



Murphy-Harpst

# Building Futures

Tracking Our Journey  
to Empower and Transform Lives

2022-2023  
Impact Report

Fall 2023 Newsletter



## Successes

One Child's Letter of Transformation

## Services

Foster Care Continues to Expand

## Support

Heroes for Hope



## Our Mission

Provide a safe and nurturing environment where severely abused and neglected children and teenagers can thrive and heal, toward a goal of re-engaging with society and leading productive lives.

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## Contact Us


Campus  
(main office)  
740 Fletcher Street  
Cedartown, GA 30125

Specialized Foster Care  
678.704.9291

Questions about this newsletter?  
Contact the Advancement Team:  
**[advancement@murphyharpst.org](mailto:advancement@murphyharpst.org)**

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# A Letter from Scott

Friends of Murphy-Harpst,

It is a joy to share with you our 2022-2023 Impact Report, marking our 99th year of success caring for Georgia's most vulnerable children. Along with the facts and figures that provide a picture of what we have accomplished together, it is always heartening to hear the stories of those who have found refuge and resolve while under Murphy-Harpst's care. We are pleased to share one of those narratives in this year's report.

As you read Erin's letter, I hope that you are as encouraged as we are by the progress this young woman has made. I also hope that you are reminded of the dozens more children that are making the same progress thanks to the care that your generosity allows us to provide. As we approach the coming year, we look toward our second century of caring by taking steps towards offering these services to many more children throughout the state with our new EVOLVE initiative.

With the EVOLVE project, we follow the lead of our founders to "make room" for even more children to heal and thrive. EVOLVE meets a fast-growing need in Georgia by providing quality care for youth who find themselves in the gap between residential care and family placement. Group Homes are currently operating in Richmond and Rockdale Counties, with plans for further expansion underway.

This continuum of care is made possible by talented and dedicated staff, a committed Board of Directors, and steadfast donors who helped us surpass our fundraising goals this past year. We begin our new fiscal year with renewed confidence. The philanthropy you provide through your individual gifts and bequests, churchwide efforts, in-kind donations, and on-campus visits allow us to deliver the level of care these children and youth need to thrive and equip Murphy-Harpst with important resources that state funding alone is unable to supply. You have our gratitude.

As we move into our Centennial year, you will be hearing from us about ways you can join in the ongoing celebration. In the meantime, may the blessings you have provided our children this year bring you many happy returns in the year to come.

Best,  
  
M. Scott Merritt | President & CEO

## Employee Spotlight

### Gwendolyn Baker

Headmaster at York Academy

#### How long have you worked at MH?

I am starting my 3rd year.

#### What is your role at MH?

At Murphy-Harpst Children's Center, I serve as the Principal at York Academy. Our school is set up like a regular public school with classes based upon grade level or courses students need to progress to the next grade. We teach utilizing a blended educational platform. This means that students receive direct instruction from the teacher as well as computer-based resources. Students receive progress reports every 4 ½ weeks and report cards every 9 weeks just as any public school.

#### What is the most rewarding part of working with kids and students at MH?

I love to see the students embrace teaching and learning. I enjoy when they stop me and show me the work that they have completed and are able to enthusiastically share their knowledge. I love the 9 weeks awards programs where we acknowledge students' academic and behavior successes, as well as teacher recognition.



#### What's your favorite activity at MH?

My favorite activity would be the prom for the kids. This is when they can really be a "normal" child!

#### What do you wish your community knew about the children MH helps?

I wish they knew that what we do is ministry. Our children are God's children. What better way to impact a child's life than to plant seeds of

success in each and every one of them? We work to help the students be their best. How does the world know we are Christians? It's by the love we show!

#### Where can we find you if you're not at MH?

With My Love, My Peace and My Joy (my three children) and those four treasures that their families blessed me with who lovingly call me "Gigi"!



First off I want to thank everyone for coming, and for taking time out of your days to come and celebrate this milestone and this achieved goal with me. Even though you all could have been doing other things. Now I want to give A big thank you to everyone for always telling me that, “this is just a stepping stone in life”, and it really is. Cause no one is going to be here forever. Life happens, our feelings change just like the weather. And honestly it has taken me A while to see this for myself but, I really have came A long way. When I first walked through those gates of MHCC and took my first steps on this campus my mindset was “this is just going to be another stupid placement that I don’t get anything out of”. And honestly at first and for A while that’s how it felt, and the reason it felt that way is because I didn’t know how to communicate my needs and wants, I was not able to talk about my life, and I just open to trying or learning new things. I will admit I was A stubborn stuck up teenager who just wanted her way, and when she could not get her way she acted out. And that is exactly what I did for A while. I ran away several times, self harmed a lot, got 10-13ed A few times, and I stayed on precautions so much to the point that I don’t have enough fingers or toes to count. All of this started at the age 12, and I don’t know why but, I am pretty sure it was just A whole bunch of built up anger and pain from all the stress and trauma that I had to suffer through in my past and I had no idea how to express those emotions. Until one day my emotions just took the best of me. I was constantly in and out of hospitals for the same reason and I missed so much that went on in the real world I lost connection with A lot of people I even felt like I lost A connection with myself, I missed A lot of school and had to get held back. And the crazy thing was that all of the hospitalizations felt the same, they did not really help me or make me feel any better. And I kept asking and telling myself, “Why do I keep putting myself through the same situation of being 10-13ed over and over and over again if nothings changing and I am not getting any better”? So one day, I stopped. And I haven’t been 10-13ed since May, 19th 2022. And it don’t even feel like that long. But I have learned a lot with being at MHCC. Like how to communicate my needs and wants and how to express my feelings before they get bad, I learned new coping skills and activities and my favorite of all I learned how to ride A horse. I am planning on carrying these things with me through life, through my future and through whatever life has planned for me next. And hopefully teach it on to someone else. Well with all that being said, thank you all for coming.

Erin

7/6/23

# Erin's Letter

## Measuring success one child at a time.

At Murphy-Harpst, many children come to us at their lowest points. One child, Erin\*, is the oldest of three sisters who have been in the foster care system since 2019. Prior to her arrival at Murphy-Harpst, she had been "1013'd" on multiple occasions; a 1013 form is the authorization to involuntarily commit a person who poses a threat to themselves or others to a crisis stabilization facility. Unfortunately, the team at MH had to initiate another 1013 just after Erin arrived at MHCC. After returning to us, she set a goal not to return to the hospital for a 1013 for a year.

Erin reached that goal in May of being one year free of hospitalizations. She and her support team celebrated in the Cafeteria on campus and Erin was able to pick out some of



**I watched Erin go from not being able to communicate without a pen and paper to being able to advocate and express her feelings openly in her daily life.**

her favorite foods to share: chicken sandwiches, chips, fruit and other treats. Over cake she shared a letter she had written with her team. Later that day she and a few peers were taken skating to continue the celebration. She has celebrated her 16th and 17th birthday here at MHCC and recently won an art competition held on campus. Erin is a very talented artist and writer with a very unique style. She wants to continue her education and continue to create art.

At Murphy-Harpst, we love when we're provided with tangible markers of progress like Erin's letter. We're so proud of her accomplishments and wanted to share the letter with our larger Murphy-Harpst family. Erin's clinical therapist at MHCC, Stormy Steward, sees Erin's letter as a sign of her acceptance of herself and the acknowledgment of how far she has grown in her time at MHCC.

Stormy Steward joined the staff at MHCC a little over two years ago. She received her Master's degree from Jacksonville State University. She chose a career in therapy to make a positive difference in the lives of others and to advocate for those in need while also helping them find their own voices.

"I saw Erin strive to make short- and long-term goals and work hard in therapy as well as on her own to hold herself accountable," says Steward. "I watched Erin go from not being able to communicate without a pen and paper to being able to advocate and express her feelings openly in her daily life. She works hard on expressing her emotions and addressing her needs. This was not something she felt comfortable doing when she first arrived, so seeing her notice how far she has come is a joy."

Steward believes that the unconditional support from the staff here at MHCC helped Erin: "Each and every department played a part in Erin's journey and allowed her the confidence and encouragement to be successful. Her being able to have all her needs met on campus played a major role in her changes. Erin has the consistent support and reminders that she does not have to face her challenges alone, allowing her to feel safe in finding her voice."

Erin's story reminds Steward that her career is one of empathy and compassion while walking with another in their healing journey. It helps her remember the reasons she does what she does: to see kids become successful and happy and to watch them reach goals they set for themselves and find their strength.

*\*All identifying factors, including name, have been changed to protect the identity of the resident.*



*Stormy Steward, Clinical Therapist at Murphy-Harpst.*



**It is a privilege to be able to bear witness to someone's story when they may not have had the chance to tell it before.**

**- Lindy Alexander**

# Tributes

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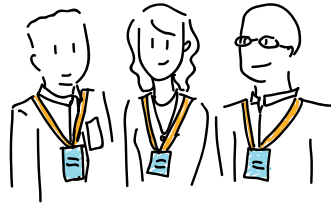
40

counties represented



364

average length of stay



15

clinicians on staff



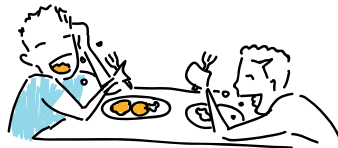
186

group therapy sessions



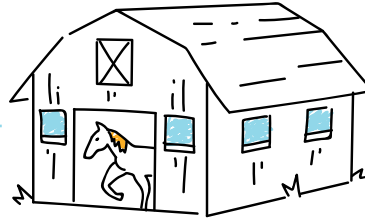
17

kids with jobs in our  
Transitional Living  
Program



64,325

meals served



10

horses on campus - plus  
2 donkeys!



7

GED/high school  
graduates



23

foster families



15

sibling groups placed in  
foster homes



65

children served  
through foster care



37

adoptions and  
reunifications

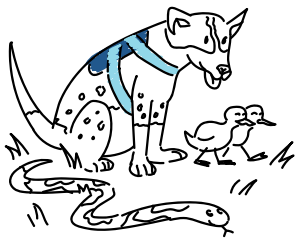






1,945

individual therapy  
sessions



18

animals assisting  
in therapy



129

children served  
on campus



\$2,322,137

raised in fiscal year  
2022-2023



## Evolve Homes Statewide Care

It was recently announced that Georgia had spent approximately \$84 million housing foster children in hotels throughout the State. Not only were these children without a stable living environment, they were not attending school nor were they receiving therapeutic services. As a result of this dilemma, Murphy-Harpst joined the State Department of Family & Children Services and Amerigroup, the primary insurance company for foster children, and developed the Evolve Program. The first home launched in February 2023 in Conyers, Georgia for males. The second home launched in May 2023 for females and a third home is scheduled to open this month. Both homes are located in Augusta, Georgia. We have also signed agreements for a fourth and fifth group home in 2024 and we hope to open more throughout the state.

The Evolve Program places difficult to serve youth in homes in the community. They go to school in the community, work in the community and participate in activities in the community. Each home provides bedrooms for four (4) to five (5) foster children, two (2) sets of House Parents who rotate when they work and when they take time off so that the children are provided with consistency and stability. Each home is supported by a full-time therapist, a casemanager and behavior aides. A current foster child in one of the Evolve homes recently told a State Surveyor that he "finally feels part of a family."



## Summer Fun on Campus

Many of us remember significant "firsts" in our lives: a trip to a sporting event, an amusement park, or the zoo. Most people rely on their parents for these events, but many of the children in our care never have these opportunities due to neglect. That's why we use birthdays and milestones to offer trips and events as rewards and goals.

For many of the children at Murphy-Harpst, these trips represent "firsts." These trips encourage the kids to strive for important goals and milestones. The experiences give children a tangible goal to work toward in their recovery while also offering a chance to participate in many of the activities that others might take for granted.

Over the summer our recreation department facilitated many of these trips. We took students on several trips to celebrate milestones and birthdays, and the kids had a blast. We visited Zoo Atlanta, the CNN Center, and Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta. We enjoyed a Southern Association of Youth Rodeo event in Franklin and visited the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame in Macon. Things got wild at the Wild Animal Safari in Pine Mountain. We also visited Six Flags, took in a Braves Game, and enjoyed the great outdoors at the Blue Heron Nature Preserve in Roswell, and a hiking trip to Berry College.





# Church & Community Partners

In order to provide some of Georgia's most vulnerable children with the healing and positive childhood experiences they deserve, Murphy-Harpst relies on the generous giving of churches, friends, and supporters. Thanks to individuals, foundations, groups, congregations, and corporations, we raised 2.3 million dollars this fiscal year to go directly toward serving the children in our residential programs and foster care. We are incredibly grateful to all who partnered with us to make this year successful!

Here are some of our top supporting churches, foundations, and corporations that helped make the 2022-2023 fiscal year full of memorable experiences for our kids.

## Top 10 Churches by total giving

Commerce First United Methodist Church  
Second Avenue United Methodist Church  
Peachtree Road United Methodist Church  
Dunwoody United Methodist Church  
Northside United Methodist Church

Roswell United Methodist Church  
Newnan First United Methodist Church  
Due West United Methodist Church  
St. James (Atlanta) United Methodist Church  
Northbrook United Methodist Church

## Top 10 Churches by per-member giving

Second Avenue United Methodist Church  
Commerce First United Methodist Church  
Marvin (Barnesville) United Methodist Church  
Vinings United Methodist Church  
Covenant United Methodist Church

Poseyville United Methodist Church  
Whitesburg United Methodist Church  
Tallulah Falls United Methodist Church  
North Decatur United Methodist Church  
Aldora United Methodist Church

## Top 10 Foundation Sponsors

Allan C. & Lelia J. Garden Foundation  
Clark and Ruby Baker Foundation  
Thalia and Michael C. Carlos Foundation, Inc.  
Margaret Finkel Foundation, Inc.  
May P. & Francis L. Abreu Charitable Trust

S. T. and Margaret D. Harris Foundation  
Evelyn & Frank Gordy Foundation  
Florence Maxwell Foundation  
Mary Allen Lindsey Branan Foundation  
Milton M. Ratner Foundation

## Top 10 Corporate Sponsors

John Gallup & Associates, LLC  
Oglethorpe Power Corporation  
B & B Building Services, Inc.  
Foxglove Antiques & Galleries, Inc.  
Goldman, Sachs & Co. Matching Gift Program

Benevity Community Impact Fund  
Northside Drive Liquor Store  
Southern First, LLC  
Walmart Foundation  
Markel Specialty

Please contact our Advancement team at [advancement@murphyharpst.org](mailto:advancement@murphyharpst.org) or 828.387.0752 for more information.

# Heroes for Hope

Heroes for Hope are individual donors who contribute \$1,000 or more in a fiscal year to Murphy-Harpst. Our Heroes for Hope provide a large percentage of all dollars raised each year and help make big dreams come true at Murphy-Harpst.

## Founder's Circle: \$20,000+

Estate of Robert Dodson · Bruce W. Elder · Courtney Hart · Rev. Dr. Coy and Linda Hinton, Jr. · Estate of Dolores Loftin · Malcolm and Musette Powell · Phil and Dee Scott · Estate of Edward M. Wise, Jr. · Nancy Wistrand

## Chairman's Circle: \$15,000 – \$19,999

Gannett and Mary Elizabeth Backus · Jackson L. Bone · Greg and Whitney Watts

## Trustee's Circle: \$10,000 – \$14,999

R. Scott Campbell · Lou Cataland · Chuck and Diane Criscillis · Mary Lou Dennisson · Bill DuPre' · Scott Elder · Doris Folger · Nancy Ann Grace · Anonymous · Bob Haley · Nathaniel and Frances Hansford · Morris Henderson · Dianne Hix · Chip Kelley · Mac and Brenda Nease · Joel and Shelley Ross · George and Betty Turk

## President's Circle: \$5,000 – \$9,999

Charles and Donna Autry · Jeff and Amy Behrhorst · Colin and Elizabeth Bessonette · Philip Brewster · Wes and Ashley Bunkley · Ena Moore Endowment · John C. Ethridge, Jr. · David Haley · David and Linette Heydinger · Ellen H. Horner · Anonymous · Hollis D. Linginfelter · Anonymous · Helen R. Rudd · Diane W. Simmons · Lee and Erin Sjostrom · Kevin Torres · Harold and Lisa Wyatt

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## Hero's Circle: \$1,000 – \$2,499

Dr. C. Daniel Allen, Jr. · Lisa Bales · Nancy D. Barnes · Mr. and Mrs. Brian Beals · James and Donna Bell · Bryan Benfield · Milton and Susan Berry · Rev. Paula D. Billhimer and Dr. David Fernandez · Jonathan Black · Scott and Sheryl Bomar · Jerry and Emily Bullock · Betty Jean Burrell · Nell A. Butler · Robert and Barbara Byard · Blake and Jen Campbell · Martha Carroll · Erin Carter · Ford and Judy Chance · Katherine Chapman · Anonymous · Charlie and Sharon Conway · Raymon H. Cox · Rev. Al and Lynne Cunningham · Ric and Laura Current · Anonymous · Lillian and Rep. George "Buddy" Darden · Mike and Karen Davis · Joel and Becky Davis · Randy and Linda Digby · Charlie Doerlich · Anonymous · Doug English, Sr. · Anonymous · Michael and Shannon Everly · Richard and Charlene Franklin · Thomas Fuller · Jack and Barbara Garrett · Andy and Dana Giacone · Don and Peggy Graab · Dale and Melinda Hajost · Tracy Hall · Penny Hannah · Charlie and Janet Holbrook · Bernice S. Howard · Kay Hudson · Byron and Nancy Hunt · Rev. Dr. Ed and Julia Judy · Charles and Deborah Kendrew · Greg and Karin King · Rev. E. Kenneth Kulp · Louis Landry · Billy and Lisa Laube · Joan Lavin · Dale and Constance Lewis · Valerie U. Luke · Jill N. Mason · Robert S. Mathews · Anne M. McDaniel · Brian and Tammy McElroy · Shane McKnight · Joshua H. McManus · Bill McNeeley · Rev. David and Katherine Moore · Ray Morris · H. Stetser Murphy, Jr. · Jan R. Murphy · Anil and Anita Patel · William Porter Payne, Jr. · Marty Piepoli · Susan Posey · Scott and Jennifer Reiser · James and Miriam Rhyne · Ruth W. Richardson · Kae G. Rivenbark · Susan Rowe · Capt. Stephen and Elise Shankle · Jack and Kelly Smith · Page H. Smith · Patricia C. Smolley · Marjorie P. Squires · Regina and Gary Stephens · Cory Stephens · Blade and Melissa Thompson · Gene and Margaret Tidwell · Anonymous · Gordon and Donna Via · Michael and Holly Villa · James Benjamin Voyles · Ken and Joyce Warren · Jack and Bette Whitley · William W. Whorley · Bob and Carol Winkle-Baldwin





Murphy-Harpst Children's Centers  
740 Fletcher Street  
Cedartown, GA 30125

## On The Horizon

### Murphy-Harpst Turns 100!

In 1924, Ethel Harpst established Harpst Home in Cedartown to care for children in need after one or both of their parents succumbed to typhoid fever, tuberculosis, or influenza. The home expanded during the Great Depression and eventually merged with the Sarah Murphy Home to become what we now know as Murphy-Harpst Children's Centers.

Be on the lookout in the next year for opportunities to serve and celebrate as we commemorate our first century of caring for Georgia's most vulnerable children. We look forward to the next 100 years as we move toward the critical needs of the region's children and youth both in Cedartown and in new ways across the state.

[www.murphyharpst.org](http://www.murphyharpst.org)

