

# together

BCFS  
Health and Human Services • Est. 1944

Meet Nick & Starla  
Award-winning youth from  
foster care

**INDIA: THE NEW  
BCFS FRONTIER**

**DISASTER CASE  
MANAGERS AID  
FLOOD SURVIVORS**

*The Goulets  
Blessed to be a blessing*



# WHAT DOES BCFS DO?

BCFS is a global system of health and human service non-profit organizations with locations and programs throughout the United States as well as Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia and Africa.



**BCFS**  
Health and Human Services • Est. 1944

**BCFS**  
Education Services

**BVT**  
Breckenridge Village of Tyler

**CERI**  
Children's Emergency Relief International

**BCFS HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**Silvercliff ranch**  
A Part of BCFS Health and Human Services

**STC**  
South Texas Centre

# together

## 7 Sweeping the Nation to share Life-Saving Emergency Management Expertise

Our subject matter experts are traveling the nation year-round, teaching hospital staff, first responders, emergency managers and jurisdictions how to "plan for the worst, and hope for the best."

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*"We cannot all be the same. We know what's good and evil, and we know our talents. All we need to know beyond that is: we are all parts of the body of Christ."* – Pierre de Wet, BCFS' longtime friend.



On the Cover:  
*Although Nick and Starla didn't know one another before coming to BCFS, they followed similar paths: both suffered turbulent childhoods and ended up in foster care, both turned to BCFS to prepare to "age out" of the system, and ultimately, both were awarded Foster Youth of the Year by the state of Texas for their determination and character.*



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together magazine is a publication of  
BCFS  
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BCFS is a global system of health and human service non-profit organizations with locations and programs throughout the United States as well as Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa. The organization is a national leader in medical sheltering and emergency management and response, providing critical emergency support services to federal, state and local governments. BCFS also provides residential services and emergency shelters for children who are abused or neglected, assisted living services and vocational training for adults with intellectual disabilities, mental health services for children and families, foster care and adoption services, medical services, transitional living services for youth who are at-risk and those in the juvenile justice system, residential camping and retreats for children and families, and international humanitarian aid for children living in impoverished conditions in developing countries.

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# Message from the President

Kevin C. Dinnin  
President & CEO

**Together... the title of this magazine, and yet so much more.** BCFS, an international system of nonprofit organizations together provides life-changing programs across the globe and in historically underserved populations throughout the country. Together with the support of you, our stakeholders and donors, we respond to the needs of millions of children, adults, families and communities faced with severe circumstances and seemingly insurmountable challenges. BCFS is there, often when no other organization is. And we do it *together*!

2016 marks my 30th anniversary with BCFS, and not a day has gone by when I do not reflect on the vision and mission of this organization and how we have positively affected the millions of lives we touch. When I was called to serve as president, BCFS employed just 30 staff and had an annual budget that was a *fraction* of what it is today. Our team has grown exponentially to now include more than 3,000 dedicated BCFS personnel and the countless individuals that join our emergency response and critical-tasking endeavors.

Although many things have changed through the years, and the organization has experienced vast growth and expansion, what has not changed are our values, guiding principles, accountability for the funds for which we are stewards, and most of all, the love and compassion for those entrusted to our care. Our Community Services Division and Residential Services Division continue to bring hope and healing to children, youth and families across the U.S... Our overseas branch, Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI), recently celebrated 15 years of changing lives, providing safety and security

to vulnerable children beckoned by human traffickers with a promise of money and food... At our residential campus, Breckenridge Village of Tyler, residents with a range of intellectual disabilities are thriving in a loving environment where their health and wellbeing are paramount.

Another important branch of the BCFS system is our Emergency Management Division (EMD). EMD is a nationally recognized leader in emergency management, incident management, disaster response, public health and planning for vulnerable populations. When record-breaking floods devastated the Houston-area, the federal government called on EMD to help thousands of victims recover, standing up an Immediate Disaster Case Management (IDCM) operation to serve 14 counties, ultimately impacting over 36,000 people who registered with FEMA as disaster survivors.

EMD is also highly sought-after to share life-saving emergency management expertise, providing trainings to first-responders and emergency managers on mass care and whole community planning; mass fatality management; evacuation planning; medical sheltering; healthcare management of events involving weapons of mass destruction; and more. Ready with robust emergency resources and supplies, EMD is set to deploy and respond at a moment's notice – no matter how big or small the mission tasking.

Thank you for being part of our journey, *together*. I invite you to see and read the heartfelt, memorable and meaningful stories of those we serve unfold in the pages before you. I know they will fill your heart as they have mine.



## Mensaje del Presidente



**Kevin C. Dinnin**  
Presidente y Director Ejecutivo

**Together (Juntos)...** el título de esta revista, pero aún mucho más que eso. BCFS, un sistema internacional de organizaciones sin fines de lucro proporciona programas que cambian vidas en todo el mundo y en las poblaciones históricamente más marginadas de este país. Juntos, con el apoyo de usted, nuestros depositarios y donantes, respondemos a las necesidades de millones de niños, adultos, familias y comunidades que se encuentran en circunstancias severas y enfrentando dificultades insuperables. BCFS asume esta responsabilidad, cuando ninguna otra organización lo hace. ¡Y lo hacemos *juntos*!

El 2016 marca mi trigésimo aniversario con BCFS, y no ha pasado ni un día en que no refleje sobre la visión y misión de esta organización, y cómo hemos ayudado a las millones de vidas que hemos tocado. Cuando fui llamado para servir como presidente, BCFS tenía solamente 30 miembros sirviendo como personal de toda la agencia, y contábamos con un presupuesto anual equivalente a sólo una *fracción* de lo que es hoy. Nuestro equipo ha crecido de manera exponencial, a tal grado de ahora incluir a más de 3,000 individuos dedicados, aunados a los innumerables individuos que se unen a nuestros esfuerzos de emergencia y tareas críticas.

Aunque muchas cosas han cambiado a través de los años, y a pesar de la amplia expansión y crecimiento que ha tenido la organización, lo que no ha cambiado son nuestros valores, nuestros principios fundamentales, y nuestra responsabilidad en el manejo de los fondos que han sido puestos a nuestro cuidado, y por sobre todas las cosas, el amor y compasión hacia los que han sido puestos a nuestro cuidado. Nuestra División de Servicios a la Comunidad y División de Servicios Residenciales continúan trayendo esperanza y sanación a los niños, jóvenes y familias de los Estados Unidos... Nuestra sede internacional, Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI), recientemente celebró 15 años de cambiar vidas, proporcionando protección y seguridad a niños vulnerables

engañados por traficantes de personas bajo una falsa promesa de dinero o comida... En nuestro recinto residencial, Breckenridge Village de Tyler, residentes con un rango de discapacidades intelectuales prosperan en un ambiente de amor donde su salud y bienestar son lo más importante.

Otro sector importante de nuestro sistema BCFS es nuestra División de Manejo de Emergencias (EMD por sus siglas en inglés). EMD es un líder reconocido a nivel nacional por su labor de manejo de emergencia, manejo de incidentes, respuesta durante desastres, salud pública y planificación para las poblaciones vulnerables. Cuando las inundaciones sin precedentes devastaron el área de Houston, el gobierno federal solicitó la ayuda de EMD para ayudar a las miles de víctimas en su recuperación, desplegando una operación de Manejo de Caso de Desastres Inmediata (IDCM, por sus siglas en inglés) para servir a 14 condados, impactando a las más de 36,000 personas que se registraron con FEMA como sobrevivientes de un desastre.

EMD también es un equipo muy solicitado por su competencia para su manejo de emergencias que salva vidas, ofreciendo entrenamientos a los primeros intervinientes y a los administradores de emergencias de cuidado masivo y planificación para la comunidad entera; el manejo masivo de víctimas fatales, planificación para evacuaciones, alojamiento médico, manejo del cuidado médico durante los eventos de armas de destrucción masiva, y más. Listo con recursos y suministros comprensivos, EMD está preparado para desplegar y responder en cualquier momento — sin tener en cuenta que tan grande o pequeña sea la labor.

Gracias por ser parte de esta jornada y recorrer este viaje, *Together (juntos)*. **Los invito a ver y leer las historias sinceras, memorables y significativas de aquellos a los que servimos, las cuales se revelan en las siguientes páginas.** Sé que tocarán su corazón de la misma manera que han tocado el mío.

# SWEEPING THE NATION TO SHARE LIFE-SAVING Emergency Management Expertise

Through interactive trainings, hands-on workshops, consultations and national conference presentations, BCFS Health and Human Services' Emergency Management Division (EMD) is sharing its disaster planning and response expertise with jurisdictions, government partners, and private companies nationwide.

**TRAININGS, EXERCISES AND CONSULTING SERVICES**  
provided by EMD subject matter experts:



### MASS CARE PLANNING

Mass care considerations across the entire spectrum of emergency management, from planning and preparedness to response and recovery



### WHOLE COMMUNITY PLANNING

Key concepts of whole community planning, including incorporating those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency preparedness and planning efforts



### BUSINESS CONTINUITY & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Recovery planning for businesses, governmental agencies and community partners in the aftermath of a disaster





### CONSIDERATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS IN DISASTERS

Disaster planning and emergency preparedness for older adults, including medical, social and cultural issues



### FUNCTIONAL NEEDS SUPPORT SERVICES (FNSS)

Key elements for ensuring that jurisdictions and agencies are able to provide Functional Needs Support Services for all members of the community in a disaster



### MASS FATALITY MANAGEMENT

Strategies for agencies who may participate in a mass fatality event, including the facilitation of body recovery, forensics, the identification process and establishing family assistance centers



### HAZARDOUS MATERIALS & DECONTAMINATION

How healthcare entities and first receivers of victims of mass casualty incidents respond to incidents involving the release of hazardous materials, using OSHA's best practice standards



### HEALTHCARE INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS)

Healthcare ICS activities & exercises to hone ICS position skills for hospitals, healthcare systems, public health agencies, or long-term care/assisted living entities, including addressing regulatory & compliance issues



### PLANNING FOR REFUGEE POPULATION SURGES

Planning strategies for the mass care of refugee populations during surges, from the operational process to key cultural issues



### MEDICAL MASS SHELTERING

Capacity-building considerations for developing medical shelter plans, A to Z operational procedures for managing medical shelters, and tools for shelter operations



### EVACUATION PLANNING FOR HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Evacuation planning processes for healthcare entities and tools for developing evacuation plans, including identifying pitfalls and addressing accountability issues



### ALTERNATE CARE SITES (ACS) PLANNING

How to build and manage alternate care facility sites, including general population shelters, medical shelters, triage centers, palliative care sites, family assistance centers and more



### DISASTER MEDICAL TRAINING COURSE

How the provision of healthcare may change in disasters, including crisis standards of care, medical surge, integration into emergency management and personnel deployment planning



### MEDICAL SURGE PLANNING

How healthcare entities can ensure continued operations when facilities are overwhelmed by a mass casualty event, expanding mass casualty triage, addressing staffing issues, crisis standards of care and ACS planning



### HEALTHCARE MANAGEMENT OF WMD EVENTS

Terrorism response training and strategies for first responders and hospital personnel to respond to weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive devices



### HOSPITAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

How to develop an emergency management program for a healthcare entity, including regulatory requirements, hazard vulnerability assessments, and Emergency Operations Plans (EOP)



### DISASTER EXERCISE TRAINING

How hospital emergency planners can develop and conduct effective and realistic disaster exercises, including exercise objectives, exercise design process, plans, handbooks and evaluation



### PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY PLANNING AND OPERATIONS

Consultation for public health agencies on developing emergency management plans, such as high consequence disease plans and Points of Distribution (POD) plans



### EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

Implementation of emergency management plans for long-term care and assisted living facilities, including the provision of templates and tools to develop compliant emergency operations plans



### AGROTERRORISM: A THREAT TO AMERICA'S FOOD SOURCE

Scenario-driven training on the likelihood of terrorists to utilize biological or chemical weapons to poison our nation's food source and the ramifications of such an act of agroterrorism to public health

**Call (800) 830-2246 for more information on trainings and consultation services available from BCFS Health and Human Services Emergency Management Division.**



BUILDING

A YOUNG

LEADER

ratio: 1:5  
measurement: in

By Leonard Favela



Leroy with his  
foster parents



Twenty-year-old Leroy Berrones-Soto sits attentively in one of his undergraduate classes at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Considering his background and upbringing, to sit in this class, on this college campus, he knows is an accomplishment. In the back of his mind, Leroy knows he's come a long way.

Leroy was born the second of seven siblings in Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, minutes from the U.S.-Mexico border. By age four, he had endured sexual abuse at the hands of a family acquaintance. His mother and siblings soon left Rio Bravo, headed for the United States. At age seven, Leroy's younger sister with Down syndrome passed away.

### Leroy in "The System"

The family struggled to settle into their new life in the United States. Leroy's mom worked long hours, and her children were often left alone. A neighbor reported Leroy's mom to Child Protective Services (CPS) for leaving her children unattended without food. In 2005, when he was 10, Leroy and his brothers and sisters were removed from their home by CPS.

"We had just gotten home, nobody was supervising us," Leroy remembers of the day a CPS social worker arrived. "We had a long case history, since 2001."

For the next five years, Leroy and his siblings shuffled through different foster homes, shelters and even some return placements with their biological mother and father. During this time, Leroy's father was tragically murdered while defending his daughter, Leroy's sister, from a pair of gang members.

During one of several stints in a foster home, Leroy's younger siblings were regularly neglected by their foster mother. Leroy felt so powerless to help his foster siblings that he stopped eating altogether to try to get their foster mom's attention and end the abuse. His hunger strike caused his health to deteriorate and Leroy was hospitalized for stomach ulcers.

### Structure & Freedom

Just after his seventeenth birthday, Leroy was placed with a new foster family, Mr. and Mrs. Santiago and Susana Lopez, who, he admits, were the most stringent of all his foster care placements. The expectations were clear for Leroy and his housemates in the Lopez foster home: follow the rules.

"They were strict with us, with our education, but they cared, and they provided us with structure and guidance in our daily lives. *I had never felt that care from a foster parent.*"

This new structure, surprisingly, brought a new kind of freedom for Leroy.

"They were the only foster parents that allowed us to do extracurricular activities," Leroy recalls. "They took time out of their schedule to take me to school very early in the morning."

Finally enjoying a stable home life, Leroy started exploring leadership roles in high school. He arrived before school each day to help the principal, and eventually became a hall monitor. He also joined the Criminal Justice Club.

Leroy credits the Lopez family for encouraging his studies. With their support, Leroy graduated early from Lopez High School in Brownsville, Texas, earning the school's Lobo Award for Service. Soon after, Leroy began classes in UTRGV's Social Work program.

"Sometimes foster youth think that some of us are just 'lucky' to have good foster parents. At the time, I remember fighting with the system, asking the agency to move me from the Lopez home. I'm glad they didn't. It's not about luck, but rather a team effort from all parties to gain each other's trust."

### Inspiration Opens New Doors

While Leroy lived in the Lopez home, CPS conducted periodic visits to check on the family. During one visit, Leroy was approached with an opportunity he could not resist.

"The CPS Youth Specialist asked me if I was interested in being on a youth panel," Leroy recalls. He agreed, and joined a panel of current and former foster youth. Collectively, they provided local CPS staff with their perspective, experiences and struggles while in the foster care system. The panel, Leroy says, was put together to help inspire improvements in the policies and procedures that are part of the daily lives of foster youth.

"Social workers can't always see what we see, as foster youth," Leroy explains. "When I started serving on the council, youth would bring up their issues, and we would work toward changing the system."

While working to help others, Leroy learned of BCFS Health and Human Services-McAllen, in Texas'



Rio Grande Valley. He was 18, aging out of foster care, and looking for some advice on how to prepare for life on his own.

At BCFS-McAllen, Leroy received case management, home visits and help planning his transition into independent adulthood. BCFS-McAllen staff also helped him fill out college applications and choose a career path. As a young adult from foster care, BCFS-McAllen helped Leroy acquire funding to pay for his college dorm through the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program.

“I was going to be kicked out of my dorm,” he recalls about his housing situation before BCFS-McAllen stepped in to help pay his housing fees and keep a roof over his head. BCFS-McAllen also gave Leroy some emergency funding to buy food during the Christmas and Thanksgiving holidays when campus cafeterias closed.

Through working with BCFS case workers – along with his turbulent childhood and experience in the foster care system – Leroy became inspired to choose youth advocacy and social services as a career.

“Leroy is one of our center’s most active youth,” says BCFS Case Manager Deyanira Garcia, “because he’s an advocate for other foster youth. He’s always showing me different resources that he comes across that other youth from foster care can use.”

### Answering the Call of Duty

“I want to work with Child Protective Services,” Leroy says. “Since I’ve experienced foster care, I can help youth who are in my same situation, and help understand and solve their problems.”

In November 2015, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) invited Leroy to join the newly formed Behavioral Health Advisory Committee to represent young adults struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues.

“I, myself, receive mental health services,” he admits candidly, “and I see other people that need services, and they don’t have the resources, or they don’t know about them. I’d like to work to create something that makes resources available to those who need them.”

The HHSC appointment is one of many accolades Leroy has earned since high school. Among them, Leroy was named “Teen of the Month” by the

Teen Toolbox Youth Development SPOTLIGHT, and he was named Youth Representative on the HHSC’s Texas Council on Children and Families. He has presented his insight to lawyers from the Texas State Bar’s Continuing Legal Education (CLE) and has been invited by the Angels of Love Foundation to discuss his experience with the foster care system.

In January 2016, Congressman Ruben Hinojosa (TX-15) bestowed a United States Congressional Commendation upon Leroy. Leroy has also received the Foster Club’s Young Leaders Award, an annual recognition of the success of young people from foster care. Leroy has also been selected to participate in the 2016 Congressional Foster Youth Shadow Program, where youth from foster care are given the opportunity to share their experiences with federal lawmakers.

*“I am not a statistic”*

Leroy has indeed defied the odds. Nationally, according to a report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, only half the youth who have been in foster care will earn a high school diploma, and only 20 percent of high school graduates will attend college. When Leroy earns his bachelor’s degree in 2019, he will be part of the less than 10 percent of youth from foster care who achieve college graduation. He shows no signs of slowing down!

“It’s rewarding, being able to help other teenagers,” he says. “Agencies, departments, people call me to go speak to foster parents or teenagers, to motivate them. That spreads the message, which is also what I want, for them to be successful, and not be a part of the negative statistics.”

“I feel like people are listening to what I say,” Leroy continues, “and that’s important, because for years, I never felt like my voice was being heard.”

After earning a graduate degree in criminal justice, he plans on a long career with Child Protective Services, hoping to be as instrumental in the lives of youth as his BCFS-McAllen caseworkers were for him.

“BCFS-McAllen was extremely helpful for me. I really admire their work,” he says. “Without them, I don’t know what would have happened.”



# INDIA’S SON RETURNS TO GIVE BACK

CERI EXPANDS TO INDIA LED BY IAN ANAND FORBER-PRATT

BY MARILU REYNA AND YVONNE PARIS RHODES



Whether you’re in a rural Indian village or in the hustle and bustle of a crowded urban street, it’s clear: India is a vibrant, intoxicating nation, bursting with color and so full of life. The food, the smells, the sounds, the ancient temples, the varied dialects, and the sense of order hidden beautifully in the chaos – a faint-of-heart traveler might even say it borders on sensory overload. This proud nation of warm and resilient people is also, unfortunately, the source of some staggering social and economic epidemics.

**India is home to 1.2 billion people, twenty-two percent of whom fall below the international poverty line. In 2015, the average annual income of each family equated to a meager \$4 per day.\* Imagine the futility of trying to stretch these few dollars to pay for safe housing, medical care, food, clothing, education and other essentials.**

Poverty coupled with lack of education, unemployment, child labor, homelessness, substance abuse, physical and mental health needs, child abuse and neglect, violence and inability to access resources are just some of the horrific challenges India’s children

face every day. In response, the international arm of BCFS, Children’s Emergency Relief International (CERI), launched a new organization in New Delhi, India, in partnership with other thought leaders and agencies, to strengthen families and protect children.

The Centre of Excellence in Alternative Care of Children will support and strengthen family-based care and protection for millions of children in India through proactive initiatives that will bridge the gap between government policies relevant to child care and protection and how these initiatives are implemented at the ground level.

Heading up this transformative program is scholar, researcher and sociologist, Ian Anand Forber-Pratt, a man following his lifelong dream of bringing progressive alternative child care to India, and promoting the idea that every child deserves to live in a healthy, happy, loving family setting. Ian aims to revolutionize the social service systems for children in his native India to include foster care and kinship care for orphan children.

\*Sources: Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook; World Bank







Born in Kolkata, India, Ian was adopted from a home for unwed mothers when he was two months old by a Canadian mother and an American father. Ian was raised and educated in the United States, along with his adopted sister from India, Anjali, and his brother and sister (biological to his adoptive parents). His adoptive parents, determined to connect Ian and Anjali to their Indian heritage, exposed them to Indian cultural events where they learned about native foods, dance and language. However, it was not until his first trip back to India in 2006 when he said his “internal circuits” really connected with his ancestry.

“I felt at home, and not at home, in the same emotion,” Ian recalls of this trip. “I finally felt like I’d found a sense of purpose. I was going to use the gifts I’d been given in life to honor my adoptive parents and give back to the country that gave me life.” Even before that memorable trip, however, Ian dreamed of giving back to his birth country, he was just unsure of exactly how.

Ian ventured out to be a catalyst for change, taking those first few steps, no matter how small. Two years and thousands of emails and phone calls to potential partner agencies mustered Ian only one connection with another organization. However, he remained

dedicated and slowly started to see results. He knew he needed to collaborate with existing service providers to make a real impact. New connections trickled in from partnering agencies, including important policy makers, government officials and leaders in social services. This established a network of advocates that would, in the next ten years, have the power to change state government and pass critical policies.

Today, critical legislation and social service guidelines are in place, including the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act 2015, Central Adoption Resource Authority Guidelines on Adoption 2015, the Model Guidelines on Foster Care 2016 and the Integrated Child Protection Scheme 2014. Ian served on advisory committees for both state and national legislation on foster care in India.

Together with partners from governmental and non-governmental sectors, the Centre of Excellence is slated to continue making significant changes and much-needed advancements in India’s child care and protection system.

In the words of renowned human rights advocate, Mahatma Gandhi, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” Leaders and visionaries like Ian and CERI are spearheading that change in India, every day.

*Partners of the Centre of Excellence include the Core Assets Group, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, and Washington University  
Visit [www.AlternativeCareIndia.org](http://www.AlternativeCareIndia.org)*



## ORPHANS IN INDIA

UNICEF ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE 25 MILLION ORPHANED CHILDREN IN INDIA, AND MILLIONS MORE ARE IN NEED OF CARE AND PROTECTION.

*Source: Indian Census and Indian Child Protection Body Childline, 2007*



# Prepare for your trip to Silver Cliff Ranch

*Bring your wanderlust and sense of adventure, but leave your inhibitions and to-do lists at home... unless your to-do list looks something like this.*



## Silver Cliff Ranch Retreat Itinerary:

- ✓ Take a dip in the outdoor hot springs pool
- ✓ Ski down the snowy slopes
- ✓ Hike in the woods near our log cabin
- ✓ Gallop on horseback
- ✓ Bike through the wooded trails
- ✓ Go whitewater rafting
- ✓ Master the ropes obstacle course
- ✓ Watch for elk and deer sightings
- ✓ Enjoy home-cooked meals... I don't have to cook!
- ✓ Breathe in that cool, fresh mountain air



*Dr... Ditch the itinerary and go with the flow!  
We're off the grid now!!*



Silver Cliff Ranch, part of the BCFS system of nonprofit organizations, is a gorgeous, log cabin retreat in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

- Church camps
- Youth groups
- Business retreats
- Team-building exercises
- Special events

**Silvercliff  
ranch**  
A Part of BCFS Health and Human Services

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# A Bright & Hopeful Future

By Kathleen Maxwell-Rambie



Savannah's life growing up was not typical of most children, but her experiences have taught this now 18-year-old how to overcome life's challenges with grace and optimism.

One of nine children, Savannah grew up familiar with Child Protective Services (CPS), which has been involved in her life since she was 3 years old. Her father was inattentive and struggled with substance abuse, leading to a very unstable home life for her and her siblings.

*"I was taken away from my dad often and my mom was never in my life," said Savannah.*

They often did not have food in the house, and Savannah suffered from physical and emotional abuse. She was placed with other family members frequently, though this was not always a good alternative.

As a sophomore in high school, Savannah was placed in the foster care system. Not long after that, she learned of BCFS Health and Human Services-Kerrville from a friend. When she arrived at BCFS-Kerrville, she met with Case Manager Kathy Rice, and immediately felt welcomed by the place she had come for assistance.

"Ms. Kathy was like the parent I never had," recalled Savannah.

Ms. Rice met with Savannah often and enrolled her in Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) classes where Savannah began to learn many new things. She was taught how to open a checking and savings account, manage her finances and stick to a budget. The bright-eyed young lady also learned how to apply and interview for a job, proper workplace etiquette, and even how to shop for healthy meals.

As is the case with most foster youth in Texas, Savannah aged out of the foster care system when she turned 18. This left her without stable living arrangements and uncertain about her future.

Unsure who else she could turn to, Savannah confided in Ms. Rice about her need for safe and secure housing. She disclosed that she hadn't felt safe

in a home for years, and she longed to feel peace and security.

At the time, BCFS-Kerrville had just completed renovations to apartments at Our House, a transitional living program that provides housing and wrap-around support to youth struggling with homelessness. Savannah was overwhelmed with gratitude when she was accepted to the program.

She moved into her new apartment, giddy with excitement and enjoying a long overdue sense of relief. For the first time in her life, she could lay her head down at night and feel safe.

"I love the furnishings and having my own place," she said. "Having the security of stable housing has helped me finish high school, work and prepare for my future."

Only a year and a half after moving in to Our House, Savannah's life looks quite different. BCFS-Kerrville helped her find a job, and through hard work she is now a shift manager at a local restaurant. She is also putting the other skills she has learned to practical use. She has been diligently putting away part of her paycheck, and her savings account is growing.

Savannah recently began classes at Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, Texas, and is excited about continuing her education in the health care industry.

*"I'm the first one in my family to enroll in college, and I'm proud of that accomplishment!"*

Savannah's case manager, Kathy, called it a blessing to be Savannah's "guide and friend."

"Today, so many young people don't have a stable and responsible adult in their lives – to help them with the simple things, like driving them to college orientation, or more complicated things like navigating Medicaid and insurance requirements," said Kathy.

"I am so excited to see how Savannah grows with each new life experience. BCFS-Kerrville and I will be there to guide her every step of the way!"





# making Ends Meet

By Leonard Favela

Shortly after the Garcias enrolled their youngest son, Maximiliano, in BCFS Education Services' Head Start, Max's parents, Elizabeth and Alfonso, lost their jobs unexpectedly.

"My husband and I were working for an oilfield company and the owners sold the company," Mrs. Garcia recalls. "One day, we went to work and they told us to get our personal stuff and leave because the company had filed for bankruptcy."

For this hard-working family of five, it was devastating news.

"They didn't pay us for two weeks," Mrs. Garcia says. "We (Mr. and Mrs. Garcia) were laid off at the same time and we were struggling really badly."

In her son's Head Start classroom one afternoon, Mrs. Garcia confided in her BCFS Education Services Family Specialist about their situation. Without work or any income, they couldn't afford to put food on the table. Mr. and Mrs. Garcia needed to get back to work, and fast.

Every family with a child enrolled in Head Start is assigned a Family Specialist who conducts home visits, assesses the family's needs, and provides emergency assistance and crisis intervention as needed.

"Our (BCFS Education Services) Family Specialist gave me information about job fairs in the area; she told me where to go to apply for food stamps and encouraged me to apply for Medicaid," Mrs. Garcia says. "She also gave me a number for a food pantry."

At BCFS Education Services' recommendation, Mrs. Garcia braved the job fair, armed with a resume and newfound confidence. There, she was hired on the spot for a medical products firm.

She picked up meals for her family from a local food pantry, with her Family Specialist's referral. Later that summer, Mr. Garcia was hired as a carpenter in a small town outside Dallas. Things were starting to improve for the Garcias!

Max graduated from his Head Start classroom in the summer of 2016 and shortly afterwards the Garcia family moved to northeast Texas. They've since settled into their new home and both Mr. and Mrs. Garcia are gainfully employed with stable companies. Max's mom says he's excelling in his kindergarten classroom.

"He's doing really well. Max's teachers told me that he's really ahead of the other kids because he's reading," Mrs. Garcia explains proudly. She attributes Max's success to his time in the Head Start program.

"At first, I felt guilty waking him up at six in the morning, sometimes 5:30, and putting him on the bus by 6:30," says Mrs. Garcia. "It was still dark, and I would feel guilty because he's my baby. But I don't regret it at all. He's very smart, he's in kindergarten and he's reading already!"

Max's teachers aren't the only ones who have noticed how he's made strides in the classroom.

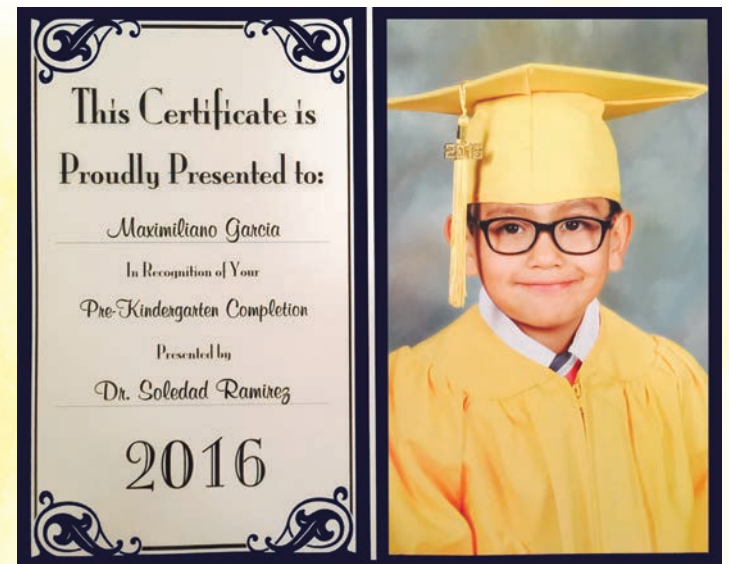
"My other kids told me that they were surprised at Max's progress. They asked me *'how come you didn't put us in Head Start? Max is really smart, and I don't remember learning how to read by five years old,'*" Mrs. Garcia laughs. "Of course, I'm not expecting that all my three kids are the same, or that they have the same ways of learning things, but it could be because Max started school earlier in Head Start."

Mrs. Garcia says getting help from her Family Specialist was a life changer.

"She would listen and talk to me, she knew that I was stressing out. When you're so used to working and providing for your family and this (losing a job) happens to you, you want to go crazy, you don't know where to go or what to do. She would encourage me, saying 'don't stress out, you'll find a job,' and then I was able to find work at the laboratory."

Today, the Garcia family is thriving. Max's 13-year-old sister, Fernanda, is now in 7th grade. His 18-year-old brother, Sebastian, is helping their father with home renovation projects while he prepares to start college in the spring.

Through it all, the Garcia family stayed positive. With support from BCFS Education Services, the Garcias were able to regain some stability, and help Max get ready for kindergarten, better prepared to achieve academic excellence in elementary school, middle school and *beyond!*



The Garcia family is just one example of Head Start's holistic, family-first approach in action, helping both parents and children. With attentive BCFS Education Services Head Start staff and receptive parents willing to follow through on helpful suggestions and connections to community resources, families are strengthened for the ultimate benefit of the children and the communities in which they live. Visit [DiscoverBCFS.net/HeadStart](https://www.discoverbcfs.net/headstart) for more information.



# Casa Dulce Casa

## Home Sweet Home

By Ashley Krimmel



Many of the youth and young adults CERI serves in Moldova face a constant struggle to meet their basic needs – their living environment is often unstable, food is sparse, and hand-me-down, ill-fitting clothing and shoes do little to protect them from the cold, harsh winters. Moldova is one of the poorest nations in Europe, and the primary source country for victims of human trafficking, where impoverished youth in this former Soviet republic are especially vulnerable.

In 2011, responding to the plight of homelessness facing young adults in Moldova, CERI opened two transitional apartments, one for males and another for females ages 16 to 23 years old. In these apartments, CERI provides free, safe and stable housing to young men and women who are at a dire crossroads in life.

While living in the apartments, the young adults participate in CERI's Transitional Care program which provides case management, education and career services, counseling, life skills trainings, medical treatment referrals, volunteer opportunities and more. The CERI apartments house 10 to 12 young adults at any given time who are working towards earning a college degree or completing a vocational training program so they can find a job and transition out to live on their own.

As part of this unique program, a Christian mentor lives in the apartment building with the young adults and serves as the “parental figure” who encourages, supports and guides them. The mentor helps them build their life skills by teaching them how to prepare healthy and affordable meals; how to budget and save money; how to keep their apartments clean and organized; and proper personal hygiene practices, among many other things. The mentor also organizes a weekly Bible study group which just recently completed the book *How To Love God and Our Neighbor*. Through this book, they learned practical ways to show love and cultivate healthy relationships by looking to God as the supreme example.

“The living conditions [in the CERI apartments] are very good. I like the meetings with the girls,” says Nadejda, who currently lives there. “Usually we cook together. We have an excellent mentor. She is a good example for us and every day we learn something new from her.”

Through the support of faithful donors, CERI is able to provide essential services to vulnerable youth who could have easily fallen victim to unconscionable suffering and abuse, but thankfully are now in a loving environment, breaking a cycle of poverty, illiteracy and hopelessness.



## IN THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS

BY YVONNE PARIS RHODES

It was forecast to be a particularly rainy Saturday in East Texas, but dozens of athletes and spectators breathed a collective sigh of relief when the weather cooperated for an afternoon of fun-filled competitions. It was finally here, the day of the Special Olympics! Teams from all over Area #7 of the Texas chapter of the Special Olympics donned colorful jerseys and descended on Golden Road Park in Tyler, Texas.

Four times a year, a team from Breckenridge Village of Tyler (BVT) gathers to compete in the

Special Olympics. Somewhere between training sessions, team-bonding and practicing good sportsmanship, they each transform into powerful athletes.

Breckenridge Village is a tranquil residential community for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Special Olympics is just one of many opportunities BVT residents and day program participants have to develop new skills and make lasting friendships along the way.



Between 20 and 30 athletes from BVT play at each competition, with about six BVT staff members by their side on the field, or cheering them on from the sidelines. Their team name: The LEAPstars!

Each athlete picks their favorite sports from a fun roster of options: basketball, track and field, softball, bocce ball, bowling, swimming, golf and even horseback riding.

BVT athletes are given opportunities to train and prepare for the competitions year-round. Bowling is the team's favorite – they go to the local bowling alley at least once a month, and some even bowl weekly. BVT's annual bowling tournament, dubbed the Turkey Bowl, is another fun way the athletes prepare. The residents break up into teams and whoever wins the coveted Turkey Bowl trophy gets to display it in their classroom at BVT all year long – and enjoy the bragging rights that come with it.

Alvin Davis, BVT's Recreation Coordinator, serves as BVT's Special Olympics Coach.

"Personally, the Special Olympics has been a real eye opener for me," said Coach Alvin. "When I first started, athletes were participating in just one sport, bowling. Now we participate in five different sports throughout the year. I've seen athletes come out of their shells both mentally and spiritually. Being a coach for this special group of people has allowed me to see a different side to them. They don't allow their inabilities to slow them down or even stop them from trying."

**For the folks that call BVT home, the LEAPstar athletes, BVT staff, Coach Alvin, and the families and loved ones of the athletes, the Special Olympics experience is priceless. Lifelong memories are created, and bonds are strengthened between teammates, and even opponents – all in a fun, safe, inclusive environment.**

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

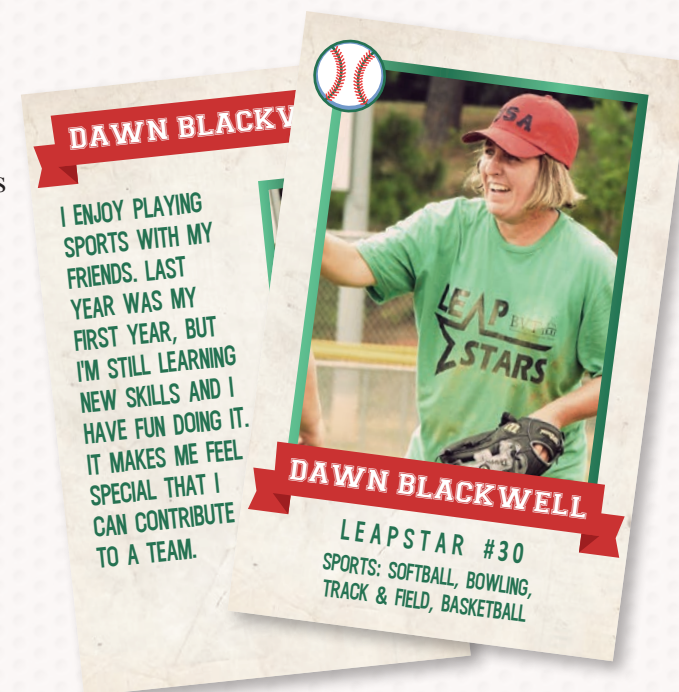
The BVT Special Olympics team name, LEAPstars, is a play on LEAPsters, the name of BVT's daytime program for adults with developmental disabilities to learn new skills by... Learning, Experiencing, Achieving and Providing

## MEET A FEW OF THE BVT LEAPSTARS ON THE TEAM ROSTER

### DAWN

According to Coach Alvin, preparing for the Special Olympics has given BVT an opportunity to teach the residents about the process of goal-setting, and working to achieve those goals. Dawn, a BVT LEAPstar on the softball team, worked hard for weeks before the competition.

"Dawn has a hunger to learn new skills because she wants to be better," said Coach Alvin. "Off the field, Dawn has been working with her parents on her batting, catching and throwing skills. I see her confidence on the field when she plays. Dawn has consistently asked for feedback and I always reassure her that her hard work is paying off on the field."



### TAMMY

At a 3-on-3 basketball game in Nacogdoches, Coach Alvin was amazed by another LEAPstar athlete, Tammy Kidd.

"Tammy is a funny and caring individual, but on the court she is competitive and relentless! Her competitiveness drives her to perform above and beyond any expectation. Everywhere she goes she meets new people and knows how to make people laugh," Coach Alvin shared.

Tammy was driving the basketball for layups, stealing the ball from opponents, and shooting from just under the three-point line. "This was not the same person I saw in practice!" said Coach Alvin, with pride.



### CYNDY

Cyndy Snider, a LEAPstar athlete who has cerebral palsy, won't allow her condition to determine her mental or spiritual state.

"Cyndy is always looking for the next sporting event she can participate in," said Coach Alvin. "She doesn't care if she wins, she just wants to do her best with what God has given her."

## THE OATH OF THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETE:

"Let me win, but if I cannot win let me be brave in the attempt."



# Precious Minds, New Connections

A Poem By Elizabeth Guajardo Walsh

Inspired by the author's experience in BCFS Health and Human Services' parenting education program, Precious Minds, New Connections

Un poema por Elizabeth Guajardo Walsh

Inspirado por su experiencia en el programa de educación para padres Precious Minds, New Connections de BCFS Health and Human Services



From stressed-out and controlling,  
To flexible and understanding,  
Today I praise independence  
By practicing empathy and patience.

It sounds fun and easy,  
But parenting takes a toll.  
Now memories of my childhood  
Empower my new role.

I've learned that communication  
Provides the connections  
Between high expectations,  
And our own situation.

A new way to play by the rules,  
This course just gave me the tools.  
My children are one of a kind,  
In my hands lays each precious mind.

To learn more about free parenting  
classes provided by BCFS Health and  
Human Services, visit [DiscoverBCFS.net](https://www.discoverbcfs.net).

*PMNC is funded by the Kronkosky Charitable  
Foundation in Bexar County*

Del "¡Ten cuidado!" a un "Te amo...",  
De "¡Más te vale!" al "¡Así se hace!",  
De la impaciencia a la convivencia,  
De gritar y controlar a interactuar y acariciar

Suena fácil—no lo es.  
Pero HOY veo las conexiones  
Entre mi estilo de crianza  
Y los recuerdos de mi niñez.

Todo es tan lógico,  
Debí de haber sabido.  
Con el perfecto ejemplo de mis padres  
Debí de haber tenido.

Sin embargo, cada situación es diferente.  
Y gracias a este curso, ahora tengo presente  
Ser cada día más flexible y tolerante,  
¡Porque la mente de mis hijos es brillante!

Para informarse sobre las clases gratuitas  
para padres proporcionadas por BCFS  
Health and Human Services, visite a  
[DiscoverBCFS.net](https://www.discoverbcfs.net).

*El programa de PMNC está financiado por el Kronkosky  
Charitable Foundation en el condado de Bexar*



# STRIKING A CHORD WITH JACKIE

by Aubrey Parke and Leonard Favela

Jackie Boyer loves to play the guitar. “I like that you can make it your own,” he says. “You can make it personal, you can make it unique. Whatever you do is really up to you.”

When Jackie came to BCFS Health and Human Services-Abilene, he had dropped out of high school and experienced periods of homelessness. Four years after his first encounter with BCFS-Abilene, at the age of 21, Jackie is now gainfully employed, has his own apartment and is working toward a fulfilling career. Jackie’s story goes to show that in life – as in music – “whatever you do is really up to you.”

An Abilene native, Jackie entered the foster care system at age 14. A severe case of diabetes put his father in a nursing home, and the mental and emotional strain that placed on Jackie’s mother left her unable to raise her four children.

Jackie is the youngest in his family, with two older brothers and an older sister. Jackie was able to stay with one of his older brothers in a foster home temporarily, but they were separated when the brother aged out of the system. Jackie was later transferred to a new foster home.

When Jackie aged out of foster care, he struggled to stay on a stable path. For a while, he was homeless and had nowhere to turn. But things began to fall into place when he was accepted into Our House, a transitional living program operated by BCFS-Abilene. Our House provides safe, comfortable housing to young men overcoming homelessness, while helping them save money, improve their life skills and prepare to move out on their own.

However, Jackie’s stay at Our House proved challenging for him and his housemates.

Jackie found it difficult to follow the house rules or stick to his Personal Transition Plan – a set of individualized rules and goals that helps each resident grow to self-sufficiency. When his hyperactive behavior disrupted the other residents, Jackie was asked to leave.

“It wasn’t until he found Our House, enjoyed how nice it was, and then *lost it* that he decided to take responsibility and overcome all the things that had been holding him back,” said Emily Cole, Regional Director for BCFS Health and Human Services. “He wound up on the streets again and said ‘I don’t want to do that again.’ It was a motivating factor for him to get it together,” said Cole. “Not every fairy tale ending comes with a picture-perfect road getting there.”

Although his time at Our House came to an early end, he remained actively involved in other BCFS-Abilene programs, including the Texas Workforce Commission program which helped him define his career goals and advance his education.

**“I got help with my schoolwork, they helped me get my GED,” Jackie says, “and they helped me write a résumé and find a job.”**

Jackie landed a full-time position as desk clerk and bookkeeper for a local hotel, and soon was offered the opportunity to move into one of the hotel’s units built out as a small apartment. It’s become another step toward Jackie’s goals of independence and self-growth.

When Jackie began a relationship with a young woman who was pregnant, Jackie, excited at the prospect of helping care for a newborn, joined the Fatherhood EFFECT program. Fatherhood EFFECT is a parenting education program operated by BCFS-Abilene that teaches the characteristics of a good father, like discipline, masculinity and work-family balance.

Although the relationship, ultimately, did not work out, he says he completed the program “for his own personal gain” and learned valuable skills about decision-making and healthy communication.

Living independently, holding down a job and studying to earn his GED *simultaneously* proved to be a challenging combination for Jackie. Staying active in BCFS-Abilene’s programs was daunting with a jam-packed schedule, according to his case worker, Alexandra Hust. But, he powered through the study sessions, long work shifts and weekly life skills workshops at BCFS-Abilene.

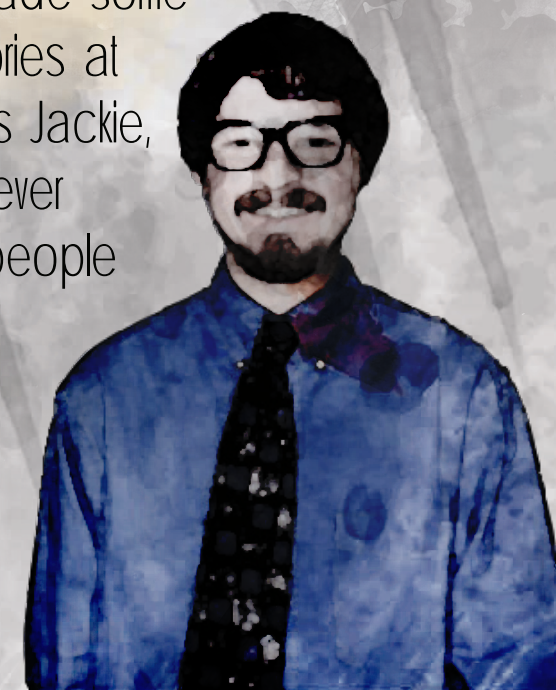
When he earned his GED in December 2015, Alexandra and the BCFS-Abilene team were overjoyed. Soon after, they helped Jackie file financial aid and admissions applications for local colleges. He plans to study psychology at Cisco College.

Jackie’s experiences in foster care inspired him to choose a career field helping others.

“I plan to be a social worker working for Child Protective Services or Betty Hardwick, I haven’t decided which yet,” Jackie says. The Betty Hardwick Center provides mental health care for children and adults, residential services for people with developmental disabilities, and early childhood intervention services.

Today, Jackie still plays the guitar and plans to dabble in songwriting for an added creative outlet for self-expression. He doesn’t shy away from opportunities to share his story, and over the next few years, perhaps his song lyrics will be another window into the ups and downs of his personal journey.

“I have made some great memories at BCFS,” says Jackie, “and I will never forget the people I have met there over the years.”









# Daisy Cardenas

By Maria Del Carmen Villarreal, Case Manager



Daisy Cardenas has lived in Laredo since she was 2 years old. She is undocumented but never let that stop her from living a normal life. She has been a hard worker for as long as she can remember. Growing up, her father made a business from buying and selling various items at the local flea

market. Daisy recalls how she always enjoyed going to work with her dad and helping him in whatever way she could.

During her first pregnancy, she and her boyfriend worked with her father to make a living and prepare for the birth of the child. For Daisy, that preparation

included enrolling in the Healthy Start Laredo program. Through the program, Daisy was able to obtain health care coverage and received first trimester prenatal care and case management. As a result of the support she received, Daisy delivered a full-term 7.5-pound baby girl.

Now married and pregnant with her second child, Daisy has followed in her father's footsteps. Little by little, the couple managed to save enough money to buy a vehicle and start their own small business at the flea market. Daisy has expressed pride in her accomplishments, stating, "My dad is a great provider and always ensured we had everything we needed. He has also taught me one of life's greatest lessons which is to never give up and that hard work always pays off. My family and I have accomplished many goals through determination and perseverance."

# Luisa Sanchez

By Maria Arellano, Case Manager



Luisa Sanchez enrolled in the Healthy Start Laredo program when she was pregnant a year ago. When she entered the program, she had been struggling to get health insurance due to a lack of stable housing caused by conflicts with her guardian. With the assistance of the HSL program, Luisa eventually got the coverage she needed and was able to see a medical provider



for her prenatal care. As a result, she delivered a healthy 7-pound baby girl, Aryanna.

But the support Luisa received through the HSL program wasn't limited to medical care. She also credits the program with helping her to develop the skills necessary to become confident and independent. Since participating in the program, she has blossomed

and managed to overcome her shyness.

"The BCFS program has helped me during my pregnancy by providing transportation to my prenatal care visits as well as instructing me in classes related to pregnancy and parenting skills. The program has also influenced me to set goals which made me realize that I wanted to continue

my education and become a radiologist," shared Luisa. "I'm thankful to BCFS for the assistance I have received and also for my case manager who has encouraged me to pursue my educational and personal goals."

Luisa is currently enrolled at Laredo Community College and will soon start courses in radiology.

# Brenda Onofre

By Lucia Arellano, Case Manager



Brenda Onofre enrolled in the Healthy Start Laredo program as a young mother of two young children, with a third on the way. She lives with her husband and two sons on El Primero Ranch, a horse stable where her husband works as a trainer. Brenda estimates that there are around 50 other residents who call El Primero Ranch their home.

Brenda was born and raised in Allende, Coahuila in Mexico. Deplorable living conditions in Allende, compounded by a lack of work or any type of assistance, forced Brenda's decision to escape

to the United States with her husband and their first son.

Although their small home is only five steps away from the stables, Brenda and her husband are grateful to live at El Primero because they have a place to call home and there is plenty of work. Their days start at 4 a.m. as Brenda wakes to make breakfast before her husband goes to work cleaning the stables and grooming and training the horses, while Brenda stays home tending to the family.

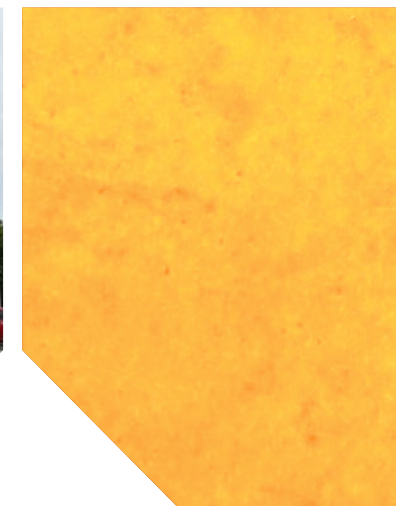
Brenda recently gave birth to another healthy baby boy weighing 7 pounds and is grateful to the

HSL program for the medical care, case management services, health education classes, and transportation assistance she has received.

"Thanks to the program, I never missed any of my prenatal appointments, laboratory testing, or sonograms but most importantly I thank them because I gave birth to a healthy baby boy," Brenda explained.

Today, Brenda continues to count her many blessings and thanks God every day because she was given an opportunity to live a happy and healthy life!





## PREPARED FOR ANY EMERGENCY



With more than a decade of experience responding to natural disasters and humanitarian crises, BCFS Health and Human Services' Emergency Management Division (EMD) is a recognized nonprofit leader in emergency management, incident management, disaster response, public health and medical emergency response, mass care, medical sheltering and planning for vulnerable populations.

In addition to our top-tier incident management expertise, EMD has built an extensive inventory of resources that allows us to provide customized logistical, communications, and mobility support that meets the unique needs of our partners in federal, state and local government and private industry. We maintain a fleet of more than 90 support vehicles and trailers including:

- |                            |                              |                   |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| • Tractor Trailers         | • Box Trucks                 | • Shower Trailers |
| • Commercial Buses         | • 1-Ton and 1-1/2-Ton Trucks | • Toilet Trailers |
| • Mobile Command Platforms | • Generators                 | • Forklifts       |
| • Ambulances               | • Light Towers               | • Polaris ATVs    |
| • Fire Engine              | • Laundry Trailers           | • Mast Trailers   |
| • Mobile Medical Unit      |                              |                   |

EMD also provides state-of-the-art communications support for responses of any size. Our communications resources include VHF, UHF, and 700/800 MHz radio equipment, satellite voice and data devices, and cellular voice and data devices.

**EMD's stock of life-saving emergency supplies and warehouse resources are always at-the-ready to be deployed to:**

- Erect a self-contained compound the size of a small city with the capability to shelter thousands of disaster survivors simultaneously, complete with sleeping cots, medical triage equipment, hygiene kits, and shower, toilet and laundry facilities
- Care for disaster survivors who need medical care and those that have access and functional needs
- Supplement local first-responder's capabilities, including fire departments, police departments and search and rescue teams

**NO MATTER HOW BIG OR SMALL THE MISSION TASKING, OUR GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE INDUSTRY PARTNERS REST ASSURED THAT BCFS EMD HAS THE RIGHT TOOLS IN THE TOOLBOX TO RESPOND.**



# Lydia's Drive

THE ROAD TO  
OVERCOMING  
ADVERSITY

BY OWEN  
CARDENAS



Lydia drove. She had no idea where she was headed, but that didn't matter. She needed help. Her application for housing had just been rejected and being new to Del Rio, Texas, she had no one to ask for guidance and no one to turn to for help.

Desperate, despondent and with only a small amount of money left, Lydia drove past an unimposing, single-story building with a sign out front that read BCFS Health and Human Services. She didn't stop at first, but as she continued driving, something inside her told her to head back to that small building.

There, at the BCFS Health and Human Services-Del Rio office, she met social workers Mary Padilla and Claudia Lopez, an introduction Lydia believes was a divine encounter that steered her new life in Del Rio in the right direction.

Lydia and her family decided to move to Del Rio from Wichita, Kansas to live closer to her husband's mother. Sadly, when they arrived in Del Rio, what should have been a joyous new beginning quickly turned to sorrow as she learned that her mother-in-law had passed away. Shortly after hearing the news of his mother's death, Lydia's husband was pulled over for speeding and was arrested during the stop for outstanding warrants. Unable to pay his fines, he was forced to remain in jail to pay his debt.

With her husband in jail, Lydia found herself in a new town with small children, no family support, no

income and no place to call home. After years of struggling with domestic abuse as a child and in her first marriage, she decided to do what she does best in tough situations: Fight back and overcome!

Lydia started looking for work and housing. Several of her job applications were rejected, but she persisted. With the assistance of BCFS-Del Rio, she was able to pay the deposit and first month's rent on a new place to live. BCFS-Del Rio even helped Lydia secure her and her children's immediate needs until her husband finally returned home.

Lydia not only found a job, but has done so well that in the short time since, she has already received a promotion. Lydia continues her path to success by accomplishing other life milestones. She received her first driver's license at the youthful age of 40! She is also enrolling in GED classes, committed to showing her own children that it's never too late to achieve your goals.

**"I don't know what I would have done if I wouldn't have found BCFS. I am so thankful to Ms. Padilla and Mrs. Lopez for all their help." – Lydia D.**

*BCFS Health and Human Services-Del Rio operates a domestic violence prevention and treatment program and provides crisis intervention, free counseling, training for youth and parents, and emergency residential placements. Visit [DiscoverBCFS.net/DelRio](http://DiscoverBCFS.net/DelRio) for more information.*



## Award-Winning *Resiliency* by Leonard Favela

Starla Huff and Nickolas Wilkerson are two youth from the foster care system who have faced more than their fair share of tragedy and injustice. By holding onto their faith, working hard, and a little help from supportive foster families and BCFS Health and Human Services-Tyler, today Starla and Nick both stand tall – ready for whatever tomorrow may bring.





## Meet Starla

Starla entered the foster care system on her 15th birthday and was moved to Waco’s Trinity Home of Faith, a shelter for youth in foster care. Two months later, on October 4, she arrived at the foster home of Mr. and Mrs. Rohus in a small East Texas town.

“I still wasn’t the best kid,” she recalls. “I’d get in trouble at school, I did not have a filter, I said whatever I wanted. I was still smoking.”

A year later, on her 16th birthday, Starla left the Rohus foster home and moved in with her biological father, a decision she now considers one of the worst she has ever made. According to Starla, her father sexually assaulted one of her friends.

A month later, Starla returned to the Rohus’ foster home, where she met a new group of foster youth who helped change her perspective.

“I’m so blessed that the foster home still had an opening,” she says. “When I came back, I was the oldest in the house, and so I had a lot of responsibilities. We started getting younger (foster) kids, so I straightened myself out. I told myself that I couldn’t do what I did when I was growing up, that *I had to be a role model* – so I did.”

Starla and her three brothers lived with their grandmother for many years while their mother battled drug addiction.

“My mom was a user. She did drugs while I was in her presence,” Starla remembers. “Often, she would take me with her wherever she was going.”

That experience, along with several instances of abuse, led Starla to her own struggles with chemical dependency and self-harming behaviors at a young age.

“I started doing drugs when I was 10 or 11, smoking and drinking,” Starla says. “I used to cut myself and I tried to commit suicide multiple times, and I was going to a dark place and most of it was because I was on drugs.”

“My family’s not very close, so I didn’t really know any of my family, except for, like, my immediate family, and they never cared for any of my mom’s children because my mom was, like, the black sheep in the family.”

## Meet Nick

Nickolas Wilkerson is an Oregon native who, like Starla, grew up in a family ravaged by the damaging effects of substance abuse.

“My mother and father were very abusive to each other,” Nick recalls of his parents, who both battled addictions to drugs and alcohol. “They couldn’t hold a job, they fought all the time, so we were finally placed with my grandma because my parents weren’t fit to care for us.”

Nick’s grandmother wanted him to have mother and father figures, so she sent him to live with an aunt and uncle in Texas when he was 8 years old. Nick moved to the remote Texas town of Harleton, where he stayed for four years.

“My aunt and uncle adopted me,” he explains, “but my aunt was really abusive. One night, I kind of felt like my life was threatened, so I ran away. It caused a whole ordeal with police, and the neighbors found out that she was abusing me. My aunt and uncle decided that they would put me into the [foster care] system.”

Nick entered the foster care system at 12 years old;

at 13, he moved into the Hall family’s foster home.

“They’ve been my support,” Nick says affectionately of the Hall family, who welcomed him with open arms and provided the stability and support system of a loving family.

“My mom showed me that through God I could accomplish anything,” Nick says of his foster mom. “They strengthened my religion; it was one of the biggest things they did for me. I was into sports, and they were very supportive of that,” he says. “They were just *there* for me.”

## Preparation for Adult Living (PAL)

Soon after Starla’s return to the Rohus’ foster home, Mrs. Rohus told Starla about BCFS-Tyler and the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program. Nick first came to BCFS-Tyler when he turned 18, eager to take advantage of programs for youth who aged out of the foster care system.

Starla and Nick completed the PAL program operated by BCFS-Tyler. PAL teaches youth how to set and achieve their goals, create healthy relationships and learn positive self-guidance. From how to write a check to filling out scholarship applications, the PAL program teaches youth the skills needed in the “real world,” and how to succeed on their own.

“They helped with my FAFSA, they set me up with classes, and bought my books,” Nick said of BCFS-Tyler. “From there on, anytime I called them and needed help with college things or if I had a problem that I couldn’t solve by myself, they were there. They’re my support line.”

Starla says the PAL program instilled in her a newfound confidence. “They taught me a lot about self-respect and to accept yourself for who you are. That’s really helped me, because I used to have really low self-esteem and I’ve gotten better about how I feel about myself.”

## Award-Winning Resiliency

When Starla and Nick graduated high school one year apart, their case managers from BCFS-Tyler were right alongside them to celebrate. Shortly after graduation they were each awarded a prestigious accolade: **the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services’ (DFPS) Foster Youth of the Year award.**

The award is granted annually by DFPS to one outstanding youth in each of the 11 DFPS regions in Texas. Nick garnered the award in 2015, and Starla in 2016, marking the first time two youth from BCFS Health and Human Services have won the award back to back, much less both from the small East Texas town of Tyler.

“To win this award, the youth must demonstrate strong leadership skills, motivation, academic excellence and extracurricular involvement,” explains Carla McCalope, BCFS-Tyler Program Director. “Starla and Nick are both very grounded, motivated and determined to make it.”





“Starla and Nick are proof that through hard work and help from supportive families and effective youth programs, good things can happen. We can break generational cycles of abuse and poverty,” McCalope says. “We are so proud of them, and can’t wait to celebrate their next accomplishments.”

## A New Beginning

Today, Nick and Starla attend Tyler Junior College. Nick is a biology major who aspires to go to medical school. Starla is working toward a bachelor’s degree in nursing, with plans to become a flight nurse in the Air Force.

“I want to finish college, I want a degree,” says Nick, matter-of-factly. “I want to make something of my life. My goal is to be a doctor. If God has another plan, then so be it, but that’s what I’m going for!”

“When my aunt and uncle put me back in foster care, I was angry and I didn’t really have anybody to turn to,” said Nick. “My foster parents that I have now, they took me to church and through that, I found that God had a plan for me; I found faith in myself and Him. My confidence was lifted and my joy was lifted.”

“Before I came into foster care, whenever I had gotten really into drugs, I claimed to be an atheist. I guess because I was so angry,” said Starla. “When I came to this foster home, they were going to church and said I had to come. The minister was talking about drugs and alcohol and basically everything that was my life. I started crying and praying, ‘Jesus, I need help, can you please guide me,’ and He did.”



Although they did not know each other until recently, Nick and Starla both followed similar paths: Both spent time in foster care, turned to BCFS-Tyler for assistance and, one year after the other, they were awarded the Foster Youth of the Year award by the state of Texas.

Too many youth across the United States experience abuse or neglect, and struggle to overcome the emotional and physical scars left behind. But just as Nick said, inspired by the Godly wisdom of his foster mother we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13), and with God ALL things are possible (Matthew 19:26).



# The Power of FAITH

By Leonard Favela

For most of her adolescence, 17-year-old Faith Garcia was angry. ***“I didn’t listen to anybody,” says Faith. “Basically, I did what I wanted. I was always with the wrong crowd, and doing everything wrong. I would choose my friends over everything – even over school.”***

Years of negative peer pressure and self-destructive behavior culminated in a serious incident at Faith’s school. She was arrested for assaulting an authority figure on campus – but even after this dramatic incident, she was given another chance. However, she continued to stray down the wrong path and was arrested again – this time on criminal mischief charges for a separate incident off campus. Faith found herself in the juvenile justice courtroom standing before Bexar County Judge Laura Parker, an experience she would later say was a personal turning point.

Judge Parker’s court is better known as the Crossroads Girls Mental Health Court, which works closely with the BCFS Health and Human Services-San Antonio KAPS program, or Kids Averted from Placement Services. BCFS-San Antonio KAPS and Crossroads work in tandem to provide young women

in the juvenile justice system with case management, counseling, life skills training, job search assistance and educational services. The goal is to help them avoid repeating their past transgressions, and build a brighter future.

*In 2016, the Crossroads Girls Mental Health Court won the National Criminal Justice Association’s Outstanding Criminal Justice Program Award for the Western Region*

One of the most unconventional components of the program turned out to be the most impactful for Faith: equine therapy and horseback riding. She enjoyed connecting with the calm, majestic animals and being outdoors. Through equine therapy, plus intensive writing workshops, Faith learned to redirect her anger and calm her destructive impulses.

***“They told us that the horses pick up on who you are, and what your attitudes are like. At first, I was scared, but then I just talked to it and said ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’ My anger calmed down because they made me write it all on paper, or work with animals***

***– things that I don’t get to do regularly.”***

Faith did so well in the program that when she graduated, BCFS staff asked her to return to mentor other girls. Today, she’s preparing to graduate high school and pursue her dream to become a firefighter.

Faith uses her past to motivate her younger brother and sister to make wise choices. “I tell them, ‘You see how I was,’ and they’re nothing like me,” says Faith. She warns them to not be controlled by others and avoid the pitfalls of drugs and alcohol, sentiments she learned from her mother and stepfather.

***“It put me in a place where I’m more calm,” Faith says of KAPS/ Crossroads. “If I get angry, it’s on me. I’m the one that’s going to pay the consequences.”***

Words of wisdom Faith received from her strict but loving stepdad, Moises Martir, helped change her outlook: ***“Your friends are not the ones that are going to be controlling your life, later. They’re going to be the ones walking when you’re stuck back here. You don’t need to be like other people, you need to be yourself. You need to learn how to control yourself and push through.”***



# Moms Get A HEAD START In Their Careers

from BCFS Education Services' Head Start

By Leonard Favela



In Head Start classrooms operated by BCFS Education Services, 3- and 4-year-olds learn the alphabet, practice new vocabulary words and prepare to hit the ground running when they start kindergarten. In addition, Learning opportunities outside the classroom – in the lives of Head Start parents – are also making a profound impact on the family's quality of life and their future.



"We conduct family assessments to discuss the parents' goals and help improve the family dynamic," says Jhanirca Velez Ramos, a Family Specialist for BCFS Education Services. "If a parent would like to earn their GED, for example, I provide them directions for how to obtain it. I encourage them to follow through. I make myself available and follow up throughout the school year if needed. My real passion is empowering people."



The federal Office of Head Start lists family well-being initiatives as one of the program's three core services, alongside children's health and early learning. So, when moms in two Spanish-speaking families of Head Start children in Seguin told their Family Specialist Jhanirca they wanted to learn English, Jhanirca was excited to help!

Jhanirca referred Ms. Hernandez and Mrs. Garcia to the local school district where they completed an English as a Second Language (ESL) course.

After working at a local restaurant for 10 years, Ms. Hernandez was finally offered a promotion. Confident in her new bilingual skills, she accepted the promotion to serve as a Team Leader. She doesn't plan on stopping there.

"At first, I didn't want to accept the job because I didn't know much English," she explains. "I wanted to learn a bit more English first and then accept the position. Now, I want to go back and learn even more, because I'd like to move up to another position at work."

While Ms. Hernandez was settling into her new role as Team Leader at the restaurant's corporate offices, her 5-year-old son, Sebastian graduated from Head Start and began kindergarten at his local elementary school. Just like his mom, Head Start helped build Sebastian's skills and cultivated in him a love of learning.

Mrs. Garcia, another Head Start mother of four, had always wanted to learn English. She picked up some phrases from her kids and from hearing other people speak, but had never taken English classes.

"I wanted to be able to help my kids with their homework, and develop myself more, and not struggle so much," said Mrs. Garcia. "It's beautiful to know how to speak both languages."

Mrs. Garcia, who works independently as a maid, hopes to use her new English skills to open her own cleaning business.

"I want to gain my commercial license so that I can clean government buildings or stores," she says. "To be able to expand and make my business official."

Both mothers are grateful for the help that BCFS Education Services has provided.

"Head Start has helped us a lot," said Mrs. Garcia. "My daughter has learned a lot in the classes, and it helped us learn how to be better parents. Everything (in Head Start) is very good, very organized. (Family Specialist Jhanirca Ramos) is always motivating us and pushing us to go further."

Mrs. Garcia's daughter, Paula, has also graduated from Head Start, ready for kindergarten.

"She's more prepared, she knows more about the routines of going to school," Mrs. Garcia said of her daughter's first year of elementary school. "She learned a lot, and while some of the other kids didn't go to pre-K, she is a bit more advanced because she attended Head Start."


For more information about BCFS Education Services Head Start, visit [DiscoverBCFS.net/HeadStart](http://DiscoverBCFS.net/HeadStart).

#### Photo Captions:

1. Jhanirca Velez Ramos, BCFS Education Services Family Specialist
2. Mrs. Garcia, with her ESL class certificate in-hand, hopes to use her new bilingual skills to expand her business.
3. Little Sebastian Hernandez







# A HOUSE FULL OF TREASURES

A Visit to the Goulet Family Home

By Leonard Favela





From the long, winding driveway, the Goulet family home looks perfectly serene, nestled in the Texas Hill Country. But step inside their expansive estate, and the quiet country scenery gives way to the joyful commotion of children running, playing and giggling.

Mrs. Jill Goulet sits in the family room, recalling when she and her husband, Denis, contemplated their journey to their fulfilling, exciting lives as foster and adoptive parents with BCFS.

“Six years ago, on the very day we got licensed (as foster parents), we got a call for an emergency placement of a six-week old infant that was being discharged from the hospital. That was Nathan.”

**Over the course of just five years, the Goulet family took in six children from foster care, and adopted each of them into the family.**

The Goulets welcomed Nathan in September 2010. A month later, two-and-a-half year old Judy joined the family as the second foster child. In November 2011, the family fostered Brian and Katie, a sibling duo, and in March 2015, welcomed the sisters, Autumn and Summer.

### A Prayerful Beginning

“We always wanted a big family,” she admits. “My husband comes from a family of nine, I come from a family of five.”

They couple shared how they turned to the Lord for guidance when they struggled with infertility issues.

“We started praying about it, and we felt like God was putting it on our hearts to adopt kids,” Mrs. Goulet says. “Family can look different, and a lot of different situations can be considered ‘family.’”

### The Goulet Kids

Today, the first child the Goulets adopted, Nathan, at six years old, is the youngest, along with Katie, also six. Brian and Autumn are both seven, Judy is eight, and Summer, at 10, is the big sister. All at once, all six children bound into the Goulet homestead each day at around 3:20 p.m. The calm, quiet household transforms into a bustling scene as Mrs. Goulet quickly adapts from willing interviewee to attentive mom, lovingly tending

to each child as they approach her with updates from school, questions about snack time, the dinner menu and the family pet. It’s beautifully frenetic; it’s family.

Brian, the most talkative, is excited about a toy snake he won at school. “His name is Slinky, because he can do this,” as he bounces the swirled rubber toy off the table.

As the kids hear mom begin to talk about family trips, Summer mentions past destinations Sleeping Bear Dunes in Michigan, Disneyworld and Niagara Falls. Nathan adds excitedly, “and Meemaw’s house!” — Mrs. Goulet’s mother in Pennsylvania.

It’s evident: this energetic, playful group of children enjoys plenty of adventures at home and on the road, and — like most families — they keep a full schedule of hobbies, lessons and sports.

“Autumn and Judy take guitar lessons, and all the girls do ballet and tap dancing. Summer is on the volleyball team at school, and she also does robotics,” Mrs. Goulet says. Before she has time to mention the boys’ activities, Judy asks her mom if she can have candy for snack.

“Nathan is going to be in baseball,” Mrs. Goulet says, before offering Judy a healthier alternative to the treat she requested. “Brian loves to design and build things. He wants to be an inventor.”

The other children have also shared dreams of what they want to be when they grow up and depending on which Goulet child you ask, the answer may vary from day to day (as it tends to for this age group), but their responses are a delightful grab bag of careers: a fashion designer, a chef, a vet and a dancer. Most heartwarming is Nathan’s response. “Without fail, he will tell you he wants to be a dad,” Mrs. Goulet says with pride.

### Blessed Beyond Measure

“We’ve never had biological kids, but I can’t imagine loving kids any more than we do... We feel blessed to be a blessing,” Mrs. Goulet says, “and



there are so many kids out there that need a home, and we love kids.”

The Goulets adopted all six children through BCFS Health and Human Services-San Antonio Foster Care & Adoption program. The BCFS team was by their side every step of the way, especially BCFS case manager Erika Noriega, who Mrs. Goulet said was instrumental in bringing their family together.

“Erika gives 110% of her effort,” said Mrs. Goulet. “She really went above and beyond, she was an amazing advocate for the kids.”

In many adoption cases, the child’s past experiences and family history can be complicated and upsetting – for a young child, the details may be too intense to understand. For the day when their kids are old enough to comprehend their pasts, Mr. and Mrs. Goulet are ready.

“I have all their case files, all their history,” Mrs. Goulet says. “Everything is packed away so the day they get curious about it, they will be able to read it, because they’re going to wonder. When they’re old enough to understand, we can go through it together. At some point, they may want to reach out (to their biological families), and that’s going to be their decision to make.”

### Crazy Fun

While six children may seem like a full house, the Goulets have considered adopting more children. For now, Mr. and Mrs. Goulet focus on nurturing, loving and guiding their own six. More family trips, stay-at-home movie nights and special birthday dinners are penciled in on the calendar for the foreseeable future. The Goulets wouldn’t have it any other way.

**“It gets a little crazy sometimes, but it sure is fun,” Mrs. Goulet smiles.**

### Building a Big, Forever Family... FAST!



September 2010

Nathan, a 6-week-old in foster care, is placed with the Goulets

October 2010

Judy, a 2-year-old in foster care, joins the Goulets



August 2011, January 2012

Nathan and Judy are adopted by the Goulets

November 2011

Brian and Katie, a sibling pair in foster care, are placed with the Goulets



August 2012

Brian and Katie are officially adopted by the Goulets

March 2015

Autumn and Summer, sisters in foster care, are placed in the Goulet home



November 2015

Autumn and Summer are officially adopted by the Goulets

Even after four children from foster care had already joined the Goulet family (Nathan, Judy, Brian and Katie) Mr. and Mrs. Goulet decided, they weren’t done yet!

“God was putting it on our hearts to open our house up again,” Mrs. Goulet says, “and that’s when we got Autumn and Summer.”



# FINDING HER WAY HOME

CASSIE'S JOURNEY

BY AUBREY PARKE

Cassie Carmichael's high school accolades summed up in one word? *Impressive.*

She was offered academic scholarships by several universities, excelled on three sports teams, and worked as a lifeguard at the Baptist Encampment, all while maintaining strong relationships with family and friends. Her story is a triumphant one, but *living* that story was not always easy.

Child Protective Services took Cassie away from her mother, a heroin user, when Cassie was 14. While the separation was painful, Cassie says that her mom was "going down a path I didn't want to be on."

For Cassie, the hardest part was leaving her older brother. When Cassie entered the foster care system, her brother had just turned 18 and was not eligible to be placed in a foster home.

At first, Cassie rotated through a handful of foster homes in the Abilene, Texas, area. Since her brother also lived in Abilene, they were able to keep in touch. After a few months, Cassie was placed with the Mellings, a new foster family in Galveston – seven hours away. Cassie admits she had "attitude problems" about the move.

"I wasn't really okay with being that far away

from my brother because we've always had a great relationship," said Cassie. "I kind of fought it and I didn't want to be there."

Even while Cassie was admittedly standoffish, the Mellings welcomed her into their Galveston home with open arms and lots of loving patience.

During Cassie's sophomore year in high school, the Mellings decided to move to Brownwood, Texas, to be closer to family. The move also put Cassie 300 miles closer to her brother.

The Mellings made it a priority to help strengthen Cassie's relationship with her biological family. When Cassie's mom and brother came to Brownwood for her high school graduation, her foster parents invited them to dinner and made efforts to get to know them. "They really tried to connect with my family because they know how much it means to me," she says.

Today, Cassie is a doting auntie to her brother's newborn son. And now that she lives closer, she can visit often. "Every time I go over there, they make me change dirty diapers," Cassie laughs. Diapers and all, Cassie loves spending time with her growing family. She enjoys taking her nephew to the park and "just having fun with him."

The Melling foster home is a busy one by any standard: Cassie is the oldest in a household of eight, with four foster sisters and a foster brother.

Cassie is deeply grateful for her foster parents. **"I love them so much," she says. "They're super cool and they trust me. They believe in all my goals and they know that I can do whatever I put my mind to."**

Cassie's senior year of high school was packed with college entrance exams and a full academic workload, but she found time to be a member of the basketball, powerlifting and track teams *and* work as a lifeguard. Prioritizing her classwork while balancing extracurriculars paid off – Cassie was accepted to three universities, each acceptance letter arriving with an attractive scholarship offer.

Faced with a choice, Cassie signed up for college campus tours, starting with Angelo State University (ASU) and the University of North Texas in Denton. BCFS Case Manager Alexzandra Hust accompanied Cassie on the ASU tour. Cassie noticed most of the other students touring with their parents, but with her BCFS mentor Alexzandra by her side, Cassie wasn't discouraged. **"BCFS is part of my family!" she beamed.**

Cassie fell in love with Angelo State and committed to attending ASU in the fall, accepting a \$10,000 scholarship for her excellent GPA and ACT scores. She also plans on joining Angelo State's Powerlifting Club.

With her freshman year of college in full swing, Cassie makes sure her busy schedule includes staying in touch with family.



"My foster mom would always joke with me, saying, 'I'm going to make you take online classes because you're going too far away!'" Cassie recalls. "It's great now that I'm going to Angelo – she can come and see me all the time."

Passionate about helping people, Cassie plans to study psychology or social work.

"I'm just trying to go where God wants to lead me. I want to do social work so I can help kids like me. Then, I want to do psychology so I can work in drug rehab and try to figure out everything, from what kind of hold drugs have on people to where I can try to forgive my mom for all the stuff she's done."

"I feel like God put me here for a reason," says Cassie. "Everyone has places where things happen to them in their life, and they don't know if they're going to make it. I feel like God tests us, and this is what He did: He put me in this situation because He knows what we can handle and that we can get out of it and make something of ourselves."

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program operated by BCFS Health and Human Services-Abilene helped Cassie transition out of foster care and become the strong, independent young woman she is today. PAL helps youth aging out of foster care learn valuable life skills like building healthy relationships, responsible money management, goal-setting and health & nutrition.



# FROM EAST TEXAS TO EASTERN EUROPE WITH LOVE

BY AUBREY PARKE

In November of 2008, Diane Stone stepped into a sparse but tidy supply closet in the recreation room of an East Texas group home and stumbled across a couple of plastic looms. *Nearly eight years and 2,400 hats later, she and nine other women have knitted their way across the Atlantic Ocean, connecting two organizations in the BCFS system in a meaningful way, and most importantly providing warmth and compassion to orphans in Eastern Europe.*

Diane has served as a day program leader at Breckenridge Village of Tyler (BVT), a residential community for adults with disabilities, for almost a decade.

When she first found the Knifty Knitter looms, Diane thought, “Maybe the residents could learn how to make hats with these!”

In the first year of knitting, Diane’s group created 200 hats. The number has grown every year since, reaching 370 hats in 2015.

All of the hats are sent overseas and distributed to orphanages in Moldova in Eastern Europe every December by Children’s Emergency Relief International (CERI), the international branch of BCFS.

Remarkably, BVT has not had to purchase yarn for any of the 2,400 hats they’ve created since the knitting group began.

According to Diane, volunteers collect trunk loads of yarn donations from their churches.

Arts and crafts have always been a part of BVT’s day habilitation program, but it

was important to Diane that the residents “use their time and talents to serve others, and feel the joy that brings.”

By making hats, BVT meets a very real need. Not only are Moldova’s winter temperatures gravely cold, but utilities and energy resources are scarce. It is difficult to keep buildings warm when the sun goes down, so the children can wear BVT’s knitted hats all hours of the night and day.

When the first batch of hats arrived in Moldova, the CERI team sent a report back to Tyler, Texas, thanking BVT villagers profusely. Eight years later, tears still well up in Diane’s eyes as she remembers what they told her.

“The kids don’t ever get a choice in what they wear,” she said. “They just wear whatever they are given.”

But, in this case it was different! CERI workers laid out the hats, with their brilliant array of colors, almost as many shades and patterns as there were hats, and let

them pick!

“The kids didn’t know what to do. Orphanage workers had to take them by the hand and show them how to make a choice.”

Diane’s knitting group has expanded to become an official class at BVT. But the core group of nine knitters continues to meet every morning, sharing life and ministry with each other.

“We are just one big family here at BVT,” Diane says. “I have never been anywhere with an atmosphere like this.”

Community service has always been a part of the lifestyle of BVT residents and day program participants. Staff and residents are involved with Meals on Wheels, the East Texas Food Bank, Jesus Closet Clothing Ministry, and other local nonprofits.

Expanding their *local* volunteer efforts to have a *global* impact was a logical – and inspiring – next step.



“IT’S AMAZING HOW GOD WORKS WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING FOR HIM,” DIANE SAYS.





# SUSTAINED RESILIENCE

Immediate Disaster Case Management (IDCM) program  
operated by BCFS Health and Human Services'  
Emergency Management Division

**BY JON BODIE**

## Breckenridge Village of Tyler goes **FULL THROTTLE WITH NASCAR**

### **No. 95 Chevrolet at Pocono Raceway in the NASCAR Spring Cup Series**

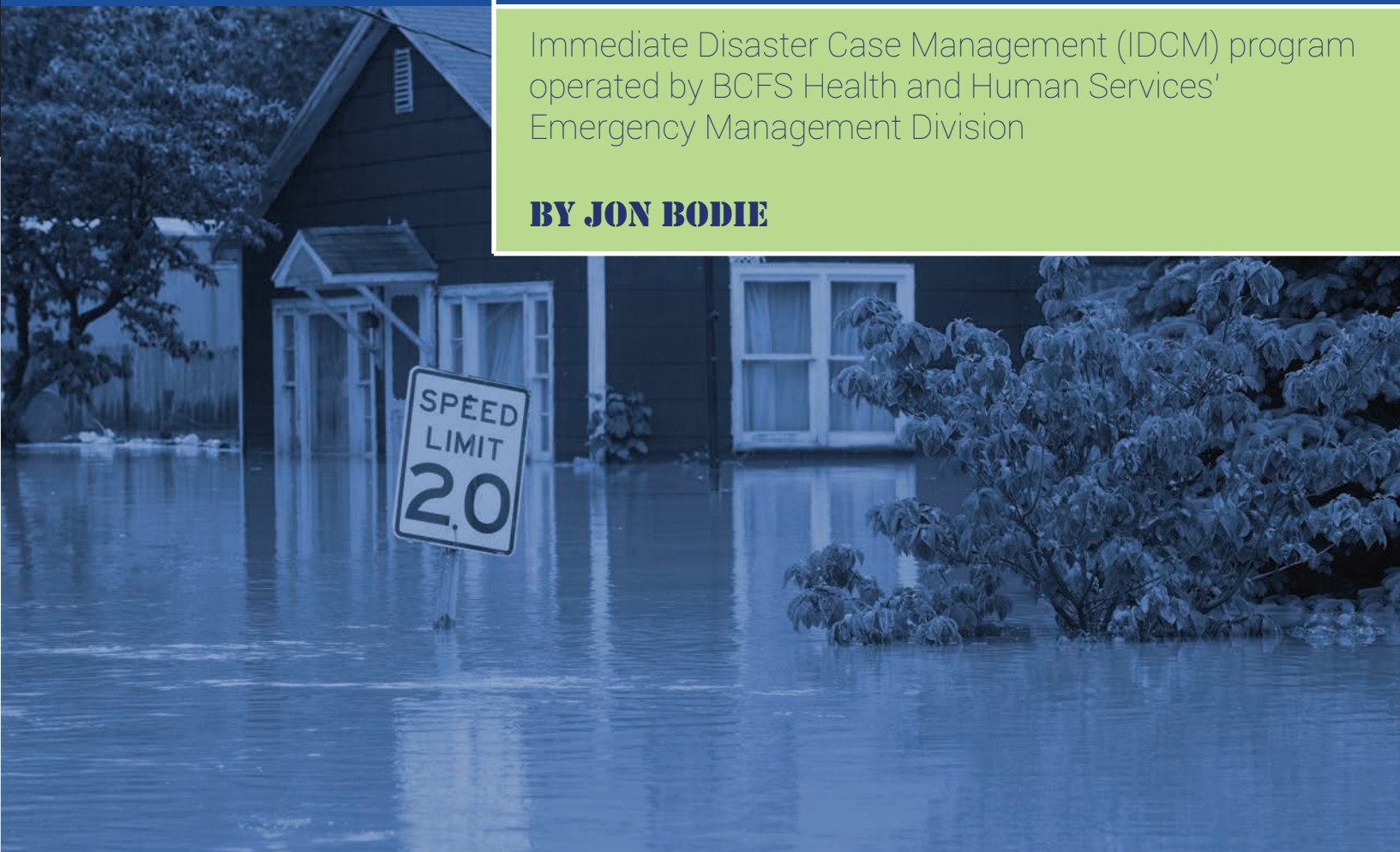
The owner of Circle Sport-Leavine Family Racing team, Bob Leavine, calls Tyler, Texas home, along with his wife, Sharon and daughter, Melynda. Mr. Leavine's 21-year-old grandson Tanner is autistic. Tanner attends BVT's day enrichment program that helps adults with disabilities develop spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally and socially in a loving, family atmosphere.

*"There is a place in Tyler, Texas – Breckenridge Village of Tyler – that our family has supported for a long time because of the work they do and the people there. They have taken that young man and helped him grow and contribute. Tanner has learned skills from cooking to making candles and selling them. We wanted to put (BVT) on the car so we could make a statement and say, 'hey we are behind this.' We need to help our special kids because it takes a lot of resources. People need to know about this, because they can help."*

**– Bob Leavine, owner of Circle Sport-Leavine Family Racing team**



BVT is a faith-based community for adults with mild to moderate intellectual and developmental disabilities, located in Tyler, Texas. Visit [BreckenridgeVillage.com](http://BreckenridgeVillage.com).





## KATRINA’S LANDFALL

The 29th of August in 2005 would become a day to go down in American history. Hurricane Katrina was making landfall during the early morning hours. The Category 3 storm brought sustained winds of 130 miles per hour to the residents of New Orleans and hundreds of communities located along the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. After several intense hours, the winds subsided, the storm moved inland and weakened, but devastation from the flooding from failed levees had just begun. Thousands would lose their lives and tens of thousands of people would be displaced from their homes in what would become the costliest hurricane in U.S. history and the fifth deadliest.



In the months and years that followed this catastrophic event, the lessons learned were many. Despite the delivery and application of an enormous volume of resources, almost four years after the storm, in April of 2009, thousands of individuals were still in need of social services that would enable their full recovery.

Trailer homes, funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and initiated by the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), had been deployed to assist residents that had lost their homes. As these trailer homes were never intended to be a permanent solution, a new pilot program known as the Louisiana Disaster Case Management Pilot (DCMP) was launched to assist people still living in FEMA temporary housing units. The goal of the pilot was to assist displaced residents with aspects related to long term recovery, including the transition to permanent housing and accessing available resources that addressed financial, legal and healthcare needs.

## LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY

According to a 2010 independent study, “Navigating the Road to Recovery,” the efficacy of the Louisiana DCMP pilot program faced many obstacles: “Despite concerted effort by participating agencies, the implementation of the DCMP was fraught with challenges. As a result, the pilot could not be implemented as intended, leaving the needs of many clients not fully met.”

The report went on to document significant problems regarding communication, coordination, and financing of the program. “The stop and start of recovery initiatives led to serious discontinuities in client recovery, so the authors recommend that federal and state governments consider a single, longer-term recovery initiative that seamlessly acknowledges the stages of human recovery. Improvements in how federal and state governments identify and locate affected residents, consider needs and vulnerabilities in planning, and ensure continuity of services are critical to ensure high-quality disaster case management.”

**The answer? The creation of a new federal program that leveraged the outcomes of the Louisiana DCMP program. The program came to be known as the federal Immediate Disaster Case Management program, or IDCM.**

## INCEPTION OF IDCM

Working in conjunction with FEMA, the new IDCM program would be administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, through the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Within ACF, a department known as the Office of Human Services Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR) would be responsible for activating the program once certain disaster impact criteria had been met under a Presidential Disaster Declaration.

In 2014, the contract to provide these services for OHSEPR came up for renewal. With a lengthy track record of successful emergency response deployment operations on behalf of state and federal clients, BCFS Health and Human Services’ Emergency Management Division (BCFS EMD) submitted a proposal and was awarded a five-year contract to provide IDCM services.

## PREPARATIONS COMMENCE

Quickly, the program was off and running. EMD established a management team and within 60 days employed and developed nine case management teams consisting of 30 case managers each. Months of team coordination and distance-based training soon followed. Members of the IDCM team come from across the country and represent all ten ACF regions.

In late summer of 2015, a full-scale IDCM disaster exercise was held at Silver Cliff Ranch, the BCFS-owned and operated wilderness camp in Nathrop, Colorado. Case managers were provided a mock “activation order” by EMD. Hundreds of designated case management personnel were then flown to Denver from across the country on a single day and were transported by EMD buses on a three-hour journey into the mountains. Over the following four days, the “ACME” exercise, which was scenario-driven and included real-world examples of actual client situations, the IDCM team was able to effectively implement disaster case management training at a higher level than any delivered training in the program’s history.

The exercise was attended by representatives from FEMA, ACF, and uniformed members of the United States Public Health Services (USPHS), a government agency that operates under the leadership of the Surgeon General’s office to ensure public health functionalities during major disasters. The exercise was an incredible success.

*The BCFS IDCM team was now ready for action. All that was needed was a mission assignment. In the spring of 2016, that opportunity came.*

## RECORD-BREAKING RAINFALL

The night of April 17, 2016 began with heavy rain forecast in the southeast part of Texas. On this night and for several consecutive nights, Harris County and the many other counties that make up the greater Houston metropolitan area were situated within a steady stream of upper level moisture coming in from the Gulf of Mexico. As this tropical air mass intermingled with cooler air approaching from the northern portions of Texas, thunderstorms developed rapidly. Instead of quickly exiting the area as they

## IMMEDIATE DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT (IDCM)

According to ACF, the goal of IDCM is to “achieve tangible, positive outcomes for vulnerable populations in the aftermath of a disaster. The program is based on principles of human dignity and is intended to be sensitive to culture, language, and socioeconomic status, and is accessible without creating barriers.”





usually do, these clusters of storms seemed to maintain a constant, almost static, presence over the region. As the thunderstorms intensified, their eastward motion slowed almost to a dead stop. As the storms remained, they dumped several million gallons of rain on unsuspecting residents of a 14-county area.

As the initial rains fell, many residents thought the storms would pass and things would go back to normal soon. Little did they know that within 12 hours the water from the nearby Brazos River, Colorado River, and numerous local bayous would swamp thousands of homes. The following day, after being rescued from swift moving waters by teams of first responders in special flood response watercraft, many of these same homeowners would be sleeping on cots in emergency shelters set up in nearby schools. Some watched the contents of their homes – their life’s belongings – washed into a river of debris that only a few hours earlier had been the roadway through their neighborhood. Other flood survivors in rural areas were left helpless as their livestock perished or were stranded by the floodwaters.

The flooding was record-setting for the Houston area. As a result, the federal government issued a Presidential Disaster Declaration for dozens of counties across the region. While the state of Texas does have significant local case management capacity, as time passed and the demand for case management services reached record levels, the local case management capacity was outstripped. It was at this point, several weeks after the floods subsided, that state officials determined federal case management assistance would be needed.

The BCFS IDCM team received a 90-day Mission Assignment task order on May 26, 2016. By June 5, nearly 60 BCFS personnel were providing desperately needed services to residents of the counties impacted by the storms. Using a combination of centralized case management services and deployable case management strike teams, the IDCM group fanned out into a dozen communities that were most impacted



by the floods. Sixty total personnel were initially deployed; an additional twenty personnel would be deployed a few weeks later.

*It would become an IDCM deployment operation that would alter the face of the federal IDCM mission profile.*

### CHANGING THE MISSION PROFILE

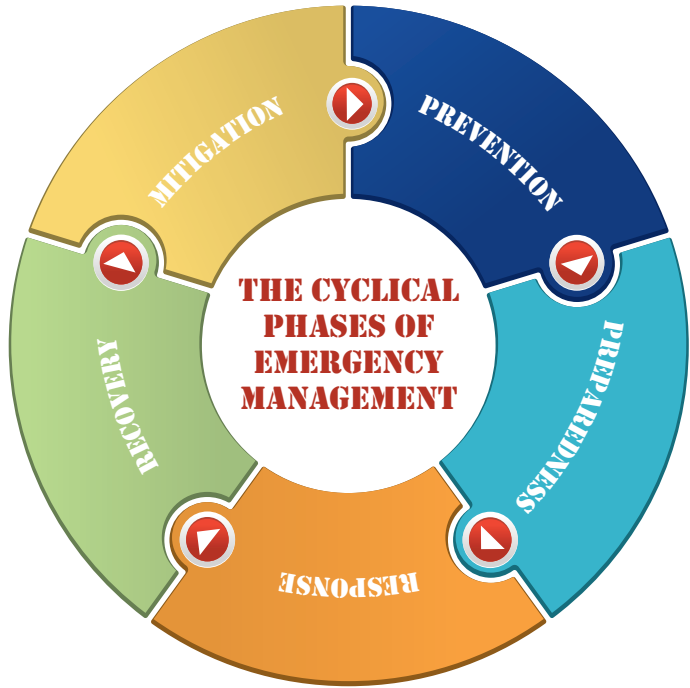
The cyclical phases of emergency management include Preparedness, Response, Recovery, Mitigation and Prevention.

In the emergency management world, the Response phase of any incident is usually short-lived. Response operations include application of response resources. An Incident Command Post is established as a location where response operations are coordinated. Supplies, equipment and personnel are organized and utilized in a manner that is designed to save lives and protect property. Incident Action Plans are drafted and distributed daily in order to capture required response objectives, organizational structure and personnel assigned to specific tasks. Situation Reports are also created and distributed daily, as a means of tracking operational success toward the established mission objectives outlined in the Incident Action Plan.

The Recovery phase, on the other hand, is where the heavy lifting begins. It is generally characterized by a slower pace, as recovery operations can continue for several years. Recovery operations rarely utilize the same tools as the Response phase. True to form,

during previous IDCM deployments a different contractor had applied a typical recovery approach to their recovery efforts on behalf of OHSEPR. The results were disappointing and ineffective.

**The BCFS IDCM team would take a much different approach. BCFS would, for the first time, apply a response-oriented approach to recovery operations. The results? A vast improvement in the coordination and application of IDCM case management resources, which allowed BCFS to assist thousands of affected residents in a much shorter time frame.**



### POWERFUL RESULTS

EMD disaster case managers spread out across the Houston-area and 11 surrounding counties, helping flood survivors on a daily basis for months at a time. For each flood survivor, some experiencing their darkest hour, their disaster case manager served as a single point of contact for all their questions, advocating for them with multiple social service organizations and government partners, to help them achieve the best possible outcomes in their individual recovery process.

EMD disaster case managers were the go-to resource for flood victims to receive assistance meeting their needs for housing, furniture, appliances, utilities, employment services, transportation, health and wellness, senior services, access and functional needs services, legal assistance and more.

The positive impact on the affected communities was tremendous. Based on the results listed above, feedback from our federal partners has been very positive.

**The highly successful work performed by BCFS Health and Human Services’ Emergency Management Division to ensure sustained resilience for the Houston-area will have a lasting impact for years to come.**

*<sup>1</sup>Acosta, J., Chandra, A., & Feeney, K. C. (2010). Navigating the road to recovery: Assessment of the coordination, communication, and financing of the Disaster Case Management Pilot in Louisiana. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.*

- After floods devastated the Houston-area, 3,866 people received disaster case management services from the BCFS IDCM team.
- The BCFS IDCM team:
- contacted 36,338 people who registered as disaster survivors with FEMA
  - opened approximately 2,034 cases for people who needed help recovering from the flood
  - assisted an additional 405 residents with information & referrals
  - provided 1,832 follow-up contacts to local organizations that could help meet survivors' critical needs
  - leveraged social media and geographically targeted outreach, online and offline, to increase community awareness about services available for disaster survivors

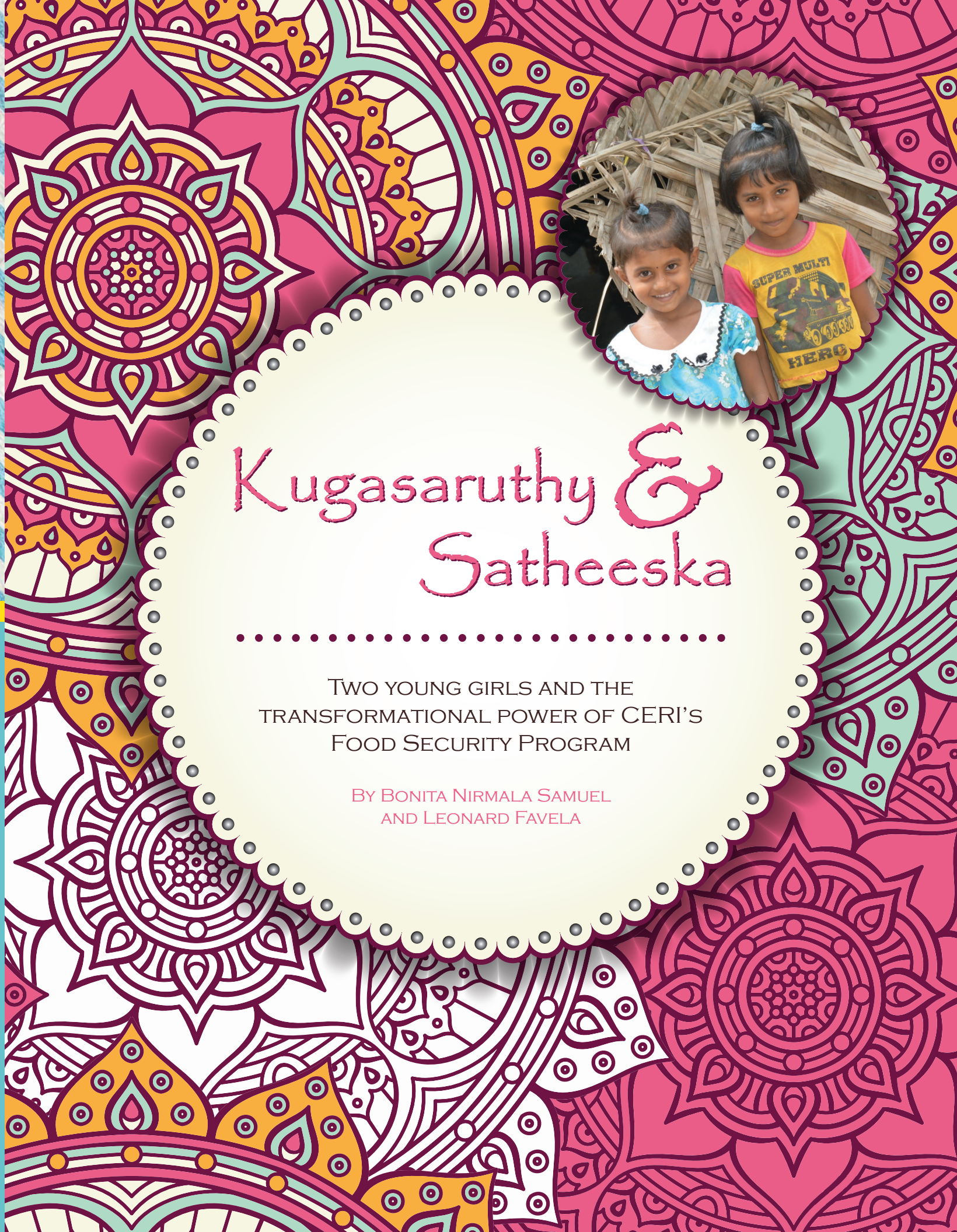






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# Kugasaruthy & Satheeska

.....

TWO YOUNG GIRLS AND THE  
TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF CERi'S  
FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM

BY BONITA NIRMALA SAMUEL  
AND LEONARD FAVELA

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In 2009, the Batticaloa District of Sri Lanka finally witnessed an end to the devastating 30-year civil war that decimated the region and its people. Batticaloa is the fourth most impoverished district in Sri Lanka, and home to the CERI office and the epicenter of CERI programs in the area. Nearly 20 percent of its inhabitants live at or below the poverty line, earning the equivalent of \$25.50 per month.

According to UNICEF, nearly one of every five children in Sri Lanka is born with low birth weight and approximately 29 percent of children under five years old are considered underweight. To address this epidemic, Children's Emergency Relief International (CERI) launched the Food Security Program (FSP).

In 2016, CERI Sri Lanka implemented the Food Security Program in Parathy Kiramam, Kiran Division, one of the poorest areas in Batticaloa, and the sixth village to be touched by the program since its inception. CERI's initial goal of serving a group of 12 to 15 children quickly changed, however, when 34 underweight children showed up to the program. Two of these young children were Kugasaruthy, age 7, and Satheeska, age 5, both of whom weighed only 27 pounds.

Although they are young, Kugasaruthy and Satheeska know firsthand the ravages of civil war, which had left their father disabled. He was attacked by an elephant while seeking shelter during a shooting. As he ran for safety, he was shot three times. Barely alive, he was rescued and taken to the hospital for emergency surgery. Unfortunately, during surgery, a medical mistake resulted in a severed nerve, rendering the young father's left arm useless. Unable to work with the use of both hands, it was incredibly difficult to find work and provide for his family.

The girls' mother, Jeyanthini, 27, also suffered in the aftermath of these tragedies. The couple experienced feelings of inferiority due to their extreme poverty, causing them to withdraw from the outside world. Jeyanthini prohibited her daughters from playing with the other children in the village, kept them from attending school and confined them to their small home.

In spring 2016, Jeyanthini and her family were selected to participate in CERI's Food Security Program, an opportunity she initially rejected. However, after learning more about the services, she accepted the offer, her heart filled with the hope of helping her family.

During the 12-day program, Jeyanthini learned to cook simple, healthy meals while her children participated in activities at the Children's Club. After living in sheltered isolation, Kugasaruthy and Satheeska made

friends and learned how to play with other children. With each passing day in the program, their energy and enthusiasm increased.

Before long, Jeyanthini started to flourish as well. She began to share stories about her life during the cooking sessions, talking excitedly with the other mothers about the positive differences she witnessed in her children's behavior as a result of their participation in the program.

"My girls are very happy to take part in the sessions," she said. "They eat more while they are with other children than they eat at home when they're alone. I feel an invisible love that surrounds my children, and peace and happiness cover our family daily as the girls return home after the session."

Jeyanthini began allowing her daughters to play with the other children in the village, as well as attend school.

Participation in the program has also improved the sisters' health. Kugasaruthy and Satheeska have both gained weight, expanded their social skills and boosted their self-esteem, and overall, enhanced their quality of life. Playing with their peers offered new experiences and opportunities for exploration, learning and development. New toys, new friends and organized games stimulated their growth and capacity, and CERI staff used game times to teach children how to play well together, model positive behavior, and show the love of God through respect for one another and good sportsmanship.

The FSP helped Kugasaruthy and Satheeska grow physically and emotionally in a very visible and profound way. Still, the girls remain underweight in comparison to their American counterparts. While the average weight of an American seven-year old is 49 pounds, Kugasaruthy is approximately 30 lbs. and little Satheeska at age four weighed in after the program at 27.5 pounds. Nevertheless, the sisters are on their way to healing, inside and out.

Bonita Nirmala Samuel, the CERI Sri Lanka Interim National Program Director describes her team's feelings about the Food Security Program implementation in Parathy Kiramam.

"We thank God for this wonderful opportunity to serve others," she says, "and to have successfully reached these families most in need."

Sadly, more than 53 percent of children in Sri Lanka under 5 years old are classified as underweight (calculated as weight-to-age ratio), and nearly 72 percent of local households do not have adequate sanitation or water facilities. Each year, local divisions of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health in Batticaloa ask CERI to address the nutritional needs of area children through the Food Security Program.

The FSP addresses the acute needs in these villages for healthy food, nutrition education, intentional cooking skills, and information on the importance of proper hygiene and sanitation. The FSP offers Sri Lankan moms the tools needed to confront child malnutrition and common, yet life-threatening health conditions like diarrhea, intestinal worms and infections.

Between 2013 and 2015, CERI's Food Security Program served more than 400 underweight children and their families. Each year the program has been in operation, a growing proportion of participating children are on track for healthy weight gain. This year, CERI Sri Lanka is serving 135 children and their families in six impoverished villages across the Batticaloa district.

Through the FSP, CERI hopes to reach even more families like Kugasaruthy's and Satheeska's, and one day, see Sri Lanka rise above the hunger, poverty and despair through the power of God's love. Together, with open, loving hearts and a mission to nourish the body and the spirit, CERI staff and the Sri Lankan people transform and rebuild families and communities.





## BCFS Hill Country Resource Center

WHERE COLLABORATION MEETS COMPASSION

For someone who needs help in the Texas Hill Country – whether it's counseling, crisis intervention, or education and employment assistance – travelling to multiple nonprofit offices around town to meet basic needs can be difficult, especially without transportation or the flexibility to miss work.

That's why BCFS gathered local nonprofits under one roof at the BCFS Hill Country Resource Center, where children and families in need can receive the necessary services and referrals in a single visit.

BCFS' Collaborative Resource Center Model is an innovative way to connect several nonprofit organizations and maximize their combined talents and resources. For the community, this means that those who are struggling have easy and convenient access to a wide array of programs, services, and resources in one central location.

### Services Available:

- Counseling
- Case management
- Emergency shelter placement
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- Job training and job placement
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- Help for military veterans
- Creative art therapy
- Computer lab access



### BCFS Hill Country Resource Center

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Open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. | Call (830) 896-0993



# THE MEASURE<sup>OF A</sup> MAN

BY KELLY DOHERTY



East Texas was never the same once Pierre de Wet arrived and put his heart and soul into the community. Little did we know, when Pierre made Tyler his home, with his larger-than-life personality and heart big enough for Texas, he would bless the community of Breckenridge Village of Tyler (BVT) with his overwhelming generosity and loving spirit.

As an immigrant, Pierre came to the United States from South Africa in 1984 bringing with him two young daughters, ages two and four. He grew up on a farm where he learned at a young age the value of hard work. The experience, without a doubt, cultivated a man of many talents and embedded in him an undeniable strength to prevail – a trait that would become his trademark.

Starting out in California as a tractor driver in a rice operation, Pierre worked in a variety of laborious jobs until he made his way to Texas in 1990, where he put down roots in the rose capitol of the world, Tyler, Texas.

Pierre was a visionary and an entrepreneur to the core. He founded several local companies including Agtoprof, a national farm management company, and Kiepersol Enterprises, a vineyard and winery destination south of Tyler.

Although Pierre had left South Africa to work and build a life in the U.S., members of his family remained abroad, including his father and sister, Suzanne. It was in 1997 Pierre received word his father had passed away. Amid the grief of this sudden loss, Pierre wondered, what would this mean for Suzanne?

Suzanne was the first born, Pierre's older sister. She was a happy, healthy child, whose baby jabbering quickly turned into words as she grew. However, one night, Suzanne developed an uncontrollable, dangerously high fever. Malaria. The walls of their one-room home closed in on them as they desperately sought God throughout the night, rashly promising anything for the chance their daughter might survive.

She did live, but things were never the same again. Suzanne didn't speak as much after that night. She was joyous and beautiful, but the fever had burned away something within the child that never returned. Over the years, her father diligently made sure she had the care she needed at special schools and convents for those with developmental disabilities.



At age 46, Suzanne was alone in South Africa with no support system after her father's death. Pierre brought Suzanne to live with him in Tyler, nearly ten thousand miles away. Shortly after Suzanne arrived, Breckenridge Village of Tyler opened, a residential community for adults with disabilities. A whole new "home" became available.

Showing compassion to people close to home, in his own community, was important to Pierre. Breckenridge Village is a place built on hope and freedom, and that was right up Pierre's alley. His core beliefs were built on freedom and living the American dream. However, the kind-hearted folks at Breckenridge Village and many people with developmental disabilities must find a *different* path to that American dream.

Part of our freedom includes the honored responsibility that we must *share* the dream with those who need help to pursue it. Sharing that dream builds hope. And in Pierre's words, you should "make every seed positive, and positive will grow."

Pierre de Wet passed away in January of 2016, but his compassion lives on in the lives he touched at Breckenridge Village, across East Texas, and beyond.



Through Breckenridge Village, Pierre had contact with so many of the residents and came to appreciate their live-in-the-moment view of the world. Seeing how they helped each other and filled in the gaps for their friends' abilities inspired him to write:

*"We cannot all be the same and will never be the same. Each of us knows what is wrong and right. We know what's good and evil and we know our talents. All we need to know beyond that is we all are parts of the body of Christ."*

*Some of us are the ears that need to hear all of the other parts. Some of us are the eyes that see the need of the other parts. Some of us are the lips and need to speak positively and show kindness to the other parts. And some of us might be the fist that has to fight the physical battle for all the parts."*

*Thy neighbor is the one that you can feel and touch. Love them so that circle can grow. There's no growth in loving people so far away that you cannot hold hands."*



*together*  
we care

*CERI gives you the opportunity  
to touch a child's life in a  
meaningful way.*



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CERI is the international division of BCFS, a global system of non-profit organizations with  
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that meet the needs of at-risk populations in the United States and around the world.

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