure in her life. I'm thankful I've been able to fill that role."

Tamara has lived with the Moretz family for a little over a year. She'll be aging out of foster care soon. When she turns 18, she won't be able to

continue in our foster care program, however, Children's Hope Alliance isn't just leaving her to fend for herself.

I had a bad past. Who would want me, ya' know?

Tamara has been accepted into both our Independent Living and our Stand By Me programs. Both programs help teens in our care transition into adulthood. Many teens who age out of care have never had a driver's license, a job, opened a bank account, or filed their taxes. We help them by teaching life skills, help them secure housing, and help them apply to colleges to further their education, or apply for a job. The difference between the programs is simply location. On our historic Barium Springs campus, we have two apartment buildings set aside for our Independent Living program, which is a

great central location to Hickory, Statesville, Winston, and even Charlotte. Stand Be Me is an added support that doesn't have the geographic limitations of Independent Living.

"I visited them, and the Independent Living apartments look great," said Tamara. "But, I think I'm going to go with the Stand By Me program, because I can live about anywhere I want to with that program. Dave and Kelly said I can come back and visit them whenever I want, but they live in Asheville, so I want to stay in the area. My case manager said Children's Hope Alliance will help me find housing, and even apply for community college. Best of all, I can stay close to the only real parent-figures I've ever had." ✨

Stand By Me was launched in 2012 by a special group of pledge supporters. To learn how you can support the Stand By Me program, contact Abigail Lord-Ramsey at 828-260-4020.

HOME RUN ON WHEELS

Children's Hope Alliance has partnered with Home Run On Wheels to raise awareness about the need for foster parents across the country. Follow Home Run On Wheels, or Children's Hope Alliance on social media, and be sure to check out their podcast as our very own Celeste Dominguez was featured on the first episode. Just search "Home Run On Wheels" on iTunes.



*Child's name and photo have been changed for his protection, but his story is very real.

MEET ERIC*,
age 15

A LISTENING EAR

Growing up is hard. It's important to consider children's mental health

by :: *Adam Hicks*

Some things haven't changed for high school students. They are still expected to complete their homework, fill out college applications, study for their exams, attend their sports practices, club events, and many work part-time jobs when they have spare time. Thanks to technological advances, the way teenagers interact with each other – and

total strangers – has completely changed over the past decade.

Eric was one of the popular guys at his high school. He was only a freshman, but was one of the stars of his junior varsity football team, and even had the opportunity to dress for several varsity games. He was playing basketball in

PE class with several of his friends. As Eric drove to the basket, his shorts got caught on one of his friend's fingers. As Eric jumped to lay the ball off the backboard, his shorts fell down. Eric was a little bashful when it happened, but he was surrounded by a bunch of guys from his football team. As soon as he landed, he picked his shorts up, and

PROGRAM NEEDS LIST

While financial contributions are always welcomed and needed to help support our programs, there are other ways you can give. For example, kids enrolled in our Stand By Me, Independent Living, and residential programs need the following items:

- Socks
- Underwear
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Dental Floss
- Shampoo & Body Wash
- Toiletries
- Pillows
- Sheets
- Blankets
- Comforters
- School Supplies
- Dishes
- Household Items
- Gift Cards For Movie Theaters, Groceries, Restaurants, & Clothing Stores

Sorry, but we do not accept used items. For more information on donating gift cards and other items, contact Abigail Lord-Ramsey at ALord@childrenshopealliance.org.

quickly scanned the gym to see if anyone noticed. It didn't look like anyone besides the guys he was playing with saw anything, so he didn't think much of it. That was, until his phone blew up after school with notifications from various social media outlets. Turns out, a kid in the corner of the gym pulled out his phone and snapped a picture of Eric before he had time to pull up his shorts. The boy went on to share the picture on Snap Chat, Twitter, and Facebook.

"That was the worst day of my life," said Eric. "Hands down. I have – well had – a lot of friends at school, and it was super embarrassing when that picture started getting shared by everyone. I went to school that morning as Eric, and I came home that afternoon as nothing more than a meme that the world would laugh at forever."

Eric continued to be ridiculed for several days and weeks after the incident. He was getting ribbed by his friends from the football team, kids would whisper and point as he walked by them in the hallway, and he even had several folks leave him letters in his locker making fun of his mishap in PE class. Eric went from being one of the school's brightest student athletes to a complete social outsider. He completely shut down and wouldn't talk to anyone.

Eric was too embarrassed by the whole episode to tell his

father. He just thought if he didn't talk about it, maybe it would all go away, but the kids at school kept teasing him about it.

"Eric and I have always had a great relationship, but I knew something was bothering him," said his father. "He never told me what was wrong, but I knew something was going on. He was very distant and angry. I searched for an organization where I could take Eric to see someone to talk about his feelings, and I found Children's Hope Alliance on Google. So, I scheduled a visit one afternoon after school for him to go speak to a therapist."

Once Eric met with his therapist at Children's Hope Alliance, he really opened up. He talked about how violated he felt from the constant bullying at school. "I learned healthy ways to work through my anger and embarrassment," said Eric. "Children's Hope Alliance has taught me how to build strong, healthy relationships with others. They even taught me some tips about how to balance my busy life and set clear goals for my future."

"Kids today deal with pressures my generation never imagined," explained Eric's father. "Sometimes, kids just need a little extra help, and there's no shame in seeking a therapist's help. I'm thankful Children's Hope Alliance could help my son through his rough patch." ✨

BEING STRATEGIC :: February Board Retreat

Our historic Barium Springs campus hosted our board retreat in February. It was a chance for our senior staff to come together with our board members to learn about the latest happenings at Children's Hope Alliance.



At the board retreat, we also had a few special guest speakers including Tara Larson, (above) who spoke about the challenges facing all behavioral health and child welfare agencies. Her perspective with 30+ years in the field was invaluable for our board and senior staff.



Foster parents, Karly and Daniel Larimore, also shared their experiences of working with Children's Hope Alliance through the years.

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*Check out our new
name and logo!*



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**YOU CAN BE A
FOSTER PARENT.**

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