

A Texas Size Thank You To Methodist Children's Home



Words can't fully communicate our thanks and gratitude to Methodist Children's Home for hosting the 2025 National CORE Conference.

The attention to details, the exposure to Waco experiences, the incredible evening reception, and most importantly the meaningful content shared through the Willson-Johnson Lecture Series along with subsequent conference workshops associated to the 2025 CORE National Conference made the time shared incredibly important.

When Trey Oakley, President of Methodist Children's Home and member of the CORE Board of Directors, volunteered to host this year's CORE conference, he suggested that our conference date coincide with their date for the Willson-Johnson Lecture Series. They were planning to bring in Nationally recognized professionals. In many respects it was like having desert first. Wow! It doesn't get any better than that.

Trey relied on his leadership team and volunteers who left no stone unturned in planning for the conference, and selecting presentations that fit with the conference theme of Rooted and Grounded - Building Healthy Communities.

Our exposure to that mindset was contagious for all of us. It was time well spent and the lessons learned will be part of the fabric woven into our quest for continuing to embrace best practices.

I repeatedly heard from first-time attendees and others that this year's conference was just what they needed. There are many reasons for CORE membership, but the primary advantage from my perspective has to do with shared knowledge. The man of wisdom stated: "Two are better than one; they have a good return for their labor."

One of the advantages of CORE is creating an environment where we grow and build on each other's strengths. We learn from each other and the friendships forged through shared time and familiarity make it easy to assess and assimilate ways of strengthening programs with the shared goal of serving children and families from hard places.

Our membership includes children's homes caring for a small number of children as well as children's homes and schools caring for large numbers of children. The common denominator we share is a desire to come alongside children and families at the point of need. We all benefit from relying on information regarding adverse childhood experiences and the importance of trauma informed care. The information and tools we have available today differ significantly from earlier years. Thank all of you for your professionalism, skillset and commitment to making a difference.

~~Plans for December 2 & 3, 2025 Cancelled~~

[This is from the September 2025 Executive Director's Report]

SAVE The Date: December 2 & 3rd, 2025

As the year draws near to an end, we believe the timing and opportunity is right for members of the Coalition of Residential Excellence to collectively make our voices known on Capitol Hill.

We are planning for a Legislative Advocacy Day on December 3, 2025.

We are being told that the Government will likely be closed until after the beginning of next year. We will reschedule an Advocacy Day on Capitol Hill when the government shutdown is behind us.



UPDATE ON H.R. 4972 - The CARE Act

There has been little change since last month's report. During the month of October, three Representatives signed onto the legislation. They include: Rep. Eugene Simon Vindman (D-VA-7), Rep. Trent Kelly (R-MS-1), and Rep. Beth Van Duyne (R-TX-24). Currently there are 21 cosponsors.

The most critical need continues to be locating Democrats willing to sign onto the legislation. The bill has not been filed in the Senate and will not be until it can be filed as bipartisan legislation.

Obviously, it will require all of us to actively advocate for passage of this legislation. We must be in contact with our Representatives and Senators. Since neither side of the aisle appears to be talking, circumstances are disheartening.

If you need to access a copy of the bill: **Read the full bill text [here](#).**





Catherine Hershey Awards

2025 CORE National Conference

Hosted by Methodist Children's Home

Waco, TX

Of course, a highlight of CORE National Conferences always includes presentation of the Catherine Hershey Awards. Categories include administrator of the year, houseparent(s) of the year, student of the year, educator of the year, and alumnus of the year. Occasionally awards are also made to trustee of the year and a lifetime achievement award for an individual who stands out significantly above the rest.

The narrative associated to the award winner's accomplishments always highlight the incredible difference that those selected to receive the award have made. The experience is filled with feel-good moments.

Administrator of the Year

Kevin Hewitt
Christian Children's Home of Ohio

Presented by John Smith



Kevin Hewitt

When Kevin came to CCHO to transition into the role of Executive Director, re-titled President/CEO, CCHO was still a "Mom & Pop Shop", fairly small but doing incredible work for families and youth.

However, since then, CCHO has not only grown as an agency, Helping More People Experience Their Worth in Christ, it has grown in professionalism as well.

Under his leadership, we have matured and have a solid reputation for excellence in our field.

Kevin has developed a culture where employees can flourish and grow in their leadership capabilities. It amazes me how he knows each child in our residential program by name as well as that of each employee, over 200 now.

He regularly prays for our staff and clients and encourages leaders throughout the agency to do the same. He sets an example many look to. But he is quick to point to Christ as the true example. To put it simply, he lives out our agency's purpose: "To Help More People Experience Their Worth In Christ."



Educator of the Year

Dana Drawdy
Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches

Presented by Maria Knapp

Mrs. Drawdy joined our organization in November 2018, and her dedication to serving at-risk children is truly inspiring. She takes on multiple roles—parent, cheerleader, disciplinarian, and counselor—often simultaneously. As she says, "There is no greater joy for me than to see a child walk across the stage and accept their High School Diploma." Mrs. Drawdy's engagement in individual student success begins with their application and interview. As she reviews the application, she develops an educational plan tailored to each young person. Mrs. Drawdy is always flexible and considers what will work best for each student. For example, Hunner joined us as a busy, somewhat fidgety, and angry young man who would use inappropriate language to gain attention. Sitting in a classroom all day was not effective for him. In traditional schools, on-the-job training is available for 11th and 12th-grade students, but as an 8th grader, this option was not available at home. Mrs. Drawdy recognized that partial school days, combined with a commitment to summer school to complete his regular school year, could provide Hunner the necessary structure to ensure he graduates. This plan also depended on his ability to maintain a job, which helped him stay on track with his behavioral goals as well.

Under her leadership, our school transitioned from a public to a private institution, allowing us to better serve our students without the negative implications of public-school reporting standards. Mrs. Drawdy has wholeheartedly embraced our children and their many challenges. She has organized our school to be a trauma-informed environment, adopting the principles of Trust-Based Relational Intervention. She involved the therapeutic team and our camping programs in training her staff to understand the reasons behind our students' behaviors and equip them with tools to engage students effectively. Mrs. Drawdy has transformed our school environment with initiatives like inviting furniture, water coolers, and healthy snacks. She ensures that every student has a voice in disciplinary matters. Furthermore, Mrs. Drawdy has implemented a summer school schedule that includes independent living skills, vocational training, and adventures designed to prepare our students for adulthood. This unique program not only equips students with practical skills for independent living but also fosters a sense of responsibility and self-reliance that is essential for their transition into adulthood. We are fortunate to have her leading our educational program, and we firmly believe she is a strong contender for the Catherine Hershey Award for Educator of the Year.

Student of the Year

Shia Farmer
Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches

Presented by Maria Knapp



Shia Farmer was first admitted to the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches' Safety Harbor program on June 14, 2018, when he was fourteen years old. While in the program, Shia was initially

working on coping skills, increasing self-esteem, building healthy relationships, and learning independent living skills. After graduating from high school, he moved to the Scholarship House on the Florida Sheriffs Youth Villa campus and has been a student in this program for two years.

At the Scholarship House, Shia is able to attend college and work toward his goal of receiving a business degree. Shia has finished his second year at Polk State College. While at the Scholarship House, Shia has been able to develop himself as a young man and an independent adult. He is a model student, maintaining an honor roll status. He works hard for his academic success. Shia is able to find a balance between school, his part-time job, and his friends. In the Scholarship House, Shia makes sure he meets his responsibilities. When new students enter the Scholarship House, Shia spends time with them to help them with the transition.

Shia made enormous progress in his social skills while in the program. He became a mentor and big brother figure to some of the younger children, and his gift for public speaking became something that he was able to further develop during banquets, Board of Directors meetings, and at a high-profile prayer breakfast for the community. During his time at the Ranch, he played Varsity Football at Countryside High School, and maintained good grades, often making the Honor Roll. He also participated in baseball and was in the Chorus at school. He maintained jobs at McDonalds, Burger Monger, Safety Harbor Recreation Center, and Publix. Shia earned a number of awards, including the Ranch Ambassador Award, the Program Director's Award (2019,2021), the President's Sportsmanship Award (Little League Baseball), and Defensive Player of the Year (football). Shia is an excellent alumnus of the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches that continues to develop himself into an independent adult in hopes to have a successful life in the future. We recommend that he be this year's recipient of the 2025 Student of the Year award.



Houseparent(s) of the Year
[Note: Two Couples Selected]

Scott and Jennette Stanley
Methodist Children's Home

Presented by Dorothy Phillips

Scott and Jennette Stanley exemplify the heart and mission of Methodist Children's Home. For the past seven years, they have served as home parents with unwavering dedication, compassion, and professionalism. The Stanley's are the perfect balance of structure and nurture, creating a home environment where children feel safe, valued, and empowered to grow. Their trauma-wise approach to care is exceptional. They consistently demonstrate a deep understanding of the needs of the young people in their home, while also upholding the rules and regulations that ensure safety and consistency for all. Their home is a place of felt safety, largely due to Mrs. Stanley's quiet strength and calming presence. She is the steady force that holds the home together, creating an atmosphere of peace and belonging. Mr. Stanley brings energy and enthusiasm to every aspect of his role. He is always eager to share new ideas, celebrate the accomplishments of the children, and contribute to the broader mission of MCH. His involvement in the recent revisioning of our developmental and experiential incentive program has been invaluable. As a key member of the workgroup, he gave voice to both students and direct care staff,

helping to shape a system that reinforces personal growth, responsibility, and opportunity. Beyond their direct care, the Stanley's are mentors to newer staff, modeling the agency's values and commitments with integrity and grace. Their influence extends far beyond their home, leaving an imprint on our ministry that is truly immeasurable. Dorothy Phillips, Waco Campus Senior Director, said this about the Stanley's and what they mean to our ministry, "The Stanley's have been a cornerstone of the MCH community for many years. Throughout their time here, they have positively impacted the lives of countless children, leaving behind lasting impressions and forming lifelong relationships. Their commitment to excellence has set a high standard, and they have played a vital role in training, supporting, and encouraging new home parents as they begin their journeys at MCH. As a dynamic and balanced team, the Stanley's exemplify dedication and compassion, serving as inspiring role models for the youth they care for." For their outstanding service, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the children and mission of Methodist Children's Home, we proudly nominate Scott and Jennette Stanley for this award.

**Victor and Gloria Brand
Milton Hershey School.**

Presented by James Turner

On behalf of the Middle Division Home Life Administrative Team, I am honored to nominate Victor and Gloria Brand for the Catherine Hershey Houseparent Award. With over 15 years of dedicated service, Victor and Gloria have made a profound and lasting impact on Home Life and across multiple departments at Milton Hershey School. Their unwavering commitment, compassion, and leadership make them truly deserving of this prestigious recognition. Victor and Gloria consistently embody our School's Sacred Values and the Milton Hershey Way. Their ability to build meaningful relationships with both students and staff is remarkable. Whether through their warm smiles, encouraging words, or their genuine belief in the potential of every individual, they radiate positivity and inspire those around them. They are respected team players who collaborate seamlessly with colleagues across all disciplines, contributing to school-wide initiatives and serving in various ancillary roles. Their dedication to our mission is evident in every aspect of their work.



Married for over 34 years, Victor, and Gloria model a strong, healthy relationship that serves as a powerful example for our students. As host houseparents and chaperones for both international and domestic service trips, they have selflessly invested their time and energy to enrich students' lives and instill the value of service to others. In the student home, Victor and Gloria provide a nurturing, supportive environment while also holding high expectations. They are warm demanders who emphasize academic achievement, character development, and holistic growth. As parents of daughters themselves, they bring a deep understanding of the unique needs of middle school girls, focusing on building self-esteem, resilience, spiritual well-being, and social-emotional skills. Their influence extends far beyond the student home. Many students turn to them for guidance during challenging times, and their ability to build trust and rapport is unmatched. Even after students transition out of the Middle Division, they often return to Victor and Gloria for continued support—a testament to the deep and lasting connections they foster. Victor and Gloria never seek recognition for their efforts. They serve with humility, purpose, and a genuine desire to help students become the best versions of themselves. Their love for the students and the school community is evident in everything they do.



Alumnus of the Year

**Khashari Wilson
Cal Farley Boy's Ranch**

Presented by Suzanne Wright

Khashari Wilson arrived at Cal Farley's Boys Ranch in 2013 from New Jersey, seeking a healthier and more supportive environment due to family challenges. From the moment he joined our community, Khashari embraced every opportunity available to him. He was actively involved in wrestling, football, track & field, baseball, the Youth Leadership organization, student government, and the prom committee. His dedication and leadership culminated in his selection as the Oldham County Student of the Year in 2015, an honor awarded across four school districts. After graduation from high school in 2015, he attended West Texas A & M University in Canyon, Texas, approximately 42 miles from our campus. There, he continued to distinguish himself through involvement in a wide range of campus activities, including: • Maroon Platoon – student section supporting athletics • SAGE/Students Assisting Good Endeavors – service organization • Peer Leader/Freshman Orientation • Resident Assistant in dorms • Leadership Board • Homecoming King 2017 Khashari was well-known and loved by all on the WTAMU campus for his enthusiasm, leadership and positive spirit! He took every opportunity presented to him and made the most of it. He graduated in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in communications and was immediately hired by the university as an admissions counselor. In 2022, Khashari made the commitment to join the National Guard. He was the sole recipient of the award for Leadership during his commencement ceremonies. He resumed his position at WTAMU, until he made a career change and moved to Boys Ranch ISD as a coach and teacher in the fall of 2023. Upon the retirement of longtime Head Wrestling Coach and Athletic Director Paul Jones, Khashari was handpicked to take over the wrestling program—an endorsement of his character and capability. Coach Jones stated that Khashari was the only person he trusted to carry on the legacy he had built. Khashari now spends his days (evenings and weekends) coaching and mentoring the kids who live here on our campus. He is a great role model with a heart for kids and insider knowledge about what's it's like to be a resident here. In his spare time, he managed to complete a master's degree in Instructional Design and Technology (May 2025) and he volunteers each summer to lead a group from BR that volunteers at Camp Alphie (which serves children with cancer and their siblings). Khashari Wilson exemplifies the mission and vision of CORE programs. His journey—from a young man seeking refuge to a leader, mentor, and role model—demonstrates the transformative power of residential care. He is a living testament to what is possible when opportunity meets determination. I am immeasurably proud of him and honored to be an observer on the sidelines of his story. Thank you for considering Khashari Wilson as a candidate for the 2025 Catherine Hershey National Excellence Award for Alumnus of the Year.

Trustee of the Year

Maria Trinh Kraus
Milton Hershey School



Presented by James Turner

Maria Trinh Kraus, a 1989 graduate of Milton Hershey School (MHS), serves as Chairman of the MHS and Hershey Trust Company (HTC) Boards—the first female MHS graduate to hold this role. She also serves as a member of The Hershey Company’s Board of Directors and sits on The M.S. Hershey Foundation’s Board of Managers. Born in Vietnam, Maria immigrated to the U.S. with her family in 1975 following the fall of Saigon. Though her family had high hopes, they faced financial hardship. Enrolling Maria at MHS opened new doors. She excelled, becoming valedictorian and embracing all the opportunities the Hershey’s’ gift offered. From a young age, she was determined to “pay it forward.” Maria earned her accounting degree from Penn State and is now a Certified Public Accountant and CFO of Wedgewood Pharmacy. With over 25 years of experience in finance, strategy, and corporate development, she brings tremendous professional expertise and heart to every endeavor. In recognition of her achievements, MHS honored Maria with an Alumni Achievement Award. On the MHS and HTC Boards, Maria collaborates closely with fellow Managers and school leaders to ensure MHS’ 2,200+ students can lead fulfilling and productive lives. She also champions the strategic growth of subsidiary Catherine Hershey Schools for Early Learning—helping even more children overcome poverty. Maria’s leadership reflects her deep gratitude, integrity, and commitment to service. Her journey—from a refugee child to Board Chair—exemplifies the mission of Milton and Catherine Hershey.

Her impact is inspiring, and her service continues to shape the future of thousands of children.

Life Time Achievement Award

Les Leskoven
Methodist Children’s Home



Presented by Trey Oakley

I am honored to nominate Les Leskoven for the Catherine Hershey Life Time Achievement Award in recognition of his advocacy for Methodist Children’s Home, a proud CORE member agency. Les currently serves as Chair of the MCH Board of Directors—a role he has described as “the greatest honor” of his life. For Les, this service is deeply personal: it is his way of giving back to the place that gave him so much. A graduate of MCH, Les went on to earn a degree from Baylor University and build a successful 46-year career in community banking. He retired in 2021 as Executive Vice President and Chief Investment Officer at Community National Bank & Trust of Texas in Corsicana, where he continues to serve on the Board of Directors. Les is a passionate and persuasive ambassador for MCH. He openly shares how his time in residential care shaped his identity, strengthened his values, and influenced his ability to be a devoted husband, loving father, and engaged citizen. He speaks frequently and powerfully on behalf of MCH. His words, and more importantly, his life’s example, lend credibility to the life-changing role of residential care in his own journey and the lives he continues to impact. In addition to serving as Chairperson of the MCH Board of Directors, Les volunteers as Treasurer of the MCH Alumni Association. His financial expertise has helped the Alumni Association build an endowment fund of more

than \$750,000, the income from which supports numerous worthy projects annually on the MCH residential campuses. Les generously gives of his resources, time, and influence, encouraging others to support MCH's mission and helping secure vital funding for its work. His leadership reflects deep gratitude and a steadfast commitment to ensuring others receive the same care and opportunity that once transformed his life. Beyond his work with MCH, Les has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to community service.

His leadership roles include Chair of the Administrative Council at First Methodist Church in Corsicana, Finance Chair for the MidTexas Conference of the Global Methodist Church, and trustee or officer for several local organizations, including the Navarro Community Foundation, Wade Wellness Services, and the Navarro County Boys and Girls Club. Les was also a strong supporter of MCH hosting the annual CORE conference and relaunching the Willson-Johnson Lecture Series, which he fondly remembers from his time as a student at MCH. His advocacy to "help others know about what we do in residential care" was a driving force behind the agency's commitment to hosting a quality event and reviving this important community education initiative. Les Leskoven is a living testament to the enduring impact of residential care. Through his story and service, he reminds us that our work today can foster blessings for individuals, families, and entire communities for generations to come.







