

# THE CHAMPION

SPRING 2018

OUR CHAMPION:

Nick

*A Step in the  
Right Direction*

  
**UMFS**

Official Newsletter



## Calling All Champions!

All of the joys of spring are upon us, and the long and stubborn winter is a distant memory. In this issue of THE CHAMPION, we celebrate change. In the case of one child in particular, we learn of an amazing transformation. From difficult times in a juvenile corrections center to great successes at UMFS, former Child & Family Healing Center student, Nick, is a pioneer in the ongoing effort to provide high-risk youth with wraparound care and resources as opposed to incarceration.

Also in this issue, we learn about Ruben Sanchez, a fun-loving volunteer mentor whose relationship with a recent residential student had an impact beyond both of their expectations.

Finally, we travel to Washington, D.C., where longtime donors Dr. John and Barbara Tate sit down to talk about their affection for the children UMFS has served throughout the agency's rich history.

We are grateful for the partnership of our volunteers, donors, and staff who make an incredible difference in the lives of high-risk children and families in Virginia.

Thank you,  
**Greg Peters, LCSW**  
President and CEO

### RICHMOND CAMPUS

3900 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230  
804.353.4461 • richmond@umfs.org

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CHAMPION

# Nick

Child & Family Healing Center Success Story

## A Step in the Right Direction



During last December's commencement ceremony, Nick reflected on his time at UMFS.

UMFS provides children with 24-hour, year-round residential care at Child & Family Healing Center in Richmond and Leland House in Fairfax County. These programs focus on healing children who are struggling to overcome trauma, acute behavioral and emotional challenges, or children with autism and other neurological differences.

**NICK DOESN'T HAVE** much to say about orange jumpsuits, handcuffs, or the cell in which he stayed for more than three years. In fact, he's decided he'd rather just put the whole juvenile corrections facility experience behind him.

"There's more to life than sitting in a cell all day," he said.

Nick first got into trouble at age 13 and was placed into a residential treatment facility. While there, he got into more trouble and landed in juvenile corrections, where he stayed from the age of 14 to 17. And when it came time for his release, Nick made a decision that was equally as difficult as it was wise.

"I've been institutionalized for three years," Nick said to his mother, Shannon. "I'm not ready to come home. Can you respect that?"

The news that Shannon's only child was choosing to enter a three-month step-down program rather than return immediately home hit her hard. After all, he'd already been gone a long time. "He's my whole world," she said. "Of course I wanted him to come home, but I was just thinking about myself."

After his release from the juvenile corrections facility in mid-2017, Nick came to UMFS. He was the first to do so as part of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's ongoing efforts to rehabilitate children. DJJ is working to prevent kids from reoffending and therefore reduce the size of its institutions. Forty-eight percent of those who were released in 2016 were re-arrested within a year. DJJ wants to lower that statistic.

"We want to support the transformation of juvenile justice to a systems-of-care approach," said Nancy Toscano, Chief Program and Strategy Officer at UMFS. "It can happen one child at a time. If things went well with Nick, then we'd be able to help another child, and another."

Therapist Angelo Cabrera had "a therapeutic hunch" that Nick was going to succeed, and that hunch turned out to be right. Nick went all in on his 90-day residential program. He responded well to therapy, but he also was able to heal by just participating in regular kid stuff, Angelo said, like playing basketball and football.

"Angelo knew ... he just knew that Nick was a pioneer for other kids,"

Nancy said. "And Nick was successful by pretty much every measure."

"Nick took the challenge of setting an example," Angelo said. "Pulling kids aside and talking to them, telling them: 'You've got it good here, I came out of a place where they didn't let you do a lot things you're allowed to do here.'"

Thanks to Nick's success, UMFS is already serving another child from a juvenile corrections facility.

"He made the right choice when he decided that he had lived that kind of lifestyle for too long to come home and just have a bunch of freedom," Shannon said, adding that UMFS went "above and beyond" in its service to Nick.

Nick said he's thankful for UMFS and the work that staff did to help prepare him both physically and emotionally to go back into the world. "I just needed some time to get back to reality."

Now 18, Nick's back home with mom, back in school and working toward the future. He's also working on the important things in life, like his crossover dribble and jumper.

"I love sports," he said with a smile. ✨



To learn more about the many volunteer opportunities available at UMFS, visit [UMFS.org/volunteer](https://umfs.org/volunteer).

# “You Never Know What Kind of Impact You’ll Have”

**RUBEN SANCHEZ** knew from the start that he and Zander would hit it off.

“Zander is just a good kid,” Ruben said. “He makes everyone around him better.”

Zander lived at the UMFS Child & Family Healing Center for more than a year. Ruben volunteered as his mentor for the last eight months he was there. Ruben has two children of his own, 18 and 20, and became a volunteer, in part, because he wanted to continue being a role model for others.

“Hopefully, those I mentor will learn something, even if it’s just a little bit,” the 38-year-old restaurant manager said. Zander picked up on

Ruben’s good vibes, and the two connected almost immediately.

“That someone would take time out of their day to hang out with me was such an honor,” Zander said.

While the duo shared an affection for board and strategy games, it was during leisurely strolls around the campus that most of their bonding took place.

“We’d talk about his day and how things were going,” Ruben said. “Even though he felt like he was stuck, he always had a positive outlook.”

“Ruben wasn’t someone I was with 24-7,” Zander said. “So it was a cool experience to talk to someone I knew but wasn’t with all the time.”

Zander said he learned a great deal

at UMFS, like coping strategies and how to find the bright side. Having a mentor like Ruben, Zander added, was invaluable. “I would like to thank UMFS in general for giving me the opportunity to meet him.”

As Zander neared the end of his program at UMFS and prepared to take the next step toward moving back home to his family, he passed along a gift that Ruben said was both unexpected and impactful.

“It blew my mind,” Ruben said of the hand-written, laminated thank-you letter that Zander presented to him. “Mentoring is challenging, but at the same time it’s rewarding. Anybody that can possibly help out someone just for a couple hours a day — a couple times every few weeks — you never know what kind of impact you’ll have.” ✨



# John & Barbara Tate

## *A Lifetime of* **Considerable Commitment**

**TO EACH OTHER**, to their family, to the church, and to United Methodist Family Services, the Tates have devoted much to both humanity and philanthropy.

From the cozy confines of their home in the Tenleytown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., Dr. John Tate and his wife, Barbara, recently reflected on a lifetime of considerable commitment.

They celebrated 63 years of marriage on Easter Monday; for 44 years, Dr. Tate served as a pastor with the United Methodist Church; three of their four children are in ministry; they've been involved with UMFS since it was the Virginia Methodist Children's Home; and the house in which they live? It was built by Barbara's father in 1929.

She and Dr. Tate have lived there since he retired in 1999.

Yes, the Tates know more than just a little about longevity. To that end, the Tates have long supported UMFS with annual gifts. And even after serving faithfully on the Board from 1981-2010, Dr. Tate said he "always felt that whatever time I was at UMFS was more of a benefit and blessing to me than I was a benefit to them."

Rallying behind UMFS is easy to do, Barbara said, citing the agency's adaptability, student success rate, and transparency.

"And UMFS helps kids that society has given up on," Dr. Tate added. "It's probably the best-kept secret in Virginia."

But without its donors, UMFS wouldn't be able to carry out its mission as an unwavering champion for high-risk children and families. Healing those in need is, after all, a collaborative effort. It's the selfless support offered by families like the Tates that helps UMFS move forward with its vision of empowering all children to contribute to society as engaged citizens.

And when asked what they would say to others who might be considering supporting UMFS, John and Barbara smiled at each other from across the room.

"It's an investment in the lives of children," Dr. Tate said. ✨

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Join the Tates and invest in the children and families served by UMFS. Visit [UMFS.org/donate](https://UMFS.org/donate) to make a gift.