

THE CHAMPION

SUMMER 2014



OUR CHAMPION:
SARAH HOYLE

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UMFS
Official Newsletter

From Needing a Champion TO BECOMING ONE

Sarah Hoyle is an adoptive parent, artist, UMFS board member and ardent advocate for families dealing with mental illness. She shares her own story about handling her daughter's mental illness, and how that has impacted her relationship with UMFS.



The Hoyle Family (clockwise from the left): Sarah, Lara, Joe and Anna.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, in their mid 40s, Sarah and her husband, Joe, weren't ready to give up being parents when their two sons left the nest. The couple adopted two toddlers, Anna and Lara, from Russia. After Anna entered high school in 2008, she was admitted to a mental hospital four times. "This is my little girl," Sarah remembers thinking as she left her daughter at the first hospital. The diagnoses varied from doctor to doctor — everything

from a developmental delay to autism to a major depressive disorder. Anna was in freefall.

The shifting diagnoses didn't affect the final outcome: Sarah had to leave her little girl in full-time residential mental health facilities, first the Virginia Treatment Center for Children and then the Child & Family Healing Center at UMFS. "It is surreal to leave your child

with mental problems in a mental institution," says Sarah. UMFS Adoptive Family Preservation helped Sarah through the meetings with teachers and psychologists, giving the family support. "Someone went with me to all the meetings," Sarah remembers. "She was there to back me up."

When Anna turned 18, she returned home to live and continued to attend Charterhouse School at UMFS.

Sarah was a stay-at-home mom, so she could spend the time needed to take care of Anna with the support of her “wonderful” husband and supportive sons and daughter. All have learned to adapt as part of loving Anna.

The Hoyles consider themselves lucky to have found UMFS, which has become part of the family. Beyond the direct services UMFS gave Anna, both Lara and Anna found a “grandmother” at Guardian Place, the senior living apartments affiliated with UMFS. Lara earned her Girl Scout Gold Award — the highest achievement for a Girl Scout — by organizing an art show featuring the art of students at UMFS’ Charterhouse School.

Sarah, too, has been inspired by her experience with Anna and UMFS, and is giving both time and money to UMFS. She is the parent representative on the UMFS board and is on the committee for the UMFS Systems of Care grant. The committee hires parents who have gone through the mental health system to help others find their way.

“I let people know what it’s like for the parent of a child they are serving,” Sarah says. The journey is admittedly tough, and without support, many families don’t get the help they need when they need it.

In addition to her work with UMFS, Sarah also works with the Children’s Mental Health Resource Center where she is a parent support partner, teaching other parents to speak up for what they need.

Throughout the chaotic years, Sarah continued to create art as a way for her to keep calm and sane. Every painting has a memory of what was

happening with Anna at that time. She teaches watercolor classes, but she has her art students write their tuition checks to UMFS, not to her.

When Anna graduated from high school, she moved to Gateway Homes, a residential facility for people with mental illnesses located in Chesterfield. She lives in her own apartment and takes care of herself. She and her mother talk on the phone every night. She is happy.

Lara is now on her way to Virginia Wesleyan College to become a social worker, inspired in part by her family’s experience with UMFS. She and her parents have learned that you “just do the best you can ... and accept Anna for who she is.” The best you can do is, however, a lot better with the support of people who understand what you are going through, like UMFS. “UMFS is a class act,” she said. “They do it right.”



Sarah painting in her studio.



Sarah’s painting entitled “One of a Kind.”

Mission

UMFS is an unwavering champion for high-risk children and families, collaborating with communities to help them reach their full potential.

Vision

Creating a world where caring, opportunity and generosity are passed on from generation to generation — empowering all children to contribute to society as engaged citizens.

www.umfs.org

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Michaela Howell, 16, went from having her world turned upside down to winning an award for academic achievement in less than a year, with help from UMFS.

LOSS IS DIFFICULT for everyone. Multiple losses can be overwhelming. For Michaela Howell, then 15, the death of her father

and hospitalization of her mother made her lose her balance but, with the help of UMFS, she was soon able to right herself.

Michaela came to UMFS after being hospitalized three times for mental health problems and being deemed “out of control.” In addition to losing her parents, she had no relatives who could handle her and had been taken away from her neighborhood, thus losing friends and classmates as well.

After completing Grafton’s residential program, Michaela came to UMFS, which placed her in the foster home of Don and Deb Libera. The Liberis are experienced foster parents, having been home to five foster children before taking in Michaela, in July 2013.

In less than a year, Michaela was back on her feet. She is doing well in school and is an active part of her community. She takes guitar lessons and has been actively involved

with a teen writing club, a book club and multiple church-related groups despite taking — and doing well in — a heavy workload of high school classes. She is also on the home-school yearbook committee, and is working with other teens on a movie project.

Her remarkable progress led her UMFS Foster Care Social Worker, Marisol Collazo, to nominate Michaela for the Beat the Odds Phoenix Award, which was presented to Michaela in June, along with a laptop computer.

But, best of all, Michaela is about to have a family again. The Liberis are going to adopt her. “My wife and I are very proud of Michaela and her great progress on multiple fronts,” Don said. “We believe she is well-deserving of the Beat the Odds Phoenix Award.”

STORIES OF SUCCESS

Quan: On the Path to a Bright Future

IN THE WINTER of 2011, Quan graduated from the Child & Family Healing Center after a year in the program because of a background of sexual abuse by a family member. Now he’s a recent graduate of LC Bird High School and is interviewing for a summer job while he decides about colleges and his next steps. He plans to start school in the fall, majoring in business administration, with the goal of starting his own business with his mom, “Life is starting to happen for him,” said his mom. “He’s able to make sound decisions. On his graduation day, when kids were partying, he was at the Special Olympics volunteering. He’s not stuck because of what happened, and it’s not hindering his productiveness. He’s moving forward.”



Earning his diploma opens new possibilities for Quan.

Getting Ben Back

A Letter From a Birth Parent

I am a recovering prescription drug addict who has been sober for more than three years. I was arrested for selling those drugs and was sentenced to three years in prison. This chain of events is why my (then one-and-a-half-year-old) son Ben was placed in foster care.

DURING THOSE THREE YEARS

in prison, I kept in contact with the social worker assigned to my child's case, and proceeded to take any and every parenting, drug recovery and skill class I could. Once I was released in January 2013, the first call I made was to the social worker for my child to begin the process for visitation.

Before my first visit, my anxiety was high. Ben was one-and-a-half when he was placed in foster care. Would he remember me? He was living with a foster family in southwest Virginia, and I had moved to Tennessee to be with family. In order to see Ben, I had to find work and a home in Virginia. It took some time but I found employment and a home in March 2013. Granted, where I moved was more than four hours away from where Ben was living. I made the ride every other week for a one hour visit. The company that the Department of Social Services used to monitor and schedule our visits was more focused on the foster family and DSS. They instructed Ben to call me Helen, not mom, and I was instructed to limit hugs towards him. I felt so frustrated and isolated from bonding with him. I had team meetings month after month with the social worker, foster parents and the individual monitoring the visits. Those always left me feeling emotionally beaten down and more

guilty than I already felt. It felt like I was going into battle against an army by myself.

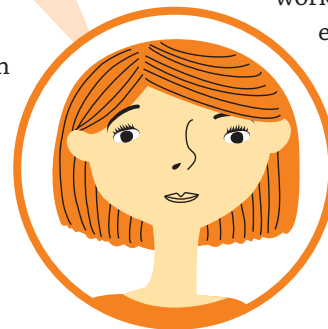
Over numerous months, my visits were changed from one hour supervised to three hours unsupervised, however I still felt like I was going into battle month after month with the team meetings. The focus was not how all parties could work together in the best interest of the child.

Then, in October 2013, a series of events occurred and Ben was placed in another foster family's home, thirty minutes from mine. UMFS was the placing agency. My defenses went on high alert due to my past experiences with foster families and agencies. On the day Ben moved, the UMFS supervisor called me to inform me that he had made it to the foster home safely and was adjusting very well. I was so relieved. The supervisor also informed me I could still have my scheduled visit with my son to take him trick-or-treating on Halloween.

I began to have weekly meetings with a UMFS worker for parenting classes.

When I had concerns dealing with Ben and voiced them to UMFS staff, they listened and treated me as his mother, not a stranger, and they had answers. UMFS also had a parenting class that I was able to attend. To my surprise it included a couple becoming foster parents. The instructor from UMFS joined foster family perspective and what they deal with, as well as birth parents' perspective. This was the first time I felt like it wasn't me against the system, it was about how we could work together in order to help my child transition from foster family back to birth family. This was such a relief — it's hard enough to imagine someone else raising your child, but even more difficult when you have to fight for everyone to come together in his best interest and to make the transition easier for him.

“UMFS listened and treated me as [my son's] mother, not a stranger.”



I honestly feel if UMFS had been involved from the beginning, I would have had Ben in my home sooner. UMFS actually works hard and encourages the foster families and birth parents to work as a team in the process to help the child through the transitions more easily. I'm happy to say that I will have full custody of my son this coming August. UMFS really brings families together with care, compassion and teamwork from the directors to the rest of the staff, everyone practices these values.



UMFS Staff Fly to Germany to Participate in an International Conference



IN 2003, WE BEGAN a partnership with Diakonie-Rosenheim, an organization similar to UMFS, and it has continued as an ongoing relationship ever since. This unique collaboration focuses on increasing knowledge and skills, challenging staff on both sides to improve continuous learning,

sharing strategies, strengthening child advocacy and exploring differing cultural norms. As part of this partnership, UMFS sent a group of staff to Berlin for a conference called the 15th German Child and Youth Welfare Congress (DJHT). DJHT is Europe's largest congress and exhibition in the field of child and youth welfare. There, our staff learned from other international agencies, and have since begun sharing our experiences from here in Virginia.

President and CEO Greg Peters and Dr. Erik Laursen, vice president of research and development and executive director of Charterhouse School, presented at the conference about creating innovative public/private partnerships for high-risk youth. They focused on the 11-year partnership we have had with Diakonie as we develop international solutions to strengthen our services to children as both organizations grow. They also shared the Circle of Courage as a framework for our treatment approach while highlighting our various programs and services.

We hope to continue to build on our relationship with Diakonie by developing extended staff and intern exchange programs and joint programs and leadership trainings in the future.

COLLABORATION CORNER

UMFS Partners To Eradicate Poverty

AS PART OF OUR GOAL to partner with communities to eradicate poverty, UMFS' Lynchburg Regional Center held a two-day training in May on Bridges Out of Poverty. The Bridges training offers a broad spectrum of workshops for reducing poverty and building community sustainability on the individual, institutional and community level.

Representatives from local departments of social services, court services units, local school districts, United Way and UMFS partner churches in Lynchburg learned how to collaboratively build and implement a community sustainability model to reduce and

eventually eradicate poverty. The goal is to achieve a sustainable community in Lynchburg where everyone can live well. In the coming months, UMFS and partner agencies will become certified Bridges Out of Poverty trainers and will begin identifying people currently living in poverty to participate in the program.

Bridges Out of Poverty is a collaboration between Dr. Ruby Payne, author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Terie Dreussi Smith and Phil DeVol, an organizational consultant on poverty issues.





UMFS Horticulture Program Growing Fast



Thanks to a Major Grant and a Generous Donation



Volunteers fill garden beds on Clean Up For Kids Day.

THIS PAST SPRING, The Dominion Foundation’s Environmental Stewardship Committee gave Charterhouse School’s horticulture program a \$10,000 grant for the construction of raised garden beds. Volunteers from CarMax and Bermuda Hundred United Methodist Church worked together to construct and install all 20 beds behind the greenhouse on UMFS’ Richmond campus. During our Clean Up For Kids day in early June, more volunteers helped finish the project by filling the beds with soil and laying down mulch around the area, while another volunteer installed an irrigation system.

The goal of the horticulture program grant is to combat the issue of food deserts in the communities where many of our students live. These new gardens will be an opportunity for students to learn how to grow their own healthy, organic food and give them fruits and vegetables to take back to their communities where fast food and convenience stores are often the only options.

Students involved in another aspect of the horticulture program, the Green Thumbs Club, are also learning valuable real-world business

experience and customer service skills as they sell plants they have tended all year (herbs, vegetables, succulents and others) at our annual Green Thumbs plant sale. The Green Thumbs sold an unprecedented 1,200 plants at the sale, thanks to help from the Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens in Richmond (winner of the #2 ranking in USA Today’s national

10 Best Public Gardens

Contest). Their

generous donation of 1,000 flowering plants allowed



Horticulture teacher and greenhouse manager Susan Westfall with one of her Green Thumbs students.

the Green Thumbs to extend their plant sale for a second day, serving a record number of customers.

Also thanks to the donation, Charterhouse School students helped fellow students in the area. Green Thumbs students created trays of extra plants to share with students at Amelia Street School so they could create gardens of their own, both at school and at home.



SPOTLIGHT: Green Thumb Student James

James has been a Green Thumb since September 2013. At the beginning of 2014, he was selected to become the new weekend assistant manager of the greenhouse. Every weekend and school holiday, James makes sure all the plants are watered and tended to. He has now been managing the greenhouse longer than any other student. “It is my way to get away and enjoy nature, and I just love taking care of plants,” he said.

THE 2014 UMFS STAFF AWARDS

Each year, UMFS recognizes the outstanding efforts and achievements of its staff with awards in five categories. See below for the 2014 award winners. You can also visit our website at www.umfs.org/news for details about each winner.



PROJECT TEAM OF THE YEAR

Recognizes a project team that demonstrated stellar project management skills in successfully implementing an agency or collaborative project.

KaBOOM Project Team:
Angie Williams, Katie Moore, Elizabeth Buchholz, Richard Palmer, Jean Hepburn, Jay Ziehl



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Recognizes an employee-of-the-month from 2013 who has gone above and beyond his or her usual duties to further UMFS' mission and promote positive relationships both within and outside the agency.

Carmen Dailey
Family Development Supervisor
Central Region



DIRECT CARE WORKERS OF THE YEAR

Recognizes three direct care workers — one from Charterhouse School, Community Based Services and Residential — who exemplify UMFS' mission and vision, have gone above and beyond their usual duties, and have displayed unusual compassion or heroism in a challenging situation.

Charterhouse School

Coby Wilmer
PE Teacher
Richmond

Community Based Services

Kourtney Herndon
Social Worker
Central Region

Residential

Dave Christianson
Youth Counselor
Leland House



TEAM OF THE YEAR

Recognizes an agency team that successfully implemented a service, process or procedure that furthered UMFS' annual goals or strategic plan.

**Northern Virginia
Regional Center**



CEO'S AWARD

Recognizes an employee whose outstanding efforts promote UMFS' mission and vision and make a significant impact on organizational culture, values or strategic direction.

Angie Williams
Volunteer Coordinator

UPCOMING UMFS EVENTS



November 10, 2014 at 10:00 a.m.
Stonehenge Country Club in Midlothian, VA

For more info, email Joe Torrence, jtorrence@umfs.org

VISIT UMFS.ORG

for more information about trainings, orientations and information sessions.

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