Bringing Hope to Families in NEW MEXICO
Your gifts, prayers and support enable Methodist Children’s Home to offer hope to children, youth and families throughout Texas and New Mexico. Thank you.

In this issue of Sunshine you will read more about our ministry in New Mexico. Although a long way from Waco, our work in New Mexico since 1982 shows our ability to deliver programs where they are needed and the powerful impact that caring relationships and trauma-informed services can have on children, youth and families, regardless of the distance. I believe this mindset will be important for our ministry as we move forward strategically.

I am excited for you to learn more about a recent collaboration with a community partner serving homeless youth. Instead of duplicating services, MCH partnered to share ideas, resources and expertise. I am confident God will continue to connect us to like-minded partners who share our core values so we can reach even more children, youth and families in the most efficient and effective ways.

Finally, in this issue we highlight the opening of two additional homes on our Waco campus through the Building Hope capital campaign. The B.R. and Helen Greathouse Home and Nancy J. Bowen Home were dedicated in October. I am pleased to announce that we have secured the funding to complete Phase 3 of the campaign which will enable us to build three more new homes in 2020! These new homes are amazing gifts for our young people and equip our staff to further improve the fantastic work they do.

I ask for your support as MCH moves forward with our strategic plan to determine our next steps. I know great things are ahead for those we serve because of God’s work in and through us for 129 years, our talented staff and faithful friends like you.

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New Mexico is called the “Land of Enchantment.” It is known for its desert and mountain landscapes, Southwestern culture, flavorful cuisine, and outdoor adventure. It offers a laid-back lifestyle and unique atmosphere, according to Julia Burris, director of MCH Family Outreach in Albuquerque and a longtime resident of the city.

“New Mexico is diverse,” Burris said. “The landscape is diverse. You can see snow, desert, mountains, trees, and lakes all in the same day. And the people are diverse. Some statistics will frame this as a challenge, but I choose to see this as a strength. The people raised here often embrace diversity. Many people you meet throughout the state are down-to-earth, authentic and kind people who want to make a difference and make their community stronger.”

With all that it offers, unfortunately there is another side to New Mexico. Statistics show families in the state are struggling. One in five families in New Mexico live in poverty (earning just $24,300 for a family of four in 2016), according to New Mexico Voices for Children, who want to make a difference and make their community stronger.”

This reality makes me all the more grateful for MCH and the agency’s true ability to offer hope to our families and our communities.

— JULIA BURRIS
MCH FAMILY OUTREACH DIRECTOR, ALBUQUERQUE

Magdalena first realized a problem when she found her 12-year-old daughter acting strangely outside one day. She discovered her daughter was using drugs and sent her to a rehabilitation center. Despite the efforts of Magdalena, who was raising the girls on her own after their father died, her daughter continued to battle with drugs into her adulthood.

Magdalena received custody of her first two granddaughters, Galilea and Kleventyne, in 2016 when they were 8 years and 3 weeks old, respectively. After a referral from New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD), Magdalena connected with MCH Family Outreach in Las Cruces to receive support and learn new parenting skills through the Gap program.

“I didn’t know I would have more babies so I was not prepared,” she said. “I wasn’t sure if I was a good mother. They are my babies. I don’t feel like a grandma. I feel like their mom. I want to make sure I do a good job with them.”

While working with MCH, Magdalena became connected with others experiencing similar situations in an MCH Caregiver Empowerment Group. Magdalena was a frequent participant and felt encouraged by her peers.

“Talking with other grandparent makes me feel like I’m not alone,” she said.

Her case closed at MCH, and over time her participation in group decreased. However, in March 2019, Magdalena returned to MCH Family Outreach after receiving custody of two more granddaughters, Ahmusicka and Ahmusicka, now 2, and Klarisse Belle, 8 months old. In order to care for the children, she had to resign from her job. The children were also drug exposed, leaving her to worry about their health.

Tiffany Gonzales, director of MCH Family Outreach in Las Cruces, was ready to help. She connected Magdalena...
Victoria is the mother of three children: Isaac, 13; Alyssa, 7, and Madison 3. Drug addiction plagued her life for many years, and her children were all being cared for by others. Her son Isaac lives with his father out of state. Alyssa was being raised by Victoria’s father. When Victoria lost custody of Madison last year, CYFD placed her into a foster home. Victoria had to stay sober for six months in order to have a chance of getting Madison back, but she kept relapsing. She said she knew she wasn’t able to provide her daughter with a good home during that time.

“I felt like my daughter was in a good place, like God had intervened,” she said. “I realized I had been an inappropriate parent for a long time and I was coming to terms with that.”

Victoria was allowed visits with Madison but was told she would lose rights to her daughter in February 2019. In her despondency, she began using drugs heavily and spiraled out of control.

“One day I just snapped out of it and thought, ‘This is horrible,’” she said. “I thought, ‘I would rather be dead! I didn’t want to go to visits high anymore. I didn’t want to put my daughter through that. I didn’t know how to bond with her in that situation, but I desperately wanted that before she was taken from me.’

Victoria checked herself into a rehabilitation hospital in September 2018 and began a parenting class, called Circle of Security, taught by an MCH case manager. She said it was an eye-opening experience. In the first session, the class watched a video demonstrating a child’s desire for connection.

“Within the first ten minutes of the video, I was in tears,” Victoria said. “It was so much about things I needed to learn. I didn’t know how to play with my kids or talk to them. I was just always making sure they looked OK so when I sent them out, people wouldn’t know I was messed up.”

Victoria’s father asked her to move in with him and Alyssa, her oldest daughter. Going to classes and therapy helped her through the transition as she recovered from addiction while learning to bond with Alyssa. Although she knew her time with Madison would soon end, she hoped she could connect with her before it was over using the tools she learned from the parenting class.

“It’s so crazy how fast she was drawn to me,” Victoria said. “She hadn’t let me hold her before and I wanted so bad for her to kiss or hug me. Then one day she came up and hugged me. I was so happy because I realized she wanted me. I was so happy because I realized she didn’t hate me.”

Victoria was able to have all her children together for a special portrait session once she completed the program. From left: Madison, Victoria, Alyssa and Isaac. Portraits courtesy of T. Rayne Photography.
In order to better meet the needs of families in communities in New Mexico, MCH Family Outreach forms partnerships with like-minded agencies. MCH Family Outreach in Las Cruces collaborates with the Third Judicial Court Self-Help Center, which assists families in completing guardianship petitions. They also aligned with Las Cruces Public School’s Early Head Start program to offer parenting classes on-site while providing meals to families. Staff lead a parenting class for incarcerated women at the Dona Ana County Detention Center.

MCH Family Outreach in Albuquerque collaborates with Pegasus legal services for guardianship. They partner with Diersen Charities, a residential treatment center for prisons. They partner with Dierson Charities, a homeless teens coalition, the public school district, and a respite care center.

"I believe this forum gives us an opportunity to meet other people to where we can work together to align our services to strengthen the community," said Nancy Davenport, a representative from Albuquerque Public Schools who attended the event. "We've got to work together to make a difference."

Burris is hopeful their efforts can make a positive impact on their state.

"There are dozens, if not hundreds, of bleak statistics about our state," Burris said. "And there is definitely struggle. However, New Mexico is also a very strong and resilient state. MCH is a part of a strong community of helping professionals dedicated to serving New Mexicans, especially our children. An awareness of prevention services and evidence-based, trauma-informed services has given many New Mexicans hope that better tomorrows lie ahead."

### JOINING FORCES FOR CHANGE

### YOUTH PROFILE

### ELI

**REACHING FOR NEW GOALS**

College was something Eli had never considered. He dropped out of high school twice before his junior year, and with financial struggles at home, he said school just didn’t seem important.

In August 2018, Eli’s mother said she found a place that would be good for him. She sent him to Methodist Children’s Home, and Eli found the structure he needed. Eli enrolled in the MCH charter school on the Waco campus operated in partnership with The University of Texas – University Charter School system, where he discovered a new outlook on education.

"I en joy going to school here,“ Eli said, adding that he is able to get his work done and the school days seem to go by fast.

Eli has caught up academically and is finding success in school. He also found a personal outlet through school athletics, playing basketball and golf.

"Sports help me take my mind off things," he said. "It is a stress reliever for me. I didn't really like to socialize much so athletics was a way I could express myself and get stuff off my chest."

Eli has a new outlook on education. He feels like college could be something he could reach.

"It was so fun seeing his eyes opened up to a world that could exist for him after high school," Lyons said. "I believe seeing a college campus lit a fire in him and for the first time he felt like college could be something he could reach." They also visited Lyons’ former college professor at Baylor’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary who now runs the Faith and Sports Institute Retreat, a weeklong camp for high school athletes focused on building character and integrity and becoming stronger spiritual leaders. She was impressed with Eli and encouraged him to apply for the retreat. Several weeks later, Lyons and Eli received an email stating he received a full scholarship. Eli attended the camp in July.

"I was able to be free, emotionally and spiritually, because everyone was on the same page," Eli said about the retreat. "It was a positive environment." Eli plans to return to the retreat as a junior mentor next summer. He also now has big plans for his future, and knows he has support.

"There are people around me who are willing to help and will do the best they can to help me get there," Eli said. "That makes me happy."
Passion, a quiet 19-year-old with a bright but shy smile, had a tumultuous childhood that saw her moving between parents and schools on a regular basis. By her senior year of high school in Waco, she found herself homeless and out of relationship with her family.

“I stayed with friends, wherever it was safe; I was pretty much couch-surfing and sometimes stayed in motels or shelters,” she said. “There was a lot of heartbreak with my family, but I knew I had to keep going and finish high school.”

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, youth may end up homeless or unaccompanied due to family conflict, economic issues, residential instability, the incarceration of a parent, sexual abuse or other trauma, or neglect. The Waco Independent School District (WISD) reports that approximately 9 percent (as many as 1,500) of WISD students deal with some level of homelessness.

A case manager from the nonprofit Communities in Schools referred Passion to The Cove, a new nonprofit in Waco offering students dealing with homelessness a safe place to study, shower, wash clothes, and receive a healthy meal. The Cove also offers professional staff which provide case management, mental healthcare and tutoring. In the 2018-19 academic year, there were nearly 1,500 student visits to The Cove, up from 1,200 visits the previous year.

Passion and her friend, Kelle, who was also dealing with similar issues, decided to visit The Cove together. “It sounded too good to be true,” Passion said. “Just about every school has support groups and counselors, but to have an afterschool resource was so good.”

At The Cove, they met Executive Director Kelly Atkinson who along with her staff provided a safe place to rest and study. Through tutoring and consistent support, Kelle and Passion graduated high school. Graduating and aging out of The Cove’s services presented new challenges for the girls, who weren’t ready to be on their own. That is when Atkinson reached out to Jeff Creel, MCH program administrator for school and transition services, to see if MCH could help.

“It’s important to have a safe place to go when you don’t have a safe place to go,” Atkinson said. “As a young nonprofit, we don’t have the resources to address every need. In the case of Kelle and Passion, they were graduating high school but still didn’t have stable housing. After they graduated last May, I called Jeff [Creel] with the thought: ‘Could this even work? I am so happy he was open to it.’”

Creel and Atkinson had connected through their work in the community, and Creel said his thought from the beginning was that MCH could be a resource for The Cove, in large part because of a common focus of offering hope to youth in need.

“The Cove understands and is positioned well to support the needs of the population of young people they serve,” Creel said. “In many ways, those served by MCH are very similar, so we were well-equipped and ready to collaborate with them while they needed extra support from our staff, transition housing or residential assistance.”

Kelle and Passion were given accommodations at Clay Commons, an apartment complex in downtown Waco that serves young people in the Transition Services program. Residents who live at the apartments maintain full-time jobs or schooling and meet regularly with an on-site case manager to learn about budgeting and other important life skills for independent living.

“The connection with MCH is so valuable because MCH has been investing in the lives of young people for a very long time,” Atkinson said. “Not only has MCH shown generosity through housing for Kelle and Passion, they have been genuine with their staff sharing their knowledge and time.”

“MCH has been so helpful,” Kelle said. “The staff has been amazing and has gone above and beyond to help us.”

Kelle and Passion are the first students served by the MCH Transition Services program who did not go through the MCH academic, foster care or residential program. Creel and Atkinson hope their collaboration will replicate and foster other partnerships among the many nonprofit organizations in the Waco area.

“We are currently collaborating with about 12-15 community organizations to share information, referrals and resources,” Atkinson said. “It’s a big sandbox when we consider all the ways to serve youth in our communities, and there’s a lot of room for new resources and partnerships.”

MCH President Trey Oakley agreed, and affirmed that finding collaborations with like-minded organizations “will be key to our future at MCH as we look for better ways to reach an ever-growing population of children, youth and families who need the hope our supporters help us offer throughout Texas and New Mexico.”

“I am excited to share ideas, best practices and resources with an organization like The Cove,” he said. “Although our organizational stories are different and unique, we find a common bond in our desire to do what it takes to serve those who have found themselves in crisis or on the verge of hopelessness. There is no time or place for competition among ministries serving youth. We must come together with a sense of urgency to help make each other better, increase efficiencies and expand effectiveness.”

Atkinson said she was surprised to discover Kelle and Passion had not yet unpacked after three months of living at Clay Commons.

“The girls did not believe they actually had a home,” Atkinson explained. “They had only known instability, so they kept their stuff in boxes. At MCH they could finally face the trauma that they had pushed aside because they lived in constant survival mode. MCH gave them space to breathe and grow and heal. Now, they’re beginning to dream about college and their futures.”

Passion and Kelle volunteer at The Cove and serve as mentors to high school students dealing with homelessness. The girls understand firsthand how so many youth need encouragement and the understanding that there are people and organizations they can trust.

“Growing up, I learned that people outside my family were not to be trusted. When that trust was also broken, I didn’t have anything left. Through The Cove and MCH I’m learning to trust again and have a plan for my future.”

— Passion

FROM THE STORM

MCH, The Cove Collaborate to Serve Homeless Youth

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— Passion
MCH FAMILY OUTREACH

Stories of Impact

EL PASO

In January 2016, Ms. B* became a member of the Gap program along with her seven grandchildren. In January 2018, Ms. B inquired about residential group care at MCH. Her then-11-year-old grandson was having behavioral issues and she was facing financial struggles of her own. With the help of MCH Case Manager Cynthia Hurtado, Ms. B was successfully able to get a spot for her grandson at the MCH Boys Ranch. On Jan. 11, 2018, Hurtado flew to Waco to transport him to his new home, which he has grown to love. Today, his attitude about life has changed tremendously and his behavior has drastically improved. He shares with his family his newfound love for horses and how he enjoys helping at the Boys Ranch. Thanks to all the resources and opportunities provided by the residential program, he is also enjoying other activities he had never tried before. Ms. B’s grandson has a great relationship with his home parents, other staff, and with the other children. After having seen such positive changes in his grandson, Ms. B decided to also send his older brother to MCH residential group care in Waco. He recently joined his brother at the Boys Ranch where he is happily adjusting and playing football for the MCH Bulldogs. Today, Ms. B is grateful to MCH for being able to help in her time of need. MCH has truly given hope to her and her grandchildren.

*Name changed for privacy.

CORPORUS CHRISTI

Manuela enrolled in Family Solutions in May 2019. She is a single mother of four girls, ages 11, 9, 6, and 2. Child Protective Services referred Manuela to MCH so she could connect to community resources and receive parenting support. She came from an abusive relationship which left her severely injured with a brain injury and limited mobility on her left side. Manuela was hospitalized for months and went through physical therapy. Once released from physical therapy, she was determined to bring her family back together and care for her children. Manuela applied for disability and was able to obtain a rental home. She also reached out to a local organization for counseling services and utilized other community resources. She connected with Coastal Plains MHMR and enrolled her two oldest children for services. She is a dedicated mother who wants to develop a positive relationship with her children. Manuela is implementing the new parenting skills she learned through MCH into her home daily.

DALLAS

Ashley* was placed with MCH in the summer of 2019. She came from a foster home where she had lived for the past year and was very attached to her foster parents and foster siblings. The previous home did not want to adopt her, so CPS placed her into a foster-to-adopt home with MCH. Originally, she was not happy about being moved and possibly adopted. Ashley often complained and disliked everything about her placement. However, in the next few months, Ashley made amazing progress. Her foster parents implemented methods learned through MCH parent education to build connection through Trust-Based Relational Intervention. Ashley has traveled throughout the summer, started school, had sibling visits and celebrated her birthday. Recently Ashley began referring to her foster parents as “Mom” and “Dad.” Ashley now tells her MCH case manager how much she loves her forever home and is looking forward to the future with them. Ashley is thriving in her placement and is ready for a successful future with the support of her foster parents and MCH.

*Name changed for privacy.

SAN ANTONIO

Deborah was enrolled in the Gap program for eight months. She has been raising her 3-year-old granddaughter since 2016. She was removed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services due to her mother and father’s mental health issues and substance abuse. According to Deborah, there were no other family members able to care for the child, so she decided to raise her granddaughter as her own. She said she wanted to remain optimistic and hopeful, despite the circumstances. Deborah heard about the Gap program through a grandparent support group and decided to reach out to MCH for assistance. MCH Family Outreach helped connect her to the Alamo Area Council of Governments and was provided an affordable lawyer. Currently, she is in the process of legally adopting her granddaughter which should be finalized at the end of this year. During her time with MCH, Deborah received utility assistance, a car seat and clothing for her granddaughter. She was highly motivated to seek resources available to her and was dedicated to ensuring all of her granddaughter’s needs were met. She said she is grateful for the grandparent support and services provided by MCH Family Outreach and felt supported and empowered through a difficult time in her life.
MCH OPENS THE NANCY J. BOWEN AND B.R. AND HELEN GREATHOUSE HOMES

The two newest homes on the Waco campus were dedicated on Oct. 15 during a time of celebration and prayer with MCH staff, residents, Commissioners, benefactors, local dignitaries, and other guests. The B.R. and Helen Greathouse Home, designated as a boys’ residence, was completed with gifts given through the Helen Greathouse Charitable Trust. Named for a longtime MCH supporter, the Nancy J. Bowen Home houses eight girls, most of whom formerly lived in the Mamie Mitchell Home.

Following words of appreciation and a prayer of dedication, guests toured the two homes which are built side-by-side along the street encircling the chapel at the highest point on the MCH campus. Residents of the homes proudly showed their rooms and other features of the homes to the visitors. The Greathouse and Bowen Homes are the fourth and fifth homes of the Building Hope capital campaign launched in 2015 to improve the infrastructure of the Waco campus to better meet the needs of today’s youth. The goal of the campaign is to build 12 homes. To learn more about supporting the Building Hope capital campaign, contact Lyle Mason at LMason@MCH.org or 1-800-383-1272.

Mrs. Nelda Hazlewood (center) was among the first residents of Mamie Mitchell Home. She is shown with two of the last Mamie residents, Lily Hitt (left) and Raelynn Prater (right).

John and Julie Diem (center) stand in front of a plaque honoring their donation made in memory of their family’s children. They are pictured with daughters Lauren (left) and Jennifer (right).

Dewayne Cady, a home parent for the Nancy J. Bowen Home, helps unpack kitchen supplies to stock cabinets before youth move in.

Alivia begins unpacking in her new room.

Mr. and Mrs. Hutter-Machado (center) were among the first residents of Helen Mitchell Home. She is shown with two of the first Helen residents, Lily Hitt and Raelynn Prater.
METHODIST CHILDREN’S HOME AGAIN RECEIVES CHARITY EVALUATOR’S HIGHEST RATING

Methodist Children’s Home on Oct. 1 once again received a four-star rating from Charity Navigator, according to Trey Oakley, MCH president.

“We are committed at MCH to extend excellence in all that we do, whether through our services and programs for children, youth and families across Texas and New Mexico, or by the way we engage with faithful benefactors who support our ministry,” Oakley said. “Receiving this recognition from Charity Navigator is an acknowledgment of our commitment and further communicates to the public that we hold ourselves to the highest standards of integrity.”

Charity Navigator, America’s largest independent charity evaluator, gives a four-star rating to nonprofits that exhibit the highest levels of financial health and a commitment to accountability and transparency. According to Charity Navigator, only 25 percent of evaluated charities have achieved this distinction in multiple years.

“Attaining a four-star rating verifies that Methodist Children’s Home exceeds industry standards,” said Michael Thatcher, president/CEO of Charity Navigator. “We are grateful for this affirmation of our ministry.” Oakley said.

Charity Navigator, America’s largest independent charity evaluator, gives a four-star rating to nonprofits that exhibit the highest levels of financial health and a commitment to accountability and transparency.

2019 COMMISSIONERS MEETING

MCH Commissioners gathered Oct. 15-16 for their annual meeting in Waco to receive updates on the ministry and learn ways to raise awareness and support for the organization. Commissioners have served as volunteer fundraisers and ambassadors for MCH since 1940. The primary responsibilities of Commissioners are to promote the annual Christmas offering in churches, speak on behalf of the ministry and host gatherings in their community to share the MCH story and enlist support.

During their visit, Commissioners heard from MCH President Trey Oakley, Vice President for Development Lyle Mason, and a number of staff members representing the scope of MCH programs across Texas and New Mexico. Commissioners also participated in strategic planning focus groups, toured the two newest homes on the Waco campus, and enjoyed a program by MCH youth which included testimonies and artistic performances.

“We are so grateful for the way Commissioners give of their time, energy and influence and come alongside us to further the mission of MCH,” said Mason. “As a group they are such a valuable resource and truly multiply what we are able to do as an organization.”

THANK YOU

We give thanks to our Commissioners for joining and worshipping with us at this year’s meeting. We are grateful for your continued support of our children and this ministry.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’

And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’

Isaiah 6:8
**MCH LAUNCHES AGENCY-WIDE LIFE SKILLS INITIATIVE**

Methodist Children’s Home strives for excellence, which includes finding new and better ways to meet the needs of children, youth and families. Recently, MCH announced the implementation of a new agency-wide life skills initiative. Life skills are positive attitudes and behaviors that allow people to effectively deal with relationships and the demands and challenges of everyday life.

The new MCH Life Skills are: Be Safe; Be Respectful; Be Responsible; Be Helpful; and Be Trustworthy.

“These life skills are supported by our mission statement and core values so they can be part of a ‘shared language’ at MCH for all staff, regardless of where they serve or their job title,” said Trey Oakley, MCH program specialist. “I think our coworkers, supporters and community partners can see that the life skills we emphasize with our children, youth and families are also the standards we seek in all our relationships at MCH.”

The efforts to update the life skills were led by the TBRI Fidelity Committee, a group of staff members from the residential and Family Outreach programs. The committee evaluates, supports and provides resources to MCH staff to ensure the effective use of a trauma-informed practice called Trust-based Relational Intervention (TBRI). TBRI was implemented through a partnership in 2010 with Texas Christian University’s Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development.

“As part of our continuous quality improvement process, it is important that we periodically gather feedback and evaluate all initiatives to ensure their fidelity and effectiveness with our programs,” said Rebekah Powell, program specialist and member of the TBRI Fidelity Committee. “We decided to reevaluate the life skills to ensure they were being used properly and that they were still effective with our youth, given the changes and growth in services we have experienced over the last several years.”

Powell said the committee determined through focus groups with staff and youth that the life skills are an important part of MCH, but needed to be simplified. The new life skills were discussed with leadership from MCH and TCU and launched agency-wide on Aug. 19.

As part of the launch, MCH hosted several friendly competitions in-house to generate excitement and support for the new life skills. Residential youth created illustrations depicting the life skills as part of a poster competition. Lauren, a sophomore at the MCH Family Outreach in Waco, took top prize.

“We recognize it is our role as staff to set an example as we help our children and families learn to use the life skills,” Powell said. “In order to set the example, we wanted to make a cultural shift within our agency to use a common language across the entire organization. We hope this will be a way to increase cohesion and teamwork across all departments so we can serve our children and families to the best of our ability.”

**MCH STUDENTS GET HEAD START THROUGH ADVANCED ACADEMIC PROGRAMS**

Several Methodist Children’s Home charter school students are earning college credits and professional licenses and certificates thanks to collaborations with local educational institutions.

A new dual-credit program through The University of Texas called OnRamp is being piloted at the MCH charter school. Six juniors are taking a U.S. History course taught by teacher Preston Powell to simultaneously earn high school and college credit. In the upper level course, students complete college-level reading and assignments and are given homework every night. The purpose of the program is to better prepare students for success after high school.

MCH also offers dual-credit opportunities through McLennan Community College’s High School Pathways program. Students enroll in college-level courses while still attending high school, allowing them to get a head start earning credits toward a college degree.

Through a partnership with the Waco Independent School District, eligible MCH students may enroll in career-focused programs to earn professional licenses and certificates. The Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy (GWAMA) offers technical and manufacturing training in four areas: welding, construction, electronics and robotics, and architecture. Students interested in healthcare professions may attend the Greater Waco Advanced Health Care Academy (GWAHCA) to earn licenses such as certified nursing assistant, EKG technician, or certified pharmacy technician.

Students with good grades, positive behavior and strong work ethic are eligible for the advanced academic programs. MCH charter school staff communicate with qualifying students who they feel would be a good fit for the programs. Dorothy Phillips, director of educational services at MCH, said the advanced programs benefit students by increasing their academic performance and attitudes toward learning. She said it also encourages self-directed learning which improves work and study habits.

“It is important that our charter school provides enriching opportunities for our students’ future success,” Phillips said. “The response from students is overwhelmingly positive because it gives them a sense of achievement. It helps them learn responsibility, be more prepared for other opportunities and expectations in life, and build their self-esteem.”

Phillips assisted Tianna, a senior at the charter school, with enrolling in dual-credit courses at McLennan Community College this fall. Tianna said she originally didn’t think she would be able to handle college, but after some encouragement she decided to enroll and discovered she enjoys the experience.

“It helped me to see what college is really like,” Tianna said. “I like taking classes there. Being the only high school student in my classes makes me feel better about myself, like I am doing something good for my future.”

**MCH EMPLOYEES DONATE TO PACK OF HOPE**

As part of the annual employee picnic, MCH employees held a food drive in support of McLennan County Pack of Hope, an organization that works to erase child hunger in McLennan County by supplying schools and their eligible students with backpacks of food over the weekend. We’re proud of how MCH team members answered the call!

Staff representatives gathered the food collected to donate. Pictured from left: Ida Mason, vice president for development; Susan Bostoo, director of database operations; Rita Jackson, database assistant; Kelly Lawson, special gifts coordinator; and Jeremy Webb, benefactor relations officer.

According to Pack of Hope, their goal is to provide students with a nutritious meal that will give them the tools to learn in the classroom.

Lauren collaborates with Sarah Wright, graphic designer on the MCH public relations team, to digitize her artwork and prepare it for printing.
It hasn’t always been an easy process, but Rainn has turned hard times into learning experiences and used them to become stronger. At age 11, Rainn and her sister were removed from an abusive home by Child Protective Services. For the next few years, they moved between foster homes before ending up at an emergency shelter in 2015. It was there they learned about Methodist Children’s Home. Rainn said she saw pictures of the Waco campus and was excited to find out she could live there.

“My journey was tough, but getting to MCH put a brighter perspective on my life,” Rainn said. “There was more than what the world had shown me. There were still good people, people who cared. It was good, and I was happy.”

Rainn lived at MCH for three years before graduating as salutatorian from the charter school in May 2018. She made the Dean’s List and built connections through choir and a part-time job. In December she will receive an associate’s degree and will move to Fort Worth to pursue a bachelor’s degree in nursing. She also hopes to become a foster parent in the future to provide children with opportunities like she had growing up.

“Even though I came from a broken situation and didn’t have the best start in life, through all of the struggles that I faced, I didn’t give up,” Rainn said. “I would tell anyone that whatever your situation, you can choose to complain or face it head on and make it to your finish line.”

With guidance from Anthony, Rainn has become more independent and confident during her time in college. “Rainn has matured a lot since I started working with her,” Anthony said. “When she went to college I think it was an eye-opener for her, but she was stronger than she thought. It was the perfect fit for her and I’m proud of her.”

After receiving her associate’s degree, Rainn plans to move to Fort Worth to pursue a bachelor’s degree in nursing. She also hopes to become a foster parent in the future to provide children with opportunities like she had at MCH. She looks back on her time at MCH fondly and is grateful for experiences like attending football games, making new friends and getting a part-time job in the community. She wants her story to inspire other children going through tough times.

“Even though I came from a broken situation and didn’t have the best start in life, through all of the struggles that I faced, I didn’t give up,” Rainn said. “I would tell anyone that whatever your situation, you can choose to complain about the way you started out or you can choose to make it to your finish line.”

Rainn decided to enroll in Navarro College in Corsicana, Texas, following graduation. She made the Dean’s List and built connections through choir and a part-time job. In December she will receive an associate’s degree in applied science.

Crystal Anthony, transition services coordinator, worked with Rainn to develop her post-graduation plans.
CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR

STUDENT ATHLETES

ON A GREAT FALL SEASON!