



LENDING A HAND

around the panhandle

The Henry and William Evans Home for Children

— by Victoria Kidd

When asked to think about the word “home,” many people immediately think of the place where they grew up, instead of the residence within which they currently reside. Home is a special place where love should be plentiful and all occupants should feel the subtle security of belonging somewhere. Now imagine for a moment that you have no place to call “home.” Imagine the great sense of solitude you would have without the memories of that special place that fostered your development into adulthood. This is the situation faced by more than a million and a half children and adolescents in the United States, according to most readily available estimates.

When a child cannot live with his or her family of origin, yet will not thrive in foster or adoptive care, The Henry and William Evans Home for Children is there to help. Since it opened in 1949, the home has served as a place to call home for young people between the ages of five and seventeen who are not well suited for other placement services. Since the beginning of an improved system of recordkeeping in 1977, the home has helped more than 400 young people who would otherwise have no place to go. Critical to its mission are the tireless efforts of the administrative staff and house parents working under the direction of Executive Director Marc Jaccard.

Jaccard began his service with the facility in 1995 as the home’s program director. Following the departure of long time director

M. Kirby Lloyd, he moved into his current role as executive director in 1999. Jaccard explains, “We are here to take care of abused and neglected children. We have generally been a catchment system for kids who are not better suited for life in a traditional family environment. Our purpose has expanded in recent years to include homeless children as well.”

The home’s inclusion of homeless children into its mission is not the only thing that has changed over the past few years. Jaccard indicates that fifteen years ago the home was predominantly accepting elementary and middle-school aged kids who would stay for two to three years. “Today,” he says, “we are seeing kids who are sixteen and seventeen. They have been bounced to and from several different placements before coming here. They have been through a lot, and this is their last placement before adulthood.”

Recognizing that their stay at the Evans Home is the last opportunity for the children to learn critical skills needed for a successful transition to adulthood, the home’s programming has been designed to prepare them for life after high school graduation. “Our programs are designed to help our children get ready for independent living,” Program Director Laura Regan explains. “We put a lot of thought into our programs, and we aim to help them learn to build relationships and develop skills necessary for adult life.”

From complex proficiencies like career planning and household management to seemingly simply tasks like balancing a checkbook and obtaining a driver’s license, these children need to learn a lot within a short period of time. Every staff member is completely dedicated to building the capabilities of residents while simultaneously creating a family-like environment within which they can thrive.

According to Regan, the reason the program is so effective is because the children help each other. “All of our kids are from dysfunctional, challenging backgrounds,” she says. “They each know what it is like to live in a world with constant stress and constant fight or flight inclinations. This is a connection for them.” These connections strengthen the home’s programming by allowing the residents to learn how to meaningfully interact with others at the same time they are learning the life skills that are the focus of planned activities.

The desired result of the home’s efforts is that residents will grow up and leave the facility better prepared for adult life. In the event that a resident runs into unexpected difficulties, the Evans Home operates an alumni house that gives them a place to access available resources needed to get back on their feet. The program opened nine years ago, and it supports about twenty-five former residents each year.

Jaccard says, "Anytime an alumnus needs a place to stay, the house is open to them. When we opened it, we knew it was going to be difficult to fund, but we knew that it would always be needed. It's never been empty." Any time a former resident needs a little extra help, for the rest of his or her life, the home's staff is available to help. "Not only do we provide a place to stay, but we provide help obtaining interest-free loans, tools for new jobs, help with health-related issues, or other things."

These programs are not without cost. The home is a local nonprofit, and they do not spend a lot of their funds to raise money. There are no full-time development officers. The home's important programming depends on the generosity of the surrounding community, and there are many innovative ways to help.

Their website includes a "gift catalogue" where individuals wanting to help can select an item to fund for a specific period of time. For example, a donor can pledge just \$100 to provide a year's worth of school supplies for one child or just

\$250 to feed a single child for a month. (Visit <http://evanshome.org/pages/gifts.aspx> for more information about these particular needs.) Of these donations Jaccard says, "This is a way to for someone to take a line item directly off of our budget, and the impact of even small donations is very meaningful to us."

For individuals who truly understand the importance and value of the home's programs, there are also monthly and yearly recurring donation options. This option provides dependable income for the program, and this is incredibly important because donors can simply budget their support, set up their donation parameters, and take pride in knowing that they are critical to a worthy cause.

One motivator for this support is that the Evans Home's programs are designed to help residents understand that while the home itself is a charity, they (the residents) are not charity cases. They are people who are deserving of a chance to succeed. Jaccard says, "There is a misconception that

these kids have done something wrong to get here. That is not the case. These kids are here through circumstances, not through any fault of their own. We want to help them grow, and we want to help them really thrive."

"These kids are really heroic." Jaccard says. "They come to us having been through events that we cannot even begin to understand. They come here having been disappointed. Yet, we are able to help them find themselves as children again, despite having had to deal with adult levels of stress for so long. I'm inspired by them."

When one looks around the home-like environment and personalized rooms of the residents of the home, it is easy to see that every effort has been made to provide that feeling of "home" for those living there. There could not be more on the line for these kids, and the Evans Home staff is truly making a difference by impacting the lives of one child at a time. To learn more about how you can help, visit www.evanshome.org.

