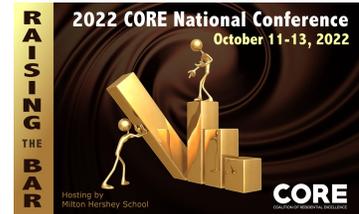




COALITION OF RESIDENTIAL EXCELLENCE

Executive Director's Report October 2022

Our gratitude and thanks go to Milton Hershey School for hosting the 2022 CORE National Conference. The conference site was the newly renovated and recently re-opened Founder's Hall, following five years of construction, exceptional carpentry, and attention to every detail.



The original building, dedicated to the school's founders - Milton and Catherine Hershey, was dedicated on September 13, 1970. Fifty-two years later, on September 28, 2022, Founder's Hall was rededicated to honor the legacy of Milton and Catherine Hershey. Participants in the celebration included students, staff, alumni, and community members.

CORE was very fortunate that this year's National Conference followed on the heels of MHS Founder's Hall re-opening. Milton Hershey School is one of the founding members of CORE, and the agency supports CORE in multiple of different ways.

Peter Gurt, the President of Milton Hershey School is an alumnus who first came to MHS a student at the age of five. He has served as President of MHS since August 2014. Gurt helped set the tone for this year's CORE conference with his warm and inviting welcome.

The theme for this year's conference was raising the bar to the Gold Standard. The beauty of the MHS campus and the majesty of Founder's Hall provided a perfect venue to expect only the best. I sense that no one came away disappointed. It is my belief, based on feedback and follow-up telephone calls, that those attending the conference returned with many takeaways to assist in improving services for those they serve.

One of the highlights associated with each year's CORE conference includes the selection and presentation of the Catherine Hershey Awards.

Catherine Hershey Award's Luncheon

The committee that selected this year's recipients chose to select two houseparent couples of the year because of their exemplary service and two students of the year. The remaining category of awards was singularly given.



Houseparents of the year

David and Tia Fontenot - St Joseph's Indian School

When you say, “David and Tia Fontenot” to someone at St. Joseph’s Indian School, you’ll likely hear “above and beyond” in reply. Like so many others, that was the first thing St. Joseph’s Indian School houseparents, Aaron and Melissa Wisenbaugh, said.

They met Tia Fontenot nearly two decades ago while working at another residential school. “We were exhausted,” explains Melissa. “Aaron and I were eight-day houseparents who lived on campus. The four-day houseparent was only one staff person [not a couple], and they were hired and quit perpetually.”

Because we lived on campus, the four-day would knock on our door every night, asking for help. So, when Tia started, Melissa was not friendly. “I am off duty. Do your job and don’t knock on my door,” she told her. The first night, Tia did knock on the door. “I made extra cookies,” she said. “I thought you’d like some.” The next night, Tia knocked on the door again. “I made extra dinner,” she said, handing the Wisenbaughs two delicious platefuls. Above and beyond. So began a long friendship.

When the Wisenbaughs moved to St. Joseph’s, they encouraged Tia to join them. She came for a while but, as a single woman, decided to return to teaching. A few years later, she married her husband, David, and the idea of house parenting as a couple lured them back to St. Joseph’s. “I warned them there is no “South” in South Dakota,” said Melissa, referring to the hard, cold winters.

But that didn’t dissuade David and Tia from creating their unique brand of climate change: warming hearts, minds, and tummies with their Louisiana-bred hospitality and Tia’s excellent cooking. “Tia knows every student’s favorite food and uses it as a relationship builder and expression of her love,” said Aaron, relating the story of how she won the heart of a particularly picky eater, Joaquin.

“He’d moved on to the senior home but went to Tia begging her to make him some ribs.” When the girls in her care arrived home, they were crestfallen to realize the ribs weren’t for them. “These are for Joaquin,” she explained, “but when you tell me what to make for you, I’ll do it.” And she did. Above and beyond. When the darkness of grief fell over the girls’ home the couple was responsible for in the fall of 2020, David and Tia’s remarkable spirit didn’t let it shut out the light of hope.

“The girls in our home have experienced a lot of grief and loss this year. Between COVID and the suicide rate among the Native American population, there is not one student in our home who isn’t affected,” the couple noted. Love and Logic Program trained, David and Tia, bring that approach to help students grow through their struggles.

“We wanted to help the girls learn to move through this grief in healthy ways,” they explained. The couple purchased memorial lanterns for each girl, helped them fill them with prayers, notes, and special memories, and lit and launched them at a predawn ceremony on the Missouri River. “We had to shield each girl from the wind as she got her lantern ready,” they said. “It was a lesson about how we depend on each other when we are vulnerable.”

As the glowing lanterns lifted into the early morning sky, the couple gathered the girls to share memories, honor the deceased by carrying their love and memories forward, and live happy, healthy lives that would make them proud. Above and beyond. “They go above and beyond for everyone, every day,” Aaron said.

He mentioned how they would drive three hours at the drop of a hat to ensure a child’s safe return to campus, attend funerals to be with families in grief, patiently wade through the chaos of poor choices that a student might make, and be there for someone when others would have long given up.

A former teacher, Tia goes the distance and more to encourage academic growth through mastery and study skills. The environment in the home, while described as “good vibe,” is simultaneously conducive to learning and meeting educational goals. Residential Director Travis Hallock describes the Fontenot’s “above-and-beyond” in these terms: Making high-quality connections with students through the Circle of Courage values of mastery, independence, generosity, and belonging; doing extra not for notoriety but for relationship; mentoring other houseparents; being grounded in faith, promoting spirituality and Native culture, but never in an overbearing way; providing freezer meals for the school’s transition program that supports graduates in college, training or the workplace; and sharing Andy, their certified canine good citizen, with students through the Pet Program.

The Fontenot’s “above-and-beyond” house parenting might leave no room for community involvement. Yet, as if everything is a priority and nothing needs to wait, the couple are active members of their church community. In their home state of Louisiana, the couple readily provided meals for families in need during the toughest part of the COVID pandemic.

In Chamberlain, Tia organizes the high school activity calendar and the couple attends and supports countless high school extracurricular activities during their time off. Above and beyond. And, about that climate change, the St. Joseph’s community is that much warmer because, during their time off, the Fontenots invite other houseparents to their home for meals and provide rides to other staff to out-of-town appointments.

Houseparents of the Year

Dan and Cassi Smith - Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches

Nomination Narrative: Dan and Cassi Smith have been cottage parents for 8 years with the Florida Sheriffs Boys Ranch. They came to us because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of kids from hard places; a goal that has been met many times over.



I'm not sure there is a typical mold that cottage parents fall into because there are so many facets to what a Cottage Parent does on a day-to-day basis. Even if there was a mold, Dan and Cassi would not fit into it.

Dan and Cassi have a parenting style that is built around love, support, accountability, fun, and hard work. They are constantly thinking about how they get the kids they serve to be successful and rarely is it the same way twice. They state, "Every child is different and must be parented in their own way. We don't have a set way to parent, it's built around the needs of the child." If we need to be firm and straightforward, we do that. If we need to offer lists and give visual examples, then that is what we do. However, one thing that is the same with all of the children they parent is the unconditional love they provide. Dan and Cassi proved this unconditional love this year in a way that no parent, biological or not, should ever have to experience.

One of the young men in their cottage was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. The young man had lived with us since he was 11 years old. His cottage home wasn't just a temporary place but his real home. This was a new path to walk for us as a program, caring for a child with a terminal prognosis. His cottage parents stepped up and served as parents would.

Dan and Cassi stayed by his side during months of treatments and doctor visits. Even as they provided care for this young man, they never lost sight of the other young men in their cottage.

They worked with staff across campus to help Malaki meet his goals and dreams, although the future loomed dark and large in their minds. The day came when Malaki was given less than four months to live. He worked through his end-of-life plans and said he wanted to stay on the campus rather than go to hospice or the hospital. Our team met and the question was posed, "Can we do this?" It wasn't just can we keep a terminally ill child on campus, the question was do we have the fortitude to support Dan and Cassi. And did Dan and Cassi have the wherewithal to travel this path?

Dan and Cassi lost two family members in the previous twelve months. They packed down their own grief and said, “He is ours, yes we want to keep him on campus.” The illness progressed and he was moved to a private home on the campus.

Dan and Cassi worked split shifts so that all of their boys had access to them, as it did not escape them other children were mourning the fate of their brother. While traveling this path with Malaki and caring for all of their young men, they were supporting and managing the transition of his roommate, another long-term resident, to college and helping all of their children manage their grief. Dan and Cassi were with him to the very end. His final wishes were honored. That’s truly the definition of unconditional love

It is my great privilege to offer you this nomination for Dan and Cassi Smith as the 2022 CORE Houseparents of the year.



Educator of the Year

Annie Schoenhard - St. Joseph's Indian School

Nomination Narrative: American research professor, lecturer, author, and podcast host Dr. Brené Brown defines connection as: “The energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued, when they can give and receive without judgment, and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.” When people talk about St. Joseph’s Indian School Second Grade Teacher Annie Schoenhard, it’s all about her connections.

“Connection is a priority with Annie,” says fellow teacher Melissa McDonald. “Other teachers put classroom management, structure and control first,” explains McDonald. “But when I watch Annie with her students, it’s clear she wants them to feel at home, safe and nurtured.”

Schoenhard adapts to ensure connection. “When one approach isn’t working well with a student,” says Principal Sharmel Olsen, “Annie finds another. She is patient, flexible and understanding with every child. Her students feel seen, heard and valued.”

Schoenhard sums it up herself in her “My St. Joe Story”. She calls teaching for the “Aha! moments” priceless. She says of her students, “I love knowing that I make a difference by caring about them as people, seeing and responding to them as individuals, and building a safe and respectful classroom.”

She plants connections, taking the study of seeds from the science curriculum to a new level. Each student plants a seed in a paper cup that sprouts and grows in a sunny common area. As they watch the daily growth, the students’ chatter and excitement

brighten the school's hallways. When garden-ready seeds are shared with other staff to plant in their home gardens, Schoenhard

also plants them in her garden, cans the resulting products, and shares them with staff and students.

McDonald relates an activity that Schoenhard coordinated at the end of the past school year. She wanted the students to have fun remembering the year, but she took it outside her room and invited the five classes that make up the first through third grade community.

"She is the one to get others together," McDonald notes. Annie organized the students in rows, each child with a bucket. The first child in the row had water in their bucket. The tasks: 1. Pass the bucket overhead and pour it into the bucket of the next child without turning around. 2. Work relay-style to get as much water as possible in the last child's bucket. Annie planned the bucket-brigade experience for the laughter and teamwork that happened as students helped each other meet the goal.

Schoenhard also connects as a mentor. She works with two students, a brother and sister, who lost their mother a few years ago. She ensures they have gifts to take home for the holidays and that each has a special snack for transportation days. She is a mentor to other teachers, both on the job and in the community. "She's the one to gather us outside of the office," says McDonald, relating dinners on the town that strengthen rapport among staff.

The community of Chamberlain is a better place for the many connections that Schoenhard makes. As an adviser for St. Joseph's National Junior Honor Society chapter, she helped develop a partnership with the Missouri Rivers Mudcats' Special Olympics Bowling Team. Through the partnership, fourth through eighth grade students supported the team for several weeks – helping deliver bowling balls, assisting at the lanes, keeping score, and befriending the 19 team members. "Through this experience, I learned that you can be friends with anyone," noted one fifth grader.

In addition, even though she doesn't have a high school student, she raises money for athletics as president of the Chamberlain Booster Club. She helps with Brownie Scouts, is active in her church community and is a member of the Fireman's Auxiliary.

Student of the Year

ShyAnne Jumping Eagle - St. Joseph's Indian School

Nomination Narrative: Wówačhaŋtognake, a core value to the Lakota people, means sharing not only material goods but a sharing of heart, comfort, and support. The closest English word is generosity. The closest example is St. Joseph's Indian School student ShyAnne Jumping Eagle.



Family Service Counselor, Darcy Belitz describes ShyAnne's generosity of heart. An excellent seamstress, Belitz organized sewing bees this past year to teach the high school girls how to make ribbon skirts, which are historical and traditional clothing for Indigenous women. "After she made her first ribbon skirt, she set her heart on using her new skill at sewing to make a ribbon shirt for her toddler nephew. When she decided to wear her ribbon skirt for high school graduation, she made one to match for her sister, her nephew's mother."

ShyAnne worked as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) at a long-term-care facility during high school. Belitz describes ShyAnne's generosity of comfort, "She has a glowing smile that warms your heart. Her quiet, gentle presence and compassion assured residents that she was there to care for them and lend a listening ear."

Amanda Mahnke, RN, director of Nursing at Sanford Chamberlain Care Center, endorses, "Residents and coworkers enjoyed her alike. She was an avid team player, always looking to help, and you never had to question if the task at hand was complete. She was great in her CNA role, and I hope she always has her kind soul and heart."

As quiet and humble as ShyAnne is, a person may not understand at first that by her example, ShyAnne provided generosity of support to other girls in the high school program. Belitz notes that she was active in basketball and volleyball every year. "Many of the younger girls decided to go out for sports because they knew she was there to support and encourage them. ShyAnne persisted year after year."

Perhaps nowhere did her generosity of support shine more than in her archery. As skilled as she was – 2019 female high school champion at a competitive South Dakota tournament – ShyAnne supported less skilled athletes by stepping aside during practice times.

And those practice times were scarce. Because of the amount of special equipment required, archery takes a second seat to other scheduled programming, and practice gets worked around other activities. "Despite her high skill level, ShyAnne didn't take the competitive attitude that she should have the spotlight and the opportunity to practice more. She was willing to support other students by giving up her turn and allowing them to practice," comments Evan Fleury, Rec Center staff person and ShyAnne's coach.

ShyAnne took up archery when she came to St. Joseph's in the seventh grade because it helped her feel connected to her Lakota culture. In genuine connection to her culture, generosity is not just giving material things, but giving her heart, comfort and support. ShyAnne continues to work as a CNA at a long-term-care facility in Sioux Falls, S.D., and plans to further her education in the health care field after gaining more experience.



Student of the Year

Malaki Sarp - Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches

[Awarded posthumously]

Nomination Narrative: Have you ever witnessed courage up close and personal? Have you ever met a person whose complete and absolute faith in God was so very real that you could almost see it as a beating heart palpitating outside of the body? Have you ever met someone whose love for others was unlike anyone you have ever encountered, who put others first and foremost even while they were enduring unfathomable pain from an illness that would soon bring about their death?

Well, I have and his name is Malaki Sarp, a young man who came to live at the Boys Ranch at age 11 and would remain at the Boys Ranch for the rest of his young life! You see Malaki died here at the Boys Ranch in early June of this year after a brutal battle with cancer; a tumor that was inoperable.

While it was thought to be in remission after many treatments back in February, it returned with a vengeance by mid-April. This resulted in the need to develop final plans with Malaki being fully aware of what was going to take place with an end-of-life discussion.

While living at the ranch from age 11 until his death (as a result of a failed adoption and the adoptive parents wanting little to do with him), Malaki decided to take advantage of all that the ranches had to offer.

He quickly became a leader, not feeling sorry for himself or his circumstances, but rather choosing to put his faith in God and believe that there was a bigger plan for him in life.

He became a regular in our church services, landed a job at our farm, and participated in all activities resulting in becoming president of the 4-H Club, a camp counselor, and a county delegate. He was a member of our Riding Ranchers, Heifer program and a Ranch Ambassador.

Over his years he won the most Improved Rancher award, the Cattleman's Award in 2019 and 2020, and the 4-H Award.

He worked in our Chapel, Arts and Crafts, Maintenance, and Administration Offices, and at Zaxby's off-campus. He had a dream to attend college and become a Paramedic and later a Pediatric Oncologist. He had plans for his life and yet these plans

changed dramatically as he learned of his fate!

Before he became so ill that he could no longer walk or speak, he visited each of our cottages and spoke to each of his fellow ranchers and explained what he was about to endure and the final outcome. He shared his love for others, and his love for God and made it clear that he was not afraid because he knew that Christ would be there waiting for him as he crossed over the bridge to the other side. He shared that his fellow ranchers needed to be right themselves with our Lord and that they had opportunities ahead of them and to make the most out of them. He asked not for pity nor sorrow but rather to rejoice that he would soon be with his savior.

He made sure to tell them how much he loved them and the same was said of his cottage parents and others. He forgave his adoptive parents and when he died in our Ranch House that had been converted into a Hospice House, he was there with his cottage parents whom he asked to remain with him.

Maliki is much more than just a Student of the Year in our eyes. He was a role model, an example of what it means to truly believe in God, and a young man of absolute courage which I have never witnessed before!! For this reason, we are recommending Maliki for this award and if chosen for it to be awarded posthumously!

Administrator of the Year

Robin Brantley-Case - Milton Hershey School

Nomination Narrative: It is with great pleasure and a real privilege for me to nominate Ms. Robin Brantley Case for consideration for the 2022 Catherine Hershey National Residential Excellence Administrator of the Year award.



I have personally known Robin since she and her husband Jim first relocated from New England to the Milton Hershey School in 1981 as houseparents in training and I was still a high school student enrolled at the School.

In the many years since then, I have known Robin in several capacities both at the School and in the community. Robin and I even attended grad school together through Duquesne University, but for the past eighteen years, she has been my immediate supervisor as Director of the MHS Elementary Division Home Life program.

Robin is gifted at working for children, families, and the MHS community. She is a patient, observant and compassionate colleague and a leader who always makes the time to listen to the concerns brought to her by many, different stakeholders of the School, including children or their guardians.

I have never heard Robin speak an ill-word or pass judgment toward any child under the care and supervision of her division or the MHS community. Robin takes her role very seriously and yet seems to understand the many challenges, setbacks, struggles, and disappointments that are often germane to both a residential school as large as Milton Hershey, or as small as the children we serve and their often stress-filled backgrounds.

Milton Hershey School is a very old, very large, and very complex organization that has certainly experienced many, significant changes over the four decades that Robin has worked here. And yet, she can adjust to meet the new challenges created by directional or initiative changes without giving up or letting setbacks determine the outcomes of her work and focus on the School or our students.

Robin has proven herself to be a strong, caring leader who motivates her staff and colleagues to want to give our best on behalf of the children who come to Milton Hershey.

Robin is always available to discuss ideas, share insights, process solutions, and even disagree without being judgmental or dismissive. Personally, and professionally, I have gone to Robin many times over the years with issues, concerns, or struggles and she is always supportive, with honest, but sound and gentle advice that never fails to help. Through her example, we as team members have come to understand the importance of creating relationships founded on compassion and respect for each other and especially for the families whose children attend the School.

It is important to Robin that everyone working for the children at Milton Hershey can understand and demonstrate how building trust is key to the success of our School and our students. Robin is one of those colleagues that you come across once in a great while who is always kind, loving, fun, and seems to care about the person more than the problems they may bring.

I have been blessed to have Robin as a colleague and boss for many years, and I wish there were more supervisors and staff members working for children who are like her. I hope you too will recognize this and honor Robin Brantley Case as a CORE Administrator of the Year



Trustee of the Year

Carol Urton - Texas Baptist Children's Home

Seven years ago, Carol Urton made a brief visit to the Austin, Texas, area to speak at an annual Partners In Prevention conference on child abuse. As she made her way to the conference, the taxi she was riding in passed

by the corner where Texas Baptist Children's Home (TBCH) sits just north of Austin in Round Rock. Because of her personal passion for rescuing vulnerable children, the TBCH sign caught her eye. She was intrigued, and made a mental note to someday learn more.

Just one year later, Carol's career unexpectedly moved her family from California to the Round Rock area. Once again, Carol found herself driving past TBCH. This time, she stopped and asked for a tour. That moment marked the beginning of Carol's now six-year journey as a TBCH Trustee and one of our ministry's most ardent ambassadors.

Not long after that first visit, we invited Carol to serve on our TBCH Board of Trustees. There is no way to adequately capture the impact she has made on our ministry over the past six years and how she has helped reshape our approach to donor and community engagement.

In her professional life, Carol serves as Senior Director of Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability for Experian's North American Region. She is responsible for overseeing the company's gift-in-kind projects, grants, employee donation and matching programs, and charitable activities.

She also supports the company's consumer education programs. Her wealth of professional and leadership experience made her the perfect fit to serve alongside our staff in launching a new sustainable funding initiative not long after she joined our Board. She eagerly agreed to help with this new initiative in any way she could. She traveled with our leadership and development teams on two different occasions during the launch period for three-day, intensive planning sessions during which new donor and community engagement strategies were developed.

Since then, she's volunteered countless hours helping to host weekly ministry engagement luncheons on our campus, networking with community partners, and even speaking at our annual fundraising events. She's also partnered with our development team in calling and writing personal thank you notes to those who attend ministry events.

Carol's personal insights and marketing expertise have been invaluable in helping us craft new approaches to engaging others in the work we do with children, single mothers, and young adults through our residential and counseling programs. Her endless and enthusiastic investment of time has greatly helped TBCH to deepen its footprint not only with donors and the surrounding community, but with clients as well.

Thanks to Carol's efforts and encouragement, we have been able to re-engage hundreds of previous donors with whom we'd lost contact and to connect with even more new ministry partners, connections that will help sustain our ministry for years to come. In addition to her professional expertise, Carol also brings a deep passion for the work we do in rescuing vulnerable children, single mothers, and young adults. This passion springs from her own tragic experience of suffering years of unimaginable abuse and

trauma as a young child at the hands of a family member, one who at the time was heralded as a pillar of his church and community.

She knows firsthand the pain that so many of our own clients have felt, what it's like to be silenced when voicing what is happening to you, and what it's like to feel you have no way out of the darkness.

At age 14, Carol was finally able to escape her own abuser and begin trying to find peace. In 2015, she published a book called "Where is God? When Hope Hurts" about the journey through which she was finally freed from the hurts of her past and found a way to embrace hope because of a loving God who never leaves and never forsakes.

Today, Carol is an accomplished and sought-after speaker whose goal is to inspire people to achieve their full potential despite hardships in life. She is a published author and has been featured on several radio and television programs. In addition to excelling in her professional career, Carol is a fierce champion of others who need to be lifted out of suffering and into productive lives, particularly those who have experienced childhood abuse and neglect.

She is especially passionate about TBCH's residential program for single mothers and their children, saying that she believes everyone has potential. She believes that even with a rough beginning, anyone can become a productive and valuable member of their community if given the right resources.

In 2021, Carol launched her own coaching practice (in her spare time!), one in which she helps people in their 50s, 60s, and 70s create a vision and plan to live their most exciting, productive lives, and fulfill their legacy. Just as she does with everything else,

Carol extended her expertise on this front to some of our TBCH staff by offering one-on-one mentoring in how they can achieve more balance in work and in life, and by also leading some of our staff trainings. Carol's generosity in sharing her insights has been incredibly valuable in increasing our capacity to serve our clients well.

It is my honor to nominate Carol Urton for consideration as the CORE Member Trustee Member of the Year. Carol is not just a board member who reviews budgets and makes financial donations, but otherwise keeps an arm's length from the day-to-day workings of our ministry. She is an invaluable team member, encourager, and friend to our staff and our ministry partners.

Most of all, she is a passionate advocate for those we serve at Texas Baptist Children's Home. She stands in the trenches beside us in carrying out our mission "to embrace children, families, and young adults in need in order to empower and equip them for a promising future." She truly embodies the heart of this mission. I can think of no one more deserving than Carol Urton to be named CORE Member Trustee Member of the Year.

Other Nominees for 2022 Catherine Hershey Awards

It is an incredible honor to be nominated to receive a Catherine Hershey Award. Other Nominees submitted include:

Houseparents of the Year:

- Rebecca and Elvis Lafunor - Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth and Families
- Lee and Kelly Held - Milton Hershey School
- Catherine and Philip Bertrand - Milton Hershey School

Administrator of the Year:

- Dorothy Phillips - Methodist Children's Home
- Debbie Rippstein - Texas Baptist Children's Home
- Travis Hallock - St. Joseph's Indian School
- Maria Knapp - Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches
- Tara Valoczki - Milton Hershey School

Educator of the Year:

- Rachel Yglecias - Methodist Children's Home
- Dana Drawdy - Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches
- Danielle Rafferty - Milton Hershey School

Trustee of the Year

- Julie Peluso - Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches

Post Conference Reflections - The Power Of Connection - Matters Of The Heart

[Written by Don Forrester on October 14, 2022]

This week's conference in Hershey, PA at the Milton Hershey School could not have been more enjoyable. It was one of those weeks where everything seemed to fall perfectly into place and the content of each workshop added a cohesive seamless dimension to the greater whole. I found myself thinking: "Wow! Wow! Wow!"

Many of the presenters shared their reservoir of experiences and both tears and laughter intermittently were not out of place. Somehow the transparency and vulnerability strengthened the shared bond of those present.

It was one of those weeks where people intuitively gravitated into conversations and shared time with people they previously had not met out of a genuine quest to know and be known.

The strength of our professional organization of children's homes and residential schools is clearly in the personnel whose calling it is to meet children and families at the point of need. In almost a naïve kind of way, those reaching out with empathy and support probably fail to realize how powerful that lifeline of hope becomes to someone who is a stranger to that kind of support.

It was Mother Theresa who said: "Spread love everywhere you go; first of all to your own house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next-door neighbor... Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.

A. J. Rinaldi, the Catherine Hershey Award's luncheon speaker, is an articulate and insightful young man. He concluded his presentation by sharing the difference a math teacher/coach made in his life. When their lives connected, he was still reeling from the tragic death of his father years earlier and he was an angry and volatile youth whose primary satisfaction came from being in fights. The coach's involvement and support changed the trajectory of his life.



As he shared his story, it reminded me of an illustration Dr. Jim Denison used in a sermon at First Baptist Church in Midland thirty-plus years ago. A professor at Johns Hopkins University gave a group of graduate students the assigned task of going into the slum area of the city and interviewing boys between the ages of 12 to 16. They were to assess their living conditions, the familial support they received, their environment, and outside influences. They then were asked to predict the future outcomes of those boys. It was the consensus that 90% of the boys would spend time in jail.

Twenty-five years later, another group of graduate students was charged with the responsibility to go back into that same neighborhood and attempt to locate the 200 boys who were now men that had been interviewed twenty-five years earlier. Of the 200 young men who had been interviewed, they were to ask them questions, and surprisingly, only 4 of the 180 had spent any time in jail.

As they questioned the men about their lives and the variables in their lives from long ago, they frequently credited a teacher the same name surfaced again and again. They were subsequently able to locate the teacher in a retirement home for teachers. When they shared with her that former students had identified her again and again as being a support system that made a difference in their lives, she was at a loss. She said simply, I didn't do anything special. I just loved those boys."

Love is a long-term investment that pays huge dividends.

[Note: I shared A.J.'s story with his permission. In addition to his work at Milton Hershey School, he is also an incredible motivational speaker, leadership coach, and youth

development consultant. He can be reached at pit2purpose@gmail.com (772) 475-7834 | (772) 626-6690]

WELCOME

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BLAZE Kids Academy
Amanda Ryan - Chief Executive Officer
12600 Hill Country Blvd, SuiteR-130, #288
Bee Cave, TX 78738
(512) 592-0109

Legislative Report



I have reviewed the status of the following bills filed during this session, and no new activity appears to be taking place. This legislative session ends shortly after the New Year. Any bills not favorably enacted will disappear at the beginning of the 118th Legislative Session.

S. 2689 Medicaid Continuity for Children in Foster Care

H.R. 4378 Protecting Siblings Relationships in Foster Care

H.R. 4299 Foster Care Stabilization Act

H.R. 4348 The Tribal Family Fairness Act

The Accountability or Congregate Care Act (not yet filed) or some version of Stop Institutional Child Abuse Act has not been filed. (Legislation being advocated for by Paris Hilton and Breaking Code Silence)

