

Recent Case Studies in Success



Jenny's story

Horrible neglect – remarkable progress

I can think of no other case in recent memory that is a better example of the value of our On-site School than **Jenny's story**. We have changed her name to protect her privacy, but the rest of the details are absolutely true ... and positively amazing!

When I first met Jenny, this past March, I just assumed she was 5 or 6 years old. She's a pretty, petite little girl with a big smile and bright eyes. I was surprised to find out that she **actually was nearly 10 years old** and that her small stature and slight build were a result of **severe malnutrition**. One of our senior case managers has said Jenny's is the **worst case of neglect** she has ever seen in her 12 years at the Children's Shelter.

But the neglect extended far beyond Jenny's physical under-development. We soon were shocked to learn that she had **never attended school a day in her life!** And apparently, absolutely no attempt had been made to teach her even the most basic of skills.

Initially, Jenny was placed with children her age, in the class for third through sixth grades. It became apparent immediately that Jenny was uncomfortable in that classroom because of her educational deficits. After assessing her academic level, it was decided it would be best to do **small-group** and **one-on-one learning** full-time in the kindergarten through second grade class.

Since Jenny had never been to school, her teacher, decided to start with basic tests. Jenny was very quiet, answering in simple, one- or two-word statements. She was asked to identify letters of the alphabet (upper case and lower case), but she was **not able to identify any of the letters**. She was then asked to write her name and was able to write only a "J" and an "I." Jenny's **vocabulary was also extremely lacking**. During her initial speech therapy testing, when shown a picture of a familiar object, such as a "bird" or a "cloud," she was not able to tell the speech therapist the name of the object. A **math skills test** was attempted, but Jenny was **unfamiliar with any of the basic concepts on the test**. Her teacher then shifted the focus to very elementary skills such as identifying shapes and colors. Jenny was successful at identifying most shapes and colors, but she could not consistently recognize shapes within her environment.

After this evaluation, the teacher began teaching Jenny her **A-B-Cs**, using a variety of educational techniques and devices. Jenny is a very quick and eager learner, and she grew more and more each day, both academically and socially. By the end of the school year, she was **able to identify 45 of the 52 upper case and lower case letters** and was able to **write her name**, recognizing each letter! Her vocabulary expanded dramatically. Not only has she learned to **recognize familiar objects**, such as "bird" and "cloud," she also has **learned many of "the basics"** – days of the week, months, identifying rhymes, counting by fives, etc.

Her **verbal and non-verbal communication** also was markedly improved. Jenny learned how to behave properly in class, communicate her immediate needs and follow through with simple instructions. She was also finally able to take the **math skills test** by the end of the year ... and **scored an 86 percent** on it!

In a **traditional school setting**, Jenny likely would have been enrolled in a **fourth-grade classroom** and expected to do **fourth-grade-level work**, during the process of identifying her needs and developing a plan to address them. This approach could have taken much longer, possibly putting her even farther behind.

By contrast, **in just 59 days**, our On-site School staff were able to develop needed documentation quickly and accurately and complete all of Jenny's special-education testing in record time. And if that weren't enough, they were able to **take a totally unschooled child through pre-school and kindergarten and to the proficiency level of a child beginning first grade!** Also during this time, with the help of the Bentonville Public Schools' Special Education Department, they were able to set Jenny up in speech therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy and **prepare an Individualized Education Plan** to help place her in a resource-based classroom when she starts school this fall.

That was important, because in July after about 100 days with us (thanks to extensions approved by DHS) Jenny left the Children's Shelter to live with her new foster parents. Thanks to the work of our On-Site School, she and her new teachers will be ready when the first day of her new academic adventure arrives.

Jenny's journey is one of hope and accomplishment, and though it is perhaps more dramatic than most, it is representative of thousands of stories of remarkable academic progress children have experienced during their time with us.

The Smith Family – Peter, Randy, Christina, Mark and Tyler (ages 4-10)

A sibling group success story

A group of five siblings recently came to Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter. Let's call them the Smiths: Peter, age 10; Randy, age 8; Christina, age 7; Mark, age 5; and Tyler, age 4. We have changed their names, but sadly, the events that brought them here are very real. Initially, even with the greater capacity we now enjoy, the two youngest (Mark and Tyler) had to be sent to two different shelters in different parts of the state because our boys' wing and pre-school wing both were full. But nine days later, they were able to be reunited and rejoin their older brothers and sister.

When the older three arrived, the first thing I noticed was their hair. They reminded me of stray dogs. Each of them had a long, filthy, matted and tangled mess of hair. That was my first clue as to how severe a case of neglect this was. Peter had lice, but miraculously, the other two did not.

None of these three children had been to school in at least a year, and evidently, no attempt had been made to educate them at home. Apparently, very little effort, if any, had been made to tend to their most basic human needs – nutritious food, proper hygiene, clean clothing, etc. In fact, when first called upon to wash his now-deloused hair, Peter had to confess that, at age 10, he did not know how. These kids basically had been fending for themselves for some time because the adults in their home were too preoccupied with their own illicit pursuits to be bothered with the needs of children. Their rural home was a chaotic and unsafe place, where they were neglected, abused and at-risk. There was a Mom and a boyfriend (and other adults passing through) – but no one was parenting.

After a few days, I noticed that the hair of these three siblings, though now clean and combed, still was quite long and shaggy. This puzzled me, because a new haircut is usually one of the first things we do for a child. I soon learned that haircuts had to be delayed until the authorities could perform a hair-follicle test to screen the kids for residue from drugs.

Despite enduring such an unhealthy environment, these siblings generally are bright, resilient and personable children, who merely needed someone to care for them. And though Christina is thought to have some form of autism, they seem to be responding well to the secure and supportive atmosphere at the Children's Shelter.

Let me count the way in which these siblings benefited from being at our Shelter:

- Our **On-Site School** is helping these kids get "caught up" academically, with lots of one-on-one attention.
- Our **on-site counselors** (supplied by Vista Health) are assisting them with emotional issues.
- Our **Food & Nutrition program** gives them nourishing food to eat.
- In our **residential wings**, they have a clean and secure place to live.
- They have a **caring and nurturing staff** to teach them life skills and show them support and affection.
- Our **Sophia Scott Expanding Horizons Program** allows them to go on "fun" and educational outings that broaden their perspectives and let them enjoy being kids.
- Because we are **equipped to take in sibling groups**, their little family could stay together a while longer.

The story of this little family in crisis perfectly illustrates why we do what we do.

Linda and Danielle

Making the grade for a better future

Linda and Danielle are not natural-born sisters, but they do share a sort of kinship of experience. They were both 17 years old (with birthdays just one day apart), in 11th grade (high school juniors), when they entered the foster-care system. Both had below-average academic records. And they each, through no fault of their own, had found themselves suddenly on their own because of legal issues related to their parents' residency status. Both tried to carry on without adult supervision, but they were unprepared for the challenges with which they now were faced:

- Paying bills and making rent/mortgage payments.
- The temptations of a life free of supervision, combined with the negative influence of some friends.
- Struggles with balancing school and their new adult responsibilities and pursuits.

The state Department of Human Services intervened in both cases, and the girls, who didn't know each other before, came to Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter.

After speaking independently with case managers about their plans for the future, the girls somewhat hesitantly responded to encouragement to pursue their GED (General Educational Development) certificates. Both girls were somewhat reluctant and pessimistic because their prior experiences with school had been less than fulfilling. They both assumed they were too far behind to obtain a GED anytime soon. College was not really in their plans.

"I had been doing poorly in school," Danielle explained. "High school was kind of a drag for me. My plan for school was really just to drop out. I didn't see the point of finishing because I didn't really think I was going to go to college. I didn't think that was a choice I was going to have, so I was never very motivated."

Linda wanted to complete her high school education, although her purpose was to get a job. But she thought it would be a long, hard road. "It was always my plan to finish high school," she said. "But I had gotten behind, and I was just prepared for it to be difficult. I never thought beyond that because I was focused on making a living, and I didn't ever think I was going to go to college – especially not for four years."

Both girls proved to be much brighter than they gave themselves credit for, as their test scores soon would prove. Both scored at a high-12th-grade/early college level, and both admitted that the process was much shorter and much less daunting than they had imagined.

"It was a lot easier than I thought it was going to be," Linda recalled. "It really wasn't that difficult. I was surprised. I thought it was going to be a longer process than it actually was."

Danielle added, "It made me feel really excited and proud of myself. I have a lot more confidence now than I did before I got my GED. It gave me a whole new outlook on college."

The girls' plans for the future now have changed dramatically. Both are now very focused on their academic and career plans but confessed to being "excited, and a little nervous." The Children's Shelter staff arranged for tours of two local colleges (one of which already has accepted both girls for admission next year) and is helping the prospective collegians with arrangements for life after their time at the Children's Shelter ... everything from professional counseling on job-seeking skills ... to assistance with financial-aid applications and needed documentation ... to preparation for driver's license exams ... to planning for future living arrangements.

Linda, who currently has a part-time job, has a five-year vision. She plans to attend college while simultaneously holding down a job and obtaining cosmetology training. She then plans to work as a hairstylist while she completes a bachelor's degree. "By then, I will have figured out what my big future goals will be," she said. And she thinks having her GED already will give her a huge head start. "People I went to school with will just be finishing their junior year of high school this spring, and I will be starting college. And for the present, I'll be able to work and save money without having to worry about going to class, and that certainly will give me some big advantages for starting college."

Danielle, who loves to cook, is getting her driver's license, interviewing for her first job and plans to enroll in the culinary arts program at a local college in January. "I watch a lot of Food Network, and I go online and look up recipes and stuff," Danielle explained. "And my father has always said he likes my cooking, so I thought that would be something I would like to do for a career. In five years, see myself living in an apartment – with a cat – and having a college degree and pretty good job in the food industry. I want to have my own little bakery someday."

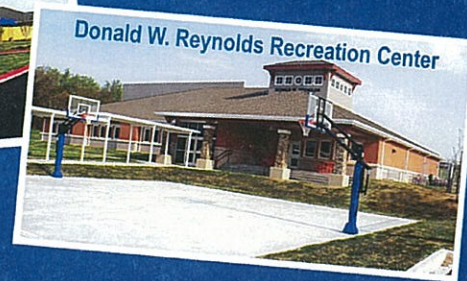
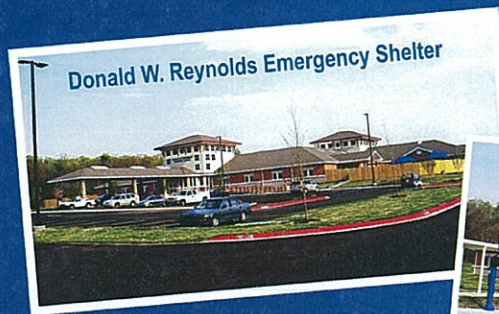
The GED twins are unanimous about the impact the Children's Shelter has made on their new and hopeful plans for the future.

"Being in foster care has helped me a lot," Danielle said. "It showed me who I was and that I was not going down the right path. Now I am going down the right path, and I have a plan for how to keep on going that way. I'm proud of that."

"This experience has made me look at different options than I even knew I had before," Linda observed. "And it has made me see that I do have a lot of options. I feel like I am positioned for more success. The greatest benefit of my being at the Children's Shelter has been meeting all these people who really care. It makes a lot of difference when you have a big support system to help with everything."

These girls admit that had they not come to the Children's Shelter, the odds are great that they would not have earned their GEDs and probably would have become two more teens who "fell through the cracks" of the foster-care system.

Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter



What is the Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter?

We are a 24-hour emergency residential shelter for children who have been abandoned, abused or neglected.

- Children live at the Children's Shelter
- Stay up to 45 days (in 6 months) before next placement
- Vast majority from DHS (Department of Human Services)
- Girls from birth through age 17
- Boys from birth through age 12



Donald W. Reynolds Emergency Shelter – 42,000 square feet



Donald W. Reynolds Recreation Center – 18,000 square feet

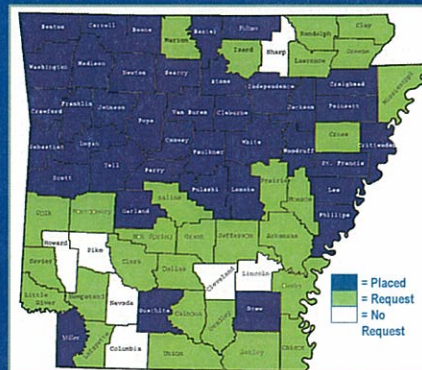
Our Increased Capacity

- Grew from 32 beds to 48 beds (50 percent increase):
 - From 15,500 sq. ft. – to 65,500 sq. ft.
 - From 4 kids per room – to 2 kids per room
 - From 5 acres – to 81 acres



How Many Children Do We Serve?

- More than 5,500 children since December 1993
- 300-500 residents per year
- Come from all over Arkansas



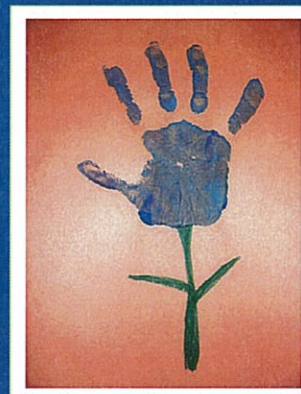
What We Provide Children



- A safe environment
- Nutritious, balanced meals
- On-site, individualized education
- On-site counseling
- Medical, dental and eye care
- Organized "fun" activities & outings
- Support
- Nurturing
- Love

Our Programs

- Emergency Care
- Sophia Scott
Expanding Horizons Program
- On-Site School
- On-Site Counseling Services



Emergency Care

Focus: Meeting the basic needs of the children so they can begin to feel safe and to heal

- A homelike facility
- 24-hour supervised care
- Balanced meals
- Healthy snacks
- Clothing and personal care items



Sophia Scott Expanding Horizons Program

Focus: Giving children the opportunity to participate in fun activities that help them learn to manage fear and stress while also building self-esteem.

- Ice-skating
- Swimming
- Museums
- Individualized one-time experiences



On-Site School

Focus: To offer individualized education by state-certified teachers in a supportive, low student-teacher ratio environment.

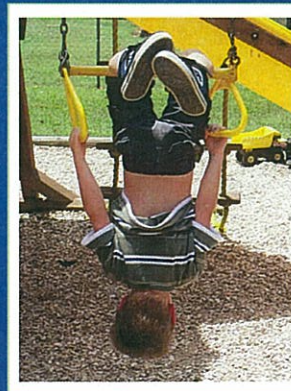
- Regular evaluation
- One-on-one support
- Weekly field trips
- Classes in Art, Music, Health and P.E.



On-Site Counseling Services

Focus: To provide on-site counseling services as well as follow-up services by a licensed counselor from Vista Health

- Immediate access to therapy
- Minimal disruption
- Sibling counseling
- Integration with On-Site School



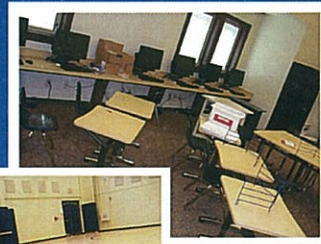
Our New Home

- Initial capacity for 48 Children
- Separate wings, with 12 beds each, for
 - Infants and preschoolers (ages 0 – 4)
 - Teen girls (ages 13 – 17)
 - Girls (ages 5 – 12)
 - Boys (ages 5 – 12)
- Visitation Rooms
- Counseling Offices
- An Administrative Wing with
 - Administrative Offices
 - Multi-purpose Conference Room
 - Staff Training Area and Resource Library



Our New Home

- Education Wing
 - Three bigger classrooms:
 - Kindergarten-2nd Grade
 - 3rd Grade-6th Grade
 - 7th Grade-12th Grade
 - 12 children/class (up from 8)
 - Library (former "reading nook")
- Recreation Building
 - Full-court Gymnasium
 - Game Room
 - Three Multi-Purpose Rooms



Our New Home

- **Additional Features:**
 - Separate 5,500-square-foot Warehouse/Maintenance Building
 - Safe Rooms
 - Outdoor Volleyball & Basketball
 - Baseball Field
 - Separate Outdoor Play Areas for Younger Children & Older Children



Looking into the Future

- **Future expansion:**
 - Separate office/school building
 - Convert vacated space for teen boys and preschoolers
 - "Scalable" to 72 beds
 - 125 percent increase over capacity of former Children's Shelter



Our Challenge

- In 2010:
 - We cared for 400 children
 - But 600 were referred elsewhere, simply because there was no bed for them
 - Now we have the beds
 - But we need more resources, to care for 50 percent more children

What Makes Us Unique?

- Our size
 - 48 beds (four wings, 12 beds each)
- Our age range
 - Girls – birth through age 17
 - Boys – birth through age 12
(to age 14, if part of a sibling group)
- Our On-Site School
 - In 2010, educational attainment was **266% higher** than would be expected in “normal” public schools (5.125 months/25 days vs. 1.4 months/25 days)

What Makes Us Unique?

- Ability to accommodate sibling groups
 - Historically, as small as 2, as large as 13
 - Number of beds
 - Age ranges
- On-Site Counseling (Vista Health)
 - Immediate
 - Integrated
 - Flexible

What Makes Us Unique?

- Rapid, comprehensive evaluation & plan
 - Medical/Nutritional
 - Dental
 - Vision
 - Emotional/Behavioral
 - Academics
- Enrichment programs
 - Sophia Scott Expanding Horizons Program
 - On-Site School field trips

Why Does It Matter?

- We are more than a bed and board
- Kids benefit greatly from what we provide
- Children and subsequent foster parents benefit
 - Problems identified
 - Case plan in motion
- Funding does not match benefits provided
 - \$495,000/48 kids/365 days = \$28.08/child/day
 - State prison inmate = \$60.52/day
 - Have to raise 80% of operating budget

Our Financial Concerns

- State contract rate = \$84.28/child/day
- Contract liability (cap) = \$492,195
- $\$84.28 \times 48 \text{ children} \times 365 \text{ days} = \underline{\$1.48 \text{ million}}$

FISCAL YEAR	BILLED	PAID	DIFFERENCE
2010	\$833,590	\$492,195	59%
2011	\$862,934	\$492,195	57%
2012	\$255,200	\$124,060	49%

Why Does It Matter?

- Jenny's story
 - Looks 5-6 years old, actually 10 years old
 - Worst neglect Case Manager has seen in 12 years
 - Never been to school or home-schooled
 - Knew virtually nothing – No A-B-Cs, no numbers, no days, no months, no recognition of common objects, etc.
 - Went from zero knowledge to 1st grade in 59 days in class, 100 total days at shelter
 - "Firsts" – school, dentist, ice skating, birthday party, McDonald's (and many more)

What Do We Need?

- A more equitable funding formula
- Designation as a different kind of shelter?
 - Preferred place for sibling groups?
 - Preferred place for severe neglect & intensive academic remediation?