

Success Stories from United Way Agencies

These are true stories from United Way agencies, but names have been changed to protect anonymity.

HATTIESBURG AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY - LETTER FROM HOMEOWNER

“As sure as the stars are out of reach, so was the idea of owning my own home. I dreamed that one day I would, but I just shrugged it off.

Being a single mom working a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. job and with homes outrageously overpriced, owning a home was a figment of my imagination.

Little did I know that angels were about to descend upon Annie Christie Street and present themselves to me and my two little cubs.

An angel’s work is used to accomplish a divine purpose and to exalt the power of God. I ascended from being a renter to a very grateful and happy homeowner. I am thankful to God that I am around such wonderful people who are disguised as angels.

A very special thank you to these angels and the organizations and businesses: Habitat for Humanity, Habitat sponsors and supporters for the monetary donations and supplies, Kathryn Dahmer for pointing me in the right direction, the city of Hattiesburg, Lockhard & Gray Construction, Willmut Gas, First Baptist Church and to the volunteers. You all are awesome.

Do angels really exist? I gladly answer that with a very big ‘yes.’ Angels exist in human form. They exist in reality in the form of friends, family, strangers, co-workers and loved ones. And, most of all, angels make the world a better place.”

THE CARPENTER’S HELPER

As of summer 2008, The Carpenter’s Helper has been working with “Susie” for almost seven months. Susie is a single mother who cares for six children in her household with an income of less than \$1,000 a month. Some of these children were adopted by her due to a death in the family. When The Carpenter’s Helper became aware of her situation, it began to see what it could do to help her housing situation become safer, more sanitary and more secure. Due to problems beyond the client’s control, her house has sustained major damage over the years. The Carpenter’s Helper replaced the roof, some rotten lumber on the outside of the house, all of the windows and doors, the air conditioning system and a hot water heater. This allowed the family to have hot showers for the first time in seven years! Damaged sheetrock is being replaced, and new insulation is being installed also. Kitchen cabinets that are now falling off the walls will be replaced, along with bathroom sinks and tubs.

Executive Director Tom Smith said, “This project would not have been possible without the continued support of United Way. It has been exciting to be a part of a project that has restored a little hope to this family who, in the mother’s own words, ‘felt like all the roads in life kept leading to a big wall’.”

THE CHILDREN’S CENTER FOR COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

“Bradley” was born in October 2003. He was born 15 weeks early at 1 pound and 14 ounces, and he was 13 3/4 inches long. He was immediately intubated at birth and placed on a ventilator. His parents were told that he would not live through the day.

Shortly after birth, his right lung collapsed, and his left lung over expanded. The doctors then discovered he had a grade IV brain bleed. Sixteen days old, he was back to his birth weight, and his head was beginning to swell. He then had hydrocephalus and was transported to University Medical Center to have a VP shunt placed. After the shunt was placed, then came feeding issues. Bradley was finally discharged home on his original due date, 3 months later.

At age 2, Bradley was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. Today, Bradley is 4 years old and weighs 28 pounds. He has had several surgeries since being released from NICU, including a shunt revision, strabismus surgery twice and selective dorsal rhizotomy. For a little boy who was not supposed to make it

past three days, he is doing great! He can now walk with the assistance of a walker. And he can speak four-word sentences. He has had a tremendous fight since he entered this world. It has been full of therapy, doctor visits, therapy, hospital stays and more therapy.

Bradley became a student at The Children’s Center for Communication and Development. Once he was there, he began to have more of a typical child’s life. The center offers a transdisciplinary curriculum, which is - according to his mother - absolutely wonderful for Bradley. It helps him make connections with a “real world approach.”

Bradley’s parents have said, “Our family and I truly thank all of The Children’s Center staff for giving Bradley the beginning foundation he needs to succeed in life. We also give a big ‘thank you’ to United Way for helping with Bradley’s needs as well as the other students at The Children’s Center for Communication and Development.”



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Mary had been married for 30 years when she was admitted to the Domestic Abuse Family Shelter in Hattiesburg. She had endured physical, psychological and sexual abuse spanning almost the entire three decades of the marriage. While struggling through her abusive relationship, she worked the same full-time job for 15 years. She also suffered physical problems.

Nevertheless, these challenges did not stop her from taking it upon herself to raise two grandchildren.



DOMESTIC ABUSE FAMILY SHELTER, INC.

Mary most likely waited to leave her abusive relationship until her own children were grown and had moved away from home. At age 57, she finally got up her courage to leave, and she turned to DAFS for help. When the woman and her grandchildren arrived at the shelter, she was emotionally exhausted, but she took full advantage of the services and resources offered by and through DAFS. While residing at the shelter for several months, she

underwent both group and individual counseling. DAFS was her help and inspiration. The woman rose above her past circumstances and refused to let her physical limitations hold her back. She found a new place to live, despite the fact that she did not qualify for low-income housing, and she was able to maintain her job.

Mary found assistance through several other agencies, such as Pinebelt Association for Families, Southeast Mississippi Legal Services Corp.,

Department of Human Services, The Salvation Army and Pearl River Valley Opportunity.

She grew emotionally, working through issues stemming from the long-term abuse she had experienced. Today, having filed for divorce, she continues to live independently with her two grandchildren.

By the age of three and a half, Tim should have been speaking in 3-4 word phrases and sentences with speech that was usually understood by others. However, Tim's speech was determined to be completely unintelligible and seriously delayed in development. In spite of having average to above average intelligence and a nurturing home environment, nothing that Tim said could be understood. His frustration was growing. Outclient therapy was initiated, and Tim's speech began to improve. However, it was still difficult to understand. At four and a half, he was approaching kindergarten age, and his parents knew that the continued challenges of his severe speech problem soon would become a major issue.

As is often the case, language and academic problems followed Tim's speech difficulties. His fine motor skills and organizational skills were compromised. In order to receive more intensive services, Tim enrolled in the full time program at the USM DuBard School for Language Disorders when he was five years old. He remained there for three years. During that time he acquired additional speech and language skills, as well as reading, writing and math through the intensive, multisensory curriculum of the Association Method.

It was much to Tim's advantage that he received intensive intervention early. By the age of eight, he returned to an area school district. Tim had normal articulation skills and grade level academic skills, and he even became an honor student! Because of the services that United Way of Southeast Mississippi helped provide, he avoided a pattern so frequently seen: speech and language problems that lead to academic frustration and failure.

Tim is currently in high school where he is active in the Beta Club and excels in sports!

Letter from a 13-year-old girl staying at the South Mississippi Children's Center

"My Stay at the Shelter"

It is a fun place to stay. They take you places. You go skating and to the movies. You rent movies. We go to the basketball games. You get store privileges. They take you to the mall and Payless. This place feels just like home. We usually don't do this at home. But sometimes I miss my mom and dad.

Sometimes they let me visit my mom. We had fun with her. The shelter is a place that is warm and safe. Mrs. Sonya Duncan was there for my brother, sister, and me. She was like a mother to me. Mrs. April is a fun person to hang out with. She's like my best friend. She is very cool when you get to know her. Mr. Shane is very nice and funny. But he can't dance. But I still love the staff. So that is why I like the shelter.