

# NEWSLETTER

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Shining Light Children's Home

## CONFESSIONS OF A BOARD MEMBER

*by Leland Ulrich, Board Chairman*

In the last newsletter, I wrote about implementing the first phase of our operating plan and highlighted two aspects—trust transfer and emotional health for our staff. This article highlights the importance of providing a safe, secure place for both staff and children.

### FOR STAFF

Providing a safe and secure place for staff to serve is paramount to the success of any organization. Physical safety and security is important and presumed, but that is not what I am referring to. I am talking about the social aspect of safety and security.

Our staff members come from Anabaptist communities across the United States, Canada, and Latin America. If you have served at SLCH or a similar place, you may have experienced something like the following: After a number of twist and turns and seeking God's will, you commit to a term of service. As anticipation builds, so do your questions about what the experience will be like. You can prepare and do your research, but uncertainty about the unknown still creates butterflies in your stomach.

When the big day arrives, you travel to your place of service. Upon arrival, a knot forms in your stomach. You might even ask yourself how you got into this. If you are the adventurous type, the adventure gives you the adrenalin to dive in and make the best of it. If you're a cautious type, you move slowly and hope you don't make any big mistakes. Either way, you can likely still feel that knot in your stomach.

This is where a mature, healthy organization can make all the difference. It is too easy for mission outposts to have a

sink or swim environment with insufficient onboarding or training to help new staff members feel welcome and secure. In insecure environments, current staff members whisper to each other, "If they only knew," while glancing at the newcomer.

The newcomer quickly realizes that even though things seem smooth on the surface, it is far from a safe and secure place. They learn to keep their guard up. Over the next few months, they try to find their place in the daily routine. But sadly, the knot in their stomach never really goes away.

There are so many things to learn—who is who, what to say and not say, who is safe and who is not, who gossips and who doesn't, and the never-ending surprises of what is acceptable and what is not. The environment is all but safe and secure, but unfortunately, the long-term staff have come to accept this environment as normal.

With much prayer the new staff member commits to making the best of it while wondering, "Does it have to be this way?"

That is a great question: Does it have to be this way?

### FOR THE CHILDREN

For millions of unfortunate children, this world is a cold, hard place. While trauma children each have a unique story, the core issues are the same. Possibly from a very young age, their lives were anything but safe and secure. In fact, such a concept is completely foreign to them. Every moment seems to be a fight for survival.

Finally, one day things get so bad they find themselves torn away from those with whom they have a love/hate

*continued on page 2*

continued from page 1

relationship, finding themselves in the hands of social care workers. For a moment it seems that there may be such a thing as safety, but all too soon it is disrupted again as they get dropped off at a strange new compound with many other children milling around.

Did you ever stop and think about what a children's home looks like through the eyes of a new child on arrival?

The child is told—in a new tone of voice they have never heard before—that they are loved and that we are there to take care of them and give them a safe place to live. Very few of the words are actually understood, but the kind tone of voice tells the child that something is different.

A glimmer of hope crosses the child's face as they observe other children playing cheerfully in the corner by the toybox. The child is shown their room and introduced to the staff member who will be their mom. This is confusing and scary, because the person they previously called mom was seldom present, and although there were moments of what seemed like love, most interactions were unpleasant. Even a shower and a new change of clothes don't make the child feel safe.

This is where a mature, healthy organization can make all the difference. Everything and everyone is strange, not a soul that the child has seen before. They don't know what is expected of them. They feverishly watch others, hoping to figure out the new plan. It is confusing. Nothing matches anything they have experienced before.

Within a short time everyone expects the child to "get it" and fit in. But big problems are about to happen. The child has hundreds of triggers programed in their minds by previous experiences. The firm grasp of an adult's hand, a door slamming, a certain look from an adult, a certain tone of voice from their new mom, and many other triggers that previously spelled danger can suddenly put the child into a fearful, defensive mode. Fear causes many forms of irrational behavior. The child cries themselves to sleep and wonders, "Does it have to be this way?"

That's a great question: Does it have to be this way?

For the answer to this question, and what the alternative can look like, watch for the editorial in the next issue of this newsletter.

Leland Ulrich  
Board Chairman



## UPPER GRADES SCHOOL REPORT

Kiara, a former SLCH child, teaches upper grades. With her stable character and creative spirit, she thrives in the classroom. She has many ideas for art projects, and inspires her students to be creative too. Skeletons out of milk jugs, seasonal décor for the classroom, and small 3D ocean or landscape scenes are only a few of the many artsy details.

A typical day begins with devotions and singing. Then they spend 10 minutes in physical activity to engage the brain and begin the day with energy. Throughout the day they study Rod and Staff curriculum (in Spanish) as well as the homework Conafe requires. Conafe is the government substitute for public schools under which our private school is registered. The students receive government certificates and are able to achieve the diplomas required for future study and employment.



## MEET PRISCILA CAAMAÑO



When I first heard about Shining Light, I decided that I wanted to visit to get to know the place, children, and people who work there. Months later God granted me the opportunity to visit the children's home. As soon as I arrived, I could feel God's call to work there, giving my time and love to these children. I became attached in the few days I was there as the children touched my life in a special way.

After this beautiful experience, I returned home with the hope of coming back some day. Finally my prayers were answered, and

several months later I arrived at Shining Light with a desire to help the most I could, to give my all—all my love and care, all my time and attention. I longed to teach them God's love and be the best example I could be.

I found that it isn't as easy as it looks. While we face many

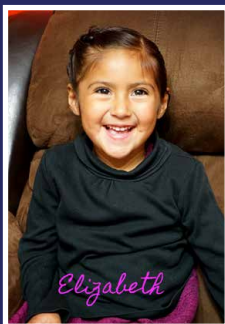
difficult and sad situations, it definitely is worth it. Difficult situations help us to grow more and more each day, as we mature and overcome our own weaknesses. We cannot forget that God is there to help us in every moment of every day that comes. He never leaves us and is always there to hear our prayers, being there for us and giving us strength and courage for the days ahead.

One of the most beautiful moments that I have experienced has been playing with the children and doing activities with them. Listening to them laugh and play, full of life and energy, fills my heart with happiness. To see them smile in spite of all the things they have faced in the past inspires me a lot.

It has been very special to spend one-on-one time with the girls that I care for. I treasure these moments. Sometimes just talking about daily life is a good way to attach to the girls and gain a special connection. I try to show them that they truly matter to me.

My work includes caring for girls and a baby. I love my responsibility. They have become very special to me and hold an important spot in my heart. They inspire and motivate me for the days ahead, knowing that we are sharing God's love for the children. Above all, we want to glorify God.

## NEW ARRIVALS

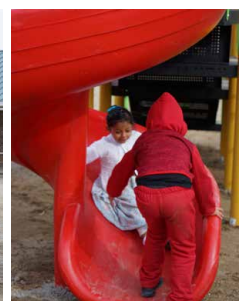


Meet Kimberly and Elizabeth. Both have been brought voluntarily by family who do not have the means to care for them. They placed them in our care hoping to give them a more stable life.



## A NEW PLAYSET

Thanks to our many donors, the playset we have dreamed of for so long now spends hours entertaining the children. We greatly appreciate every person who gave so the children can enjoy playing safely. A special thank you to the group from South Carolina who spent several days installing the playset. The children spend endless hours playing with their new gift!



## WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF!

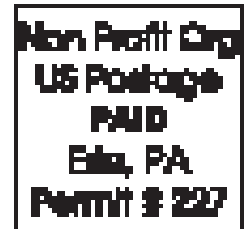


**JERLENE ROHRER**  
Outgoing and energetic, Jerlene came from Minnesota to work as chauffeur and cook and to fill in wherever needed.



**EDNA MARTIN**  
We are thankful for her month of service in helping out with sewing, cooking, and spending time encouraging staff.

Shining Light  
Children's Home  
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## SHINING LIGHT 2019 STAFF NEEDS

Leland Ulrich - Board Chairman  
Corey Yoder - Treasurer  
Lorne Hershberger - Secretary  
Herb Miller - Board Member/  
PR Coordinator  
Myron Bontrager - Board Member  
Mike Yoder - Board Member

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Please join us in praying for volunteers to meet our staffing needs for the coming year. We have a number of staff who will be finishing their term throughout the year. If you have an interest in serving as a volunteer at Shining Light please contact us for more information.

### Staffing needs:

- 2 childcare practitioners (moms)
- 2 childcare practitioners (dads)
- 1 childcare practitioner couple
- 1 general maintenance assistant
- 1 Spanish school teacher for next term
- 1 chauffeur

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