



AUSTIN CHILDREN'S SHELTER

4800 Manor Road Austin, Texas 78723
phone 512.499.0090 fax 512.590.8664
www.austinchildrenshelter.org

July 23, 2010

Paula VanStraten
Administrative Assistant, Tax Knowledge Center
National Association of Tax Professionals
P.O. Box 8002
Appleton, WI 54912-8002

Dear Ms. VanStraten:

Austin Children's Shelter is honored to receive the generous donation of \$20,002.75 from NATP and members collected at the recent conference auction. Funds will be used to provide salaries to devoted caregivers who provide the supervision and nurturance that allow children who have been abused and neglected to have hope for the future.

We greatly appreciate the difference that the National Association of Tax Professionals has made in our community. A formal letter will be sent for tax reporting purposes to NATP and each individual who made a donation.

Sincerely,

April Kerwin
Grants Manager

Enclosures: Success Stories



AUSTIN CHILDREN'S SHELTER
25 YEARS OF SERVICE

the work we do: changing lives

Denise, Age 14

Some youth simply defy their backgrounds and triumph over unbelievable adversity. We describe them as "resilient," a term sadly inadequate to describe their remarkable ability to succeed where so many others fail. Fourteen-year-old Denise is such a youth. We can learn from her courage and resilience. She came to the Austin Children's Shelter the first time in November and again the next month. Denise has seen five of her friends shot dead before her eyes, and a cousin killed by the police. Her father is in prison, and her mother is so firmly addicted to drugs that she is not capable of parenting the ten children to whom she has given birth. How was Denise able to find the courage to decide that she wanted more from life than to follow in their footsteps?



Rejected by family friends who had promised her safe haven the first time she left our care, Denise was very depressed when she returned to the Shelter. We understood that her frequent mood swings resulted from the emotional roller coaster of hope followed by disappointment – repeated over and over again year after year as the State tried to support the family toward independence. Denise needed predictability and certainty that she would not be rejected and abandoned by us even though her behavior tempted even the most patient to turn away. Maintaining consistent routines and providing nurturing support no matter how she behaved showed that we would not fail her. To help Denise find hope we supported her artistic expression as well as her academic success, accompanying Denise to the presentation of her composition in the Writing Showcase at her school. Our child psychiatrist carefully assessed Denise's mental status and prescribed a short course of medication to allow Denise to benefit from psychotherapy. Patience and consistency governed our interactions with Denise from day to day as we watched her transform before our eyes. When Denise firmly told the judge hearing her case that her mother's parental rights should be terminated, we agreed, with the knowledge that twelve years of attempts to reunify the family were evidence that the children were being denied any realistic hope for a future.

Denise left the Austin Children's Shelter bound for a foster home that she swore would not work out for her. She was afraid of the unknown. But we have heard from her since then and are encouraged that the placement seems to be working out. Denise deserves to have a chance to succeed. Her resilience will help turn her dreams into reality.

Kevin & Lissa

Kevin, now three and his younger sister Lissa initially arrived at the Shelter last fall for a brief stay due to suspected parental drug use. It is also suspected that Kevin was born addicted to methamphetamine. Both children were unable to speak, slept just a few hours a night and had severe tantrums. Kevin would hurl himself backwards, run into walls and bang his head several times an hour. He would not make eye contact and was only able to relax for just a few minutes a day to do any kind of meaningful play. Lissa had terrible nightmares and needed to be held almost constantly. Occasional rocking and stroller walks were the only things that soothed these young children.



In March, after a failed placement attempt with a relative, the two children were returned to ACS for care and assessment. Kevin's tantrums were still explosive and eating and sleeping still irregular and sporadic. Almost two, Lissa was evaluated as several months behind in social and language development. With a regular daily schedule of three meals a day, preschool time and occasional outings, she began emerging as a happier child.

Staff and volunteers rallied resources to help Kevin. Because he so often banged his head into walls, the clinical specialist working with him contacted a neurologist to get a special helmet to protect him from injury. One of our volunteers, who is a former special education teacher, began coming every day to work with Kevin. She spent one-on-one time with him and taught him sign language so that he could communicate. She even organized a special training for our staff to teach them how to work with special needs children.

Within a few weeks Kevin was following a more regular schedule and was able to communicate through sign language. With more sleep, his moods improved and his tantrums lessened in severity and frequency.

In morning preschool, both children began to enjoy music, painting, simple learning activities, gymnastics and sensory play -- exploring with sand, water, rice and shaving cream. Recently, Lissa began uttering a few words and most importantly trying new sounds. Kevin likes to study how things work; his favorite learning toys are magnets, magnifiers and gears. He can now focus for several minutes and loves to be applauded for his efforts on building a tower or painting a picture. The change in both children is remarkable. Kevin no longer has to wear the helmet and recently, staff were amazed to hear him giggling.

There is still however, no meaningful language or words from three year old Kevin; both children have emotional difficulties. The future for Kevin and Lissa will not be an easy one. Finding caring adults to help them on a permanent basis will be a challenge.

We can be assured however, that we have created positive changes in both children through patient, loving care, activities and experiences that are calming, meaningful and stimulating. We have brought them services in areas of mental health and speech therapy and provided them a stability that never before existed in their young lives. We are building a new foundation that will ultimately give them the best chance to achieve a successful placement with a foster family.



Leon Age 17

Leon came to the shelter as a result of a foster home breakdown. He had a history of self-harm and anger management problems. In his early days at the shelter, Leon would yell, punch walls, and storm out of the shelter when frustrated. Slowly, with staff support, Leon learned to ask for what he needed and to manage his anger more appropriately. He became involved in extracurricular activities at his new high school and settled into the shelter routine. Leon was afforded more independence as he demonstrated emotional maturity. Academically, he performed at the top of his class and he earned over 1400 on his SAT!

Despite his academic success, Leon was unsure about his future. He continually cancelled appointments with Lifeworks due to fear of adulthood. He feared being kicked out of the Shelter when he turned 18 years old and wondered who would help him through knee surgery. When informed he could stay after his birthday if he remained in CPS custody, he grew in security and confidence and started to examine his options. He researched colleges and completed college applications. He had knee surgery and soon Leon will transition to an Independent Living Program. He plans to attend Texas State with his PAL (Preparation for Adult Living) benefits.

Many teenagers who come to the shelter lack adult guidance and direction. They fear being "out there on their own" without family. We are here to remind young adults that they are not alone, even after they leave, because we connect them with ongoing support and continue to root for their success.