

THE CHAMPION

SUMMER 2016



OUR CHAMPION:
ANDREA

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UMFS
Official Newsletter

It's Never Too Late for a Forever Family



Andrea (left) and her sister, Amanda, celebrate their recent graduation from Longwood University with their family dog, Mr. Beans.

ON A SUNDAY MORNING

this past Spring at a small Methodist church 21-year-old Andrea stepped up to the pulpit to read an open letter from a mother about her children. Deliberately, Andrea read the mother's words:

"I was the last person you'd ever think would become a foster parent. I was successful, middle-aged, the mother of three young men, all in college... our hands-on parenting days were over. My husband and I were making retirement plans and had built our dream house in South Carolina. Our family expansion plans involved weddings. But God had a different plan — a plan that would bring us unexpected, unimagined joy."

Andrea continued to read the letter, captivating the congregation with the story of how twin sisters, who had

"I was the last person you'd think would become a foster parent... God had a different plan that would bring us unexpected, unimagined joy."
 — Tammy York

been in foster care since they were infants, became a part of her family at the most unexpected time and under the most unexpected circumstances.

"I was no social worker, nor a do-gooder, but here I was about to add two children to my family because I felt God calling me to make a difference. My husband and I realized we couldn't change the world, but we could have an impact on two precious children and change their worlds for the better."

When Andrea finished reading, she looked out into the congregation and

said, "This story is not make-believe. It's not about imaginary kids in some far-off place. My mom wrote this letter this morning because she knew I'd be speaking to you today. This story is about me and my sister Amanda."

Andrea, who serves UMFS as a recruitment volunteer, uses her experience growing up in foster care to bring awareness to the ongoing need for parents like hers. Leanne Hill, foster parent recruiter for UMFS, says Andrea isn't trying to be the poster child for foster care. "Instead, she wants to show what can happen when you give a child a chance," Leanne explains.

Foster youth "age out" of the system at 18. Suddenly out in the world without a supportive adult, a job, or even a high school diploma, many youth in foster care often do not get the

help they need. Studies have shown they are more likely than those in the general population to not finish high school, be unemployed, and be dependent on public assistance. Many find themselves in prison, homeless, or parents at an early age.

With grit and determination, Andrea and her sister beat the odds. "We can't even count the number of times we were told we would fail — that we wouldn't graduate high school without getting pregnant, we wouldn't go to college and that we'd end up in subpar jobs," Andrea explains. Despite having attended four different high schools while bouncing between foster homes and group homes, they both received bachelor's degrees from Longwood University in May. "Both my sister and I are graduating from a four-year college with dean's list grades — things we were told we would never accomplish, we have."

Having grown up in the system, Andrea and Amanda became fiercely independent and self-reliant. They emancipated from foster care when they turned 18. Andrea said, "We'd been on our own for a month or two, and we expected that we'd manage on our own." That's when Tammy and Jim entered their lives.

"Over my life, and over our married lives we've had things that have happened that we felt we were called by God to do," Tammy explains. Tammy and Jim knew of Andrea and her sister through their youngest son, Thomas. Over the years, Thomas and Tammy had numerous conversations

about the sisters and had always wanted to help them in some way.

Armed with two cell phones as a "welcome to the family gift," Tammy and Jim drove from North Carolina to Virginia to meet the girls for the first time. "We'd never even seen a picture of them, and had no idea if they were short, tall — no idea about the color of their hair or eyes, about their personalities, their likes, their interests," Tammy says. "I only knew that my son said they were good kids who needed a home."

The sisters were skeptical. Jim said it was clear that Andrea and Amanda had thrived in the foster care system. "While we were offering them help, we had to be sure that it was the kind of help they would accept. The girls made it very clear that they didn't need any help and that they could figure this out on their own," says Jim.

"Things we were told we would never accomplish, we have."
 — Andrea

After raising three sons, Tammy and Jim suddenly found themselves enjoying being the parents of girls. "Andrea became Jim's sous-chef," Tammy explains. "They've shared a lot of time together doing that." "Being around them has made my life richer and will forever keep me young," says Jim.

This is more than a story about empty-nesters helping two children in need. "They've opened our eyes to things we would never have been exposed to, and they see things differently than we do," says Tammy. "Our family is unique. Mom and dad do not consider themselves to be foster parents. They're simply a family that offered us an opportunity to have a forever home, a place to always belong and a place to be loved unconditionally," says Andrea.

Empowered by the support of a stable and loving family, Andrea and Amanda are both headed for success. Amanda plans to attend graduate school in the fall to study special education. Andrea turned down a job in New York City to stay in Virginia. She wants to continue to advocate for the foster care system. "I'm working with Leanne to come up with new and creative ways to recruit foster families," says Andrea. "Having someone from inside the system gives me a real advantage — a real opportunity to have an impact."

Currently, there are about 1,500 kids in the Virginia foster care system awaiting adoption. The Fostering Futures bill that became law in Virginia this year extends the age for foster care benefits to 21.

Visit our website at umfs.org to learn more about fostering or fostering to adopt.

Courage to Succeed Student Earns Associate Degree

CHARTERHOUSE SCHOOL IS PROUD TO announce Paul Switzer as the first student to graduate with an associate degree from J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College. Courage to Succeed provides academic, social and independent life skill supports to students with autism and other neurological differences.

Students on the autism spectrum often have no trouble meeting college entrance requirements, yet once there have difficulty navigating the academic and social complexities inherent in the college experience. Many lack the social and self-management skills needed to independently organize and integrate all aspects of college life.

The Pop Smith Scholarship fund provides financial assistance to students who participated in any UMFS program or service. Students who apply and receive the scholarship can use it for post-secondary education including college or vocational training. The Scholarship is named for the Reverend E. Leon "Pop" Smith who was the executive director of the Virginia Methodist Children's Home, now UMFS, from 1949 to 1974. For more information about Courage to Succeed or the Pop Smith Scholarship, call Katie Moore, development manager, 804.254.9674.



Before Courage to Succeed, Paul said he could barely look someone in the eye or start a conversation. Thanks to the support of his social coaches and peer group, that is no longer the case. "Having autism is like being a viewer of a foreign film without subtitles. You have a vague idea of what's going on in the movie (or world if you prefer). You have a strong mind, but have a harder time expressing it. You have a vast imagination that you often escape to. Growing up with autism is hard, because kids don't understand you and think you are weird," Paul said.

Paul, a Pop Smith Scholarship recipient, plans to attend Virginia Commonwealth University this fall to pursue a bachelor's degree.

STORIES OF IMPACT

Police Officer Uses Gentle Tactics with Traumatized Kids

OFFICER ROBERT CAPOCELLI from Richmond Police Department's 4th precinct, is Charterhouse School's first winner of the UMFS Community Champion award. He is a superhero of kindness and support and has had profound impact on the lives of several of our students.

Officer Capocelli responded to a call recently to find a young student hiding

under a desk. The child was afraid of police and was scared of going to jail. Knowing how terrified the child felt about police, Officer Capocelli opened the trunk of his police car and let the child choose a stuffed animal from his collection. Officer Capocelli let the boy explore his police car and offered his sunglasses to the child for the ride to the hospital. The officer stayed with the boy for several hours to support



him during the intake process. Charterhouse School staff were blown away by the kindness, care and generosity demonstrated by Officer Capocelli.

Thank you, Officer Capocelli, for being an unwavering champion for children and families.

Tyler Finds His Super Family

MANDY AND BRAD CHILDRES always wanted to be foster parents. They had talked about it for years before moving to Virginia from North Carolina. "It was something we'd had on our hearts for the last eight years," says Brad, "But it wasn't until one of our friends went to work for UMFS that we found the right opportunity."

UMFS Recruiter Leanne Hill introduced the Childres' to the possibility of fostering. The Childres' prayed about it and felt inspired to bring a child into their home. "Brad and I felt like this was the route God wanted us to go," says Mandy.

While Mandy and Brad were in the process of training and certification to become foster parents, Leanne approached them and asked them if they'd be willing to consider taking the next step — adoption. Leanne was confident the child she knew needed a home was a good fit for the Childres family. "Just trust me," Leanne told them.

The first time Mandy and Brad met eight-year-old Tyler, they took him fishing. "Leanne was right — we loved him immediately. We just did not want to let him go," says Mandy.

After finalizing Tyler's adoption, the Childres' celebrated with a super hero-themed adoption party attended by extended family, Tyler's classmates and kids from church. "We wanted Tyler to know that this day is almost like a birthday for him," says Brad.

UMFS Social Worker Ralph Branch, who helped arrange the adoption, also attended the party. "Tyler could not stop smiling and laughing while playing games and being social with his family and friends," Ralph says. "This is more than a feel-good story of a child finding a forever home — it's a story of a child finding his forever family."



Tyler celebrates his adoption with UMFS Social Worker Ralph Branch.

"This is more than a feel-good story of a child finding a forever home — it's a story of a child finding his forever family."
— Ralph Branch



Mandy and Brad Childres have made a place in their home and their hearts for Tyler.

Charterhouse School Student Learns the Art of Roasting Coffee

ROASTING COFFEE BEANS IS BOTH ART AND science. Jackson, a student in Charterhouse School's Courage to Succeed program, is learning about the unique characteristics of each type of coffee during his summer internship with Ironclad Coffee Roasters. Jackson says he's excited to learn about everything that goes into making a cup of coffee.

Jackson's is one of several student internships that Charterhouse School Career and Technical Education Coordinator, Sarah McCaig, lined up with Richmond-area businesses. Students with autism and other neurological differences get the chance to practice social skills while gaining hands-on work experience.

“Jackson will not only be learning how to make a great cup of coffee, he will gain confidence and a sense of purpose in a job setting that reaches into every aspect of his life.”
— Sarah McCaig

“Internships like this one give our youth access to valuable social and practical skills through hands-on learning in a community-based setting. Jackson will not only be learning how to make a great cup of coffee, he will gain confidence and a sense of purpose in a job setting that reaches into every aspect of his life,” McCaig said.

As part of his daily routine, Jackson helps roast and bag the coffee beans and helps keep the shop tidy. On weekends, he's out in the community helping serve Ironclad coffee at farmers markets and other community events. “Jackson is a natural people person,” explains Ryan O'Rourke, Ironclad's owner. “He doesn't shy away from joining in the banter with fellow staff and with the customers, and that's shaping up to be a brilliant thing.”

Visit <https://www.charterhouseschool.org/services/curriculum/> for more information about the Courage to Succeed and the career and technical education classes at Charterhouse School.



VOLUNTEER/DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Maria Tackett



How did you first get connected to UMFS?

I first connected with UMFS through my church, Area 10 Faith Community. Volunteer leaders there knew about UMFS' tutoring program and put me in touch with staff. I've been doing it for three years now and I enjoy it a lot. I go once a week and work with a student for about 30 to 45 minutes. I switch back and forth tutoring kids from Charterhouse School and the day school. Typically, I work with one student for about a semester to a year. Occasionally I'll work with a student for just a couple of weeks to prepare for standardized testing.

What have you learned from the kids you've tutored?

A lot! They like to share whatever hobbies they're interested in. For instance, one student told me all about the ins and outs of various video games. Another shared with me everything he knows about racing dirt bikes. Recently a student in the Charterhouse School cosmetology class was giving me hair and makeup tips.

How else have you been involved with UMFS?

I've done a few volunteer projects through Area 10. We have a day each year, called "Rise Richmond," when we all engage in volunteer projects instead of going to church. One year I helped paint a cottage. Last year we cleaned up the industrial kitchen the students use for the culinary classes.

“The kids are great. I love getting to know the students.”

What would you say to someone who might be thinking of supporting UMFS?

I would say to go ahead and do it. The kids are great. I love getting to know the students and they are always interesting to be around. Also, the organization is great from a volunteer perspective. Angie and Lisa, the UMFS volunteer team, make volunteering easy and fun. There's a way for anyone who wants to support UMFS to get involved.

What else do you want people to know about UMFS?

What continues to surprise me is how much goes on at UMFS. The level of impact the organization has on the lives of the kids you serve and on the lives of your donors and volunteers is truly inspiring.



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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#BackInTheDay

Charterhouse School students kick off the summer with a watermelon eating contest at field day in 1985. Though the activities have changed over time, students in Richmond and Edinburg still enjoy the 30-plus year tradition of field day.

HAPPENINGS AT UMFS



FORE the Kids golf tournament

Tee Off Fore the Kids

If you're looking to spend some time outdoors and partner with UMFS while you're at it, the Fore the Kids golf tournaments are your chance. Whether you choose to play, sponsor or donate to the tournaments, you'll be a champion for kids and families in Virginia.

For more information, visit: www.umfs.org/golf

WHEN: September 30, 2016 at 10:00 a.m.
WHERE: The Manor Golf Club, Farmville, VA

WHEN: October 14, 2016 at 10:00 a.m.
WHERE: Royal New Kent, Providence Forge, VA



VISIT UMFS.ORG

for up-to-date information on events or to give online.

Find other updates about upcoming events and other news on social media:

