



Board of Child Care benefits 1,500 children

BY LINDA WORTHINGTON
UMCONNECTION STAFF

During Advent each year, many United Methodist churches take the opportunity to send offerings to the Board of Child Care to help the many children under the care of the 135-year-old United Methodist agency.

Nearly 1,450 children benefited from a wide variety of services in this region in 2007.

Fifty of them are boys and girls, from 12 to 18, who live in five cottages at the Falling Waters, W. Va., campus. They are children whose lives have been so traumatized or disrupted that the state of West Virginia placed them in the care of the Board of Child Care.

Dwight Watson spends each day from about 3 p.m. (after school) until around 10 p.m. (bed time), in one of the cottages with 10 boys, 12-15 years old. He does whatever the boys need during this time, taking them to off-campus activities, medical services, dinner, playing games, supervising homework, counseling and listening.

"Someone on the staff is with the children 24/7," he said.

Their lives are quite self-contained since the campus includes a school, dining hall and medical clinic continuously staffed by a nurse. When the West Virginia Health and Human Services Department allows it, children may have visits with family members, he said. "It depends on (them) and on the boy's behavior."

Watson believes in the importance and ministry of fostering children, either in a group setting or in a home. He and his wife, the Rev. Patricia Watson, pastor of Salem UMC in Keedysville, have a foster son through another agency. "Helping kids in foster care and providing these services is a very important ministry," he said.

It's a growing ministry as well.

As Maryland considers decreasing group homes and moving more toward individual family services for foster children, Watson sees a growing need for family foster care. It's time for our churches to take that responsibility and step up, he said.

The Board's Women's Auxiliary, organized in 1953, offers help to all the children year round, but especially during holiday seasons. Last year 168 foster families and others received Thanksgiving baskets. And all youth in both residential campuses received Christmas gifts from Auxiliary members, and the opportunity to shop for others.

But the Board of Child Care is far more than residential care for children whose families can no longer provide them support. Last year it provided round-the-clock emergency services for 219 vulnerable youth who arrived at its four emergency shelters in Baltimore, Pasadena and Mt. Airy. These young

people are often runaways, homeless, abused or neglected. Staff respond to their immediate needs then seek ways to help them transition to a more stable environment, either "back home," foster care or a residential program.

At the Tide Point and D.C. Day Care and Early Education centers, parents of young children can leave their children while they go to work, knowing they will not only be safe, but well cared for and developing new skills. Last year the centers served 340 young children.

The agency, licensed in Maryland and the District of Columbia, brings children and potentially adoptive parents together, placing children through national and international adoption agencies in 45 families in 2007. The Board provides the services that make adoptions happen.

"We are eternally grateful to BCC for helping us to adopt our son Jacob, our most precious gift in the world," said Sally Savidge, an adoptive parent.

A new program, the national Ways to Work Program, opened in Baltimore City in March this year. The agency provides low-interest loans of as much as \$4,000 to qualifying working families to help them buy reliable transportation, in order to stay employed.

The Board expects to grant up to 40 loans this year, and expand to 100 such loans by 2010.

This fall, the Board employed three young adults as the beginning of the new Turning the Tide Fellowship Program, an initiative to train and develop young professionals to work in human services agencies and help ensure the future viability of the sector.

The agency is one of the three pilot program sites, undertaken by a partnership with the Alliance for Children and Families. As a committee member with the Alliance, Board of Child Care president Tom Curcio contributed some of the program's start-up funds.

"It's a real passion and interest of mine as an executive to continue to try to find ways to enrich and enhance the workforce in child welfare," Curcio said. "Because our direct service workers are especially important, our continued focus must be on ways to improve so that the children we serve are getting the highest degree of care."

Those who wish to contribute to the Board of Child Care should be aware that "every gift from you, no matter how large or small, benefits not only the children we directly serve, but also the overall well-being of the community," said Curcio.

For more information on how you can help, contact Brent Stouffer, Spiritual Life Director, at 410-922-2100, Ext. 5261.

Contributions can be sent to Board of Child Care, 3300 Gaither Road, Baltimore, MD 21244.

AIDS: 'It's good to be the light'

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bumps."

The healing isn't always physical, it comes in many forms.

"I can see, from a mental wellness perspective, how they really need this break," said Lance Hogue, a nurse practitioner who sits on the Quality of Life Retreats board and also is a person living with HIV. "We let people let their walls down."

"It's a place they can go so they don't feel so alone," said Claudette Williams, who has been volunteering with Quality of Life Retreats for about three years.

Coley agreed. "It helps me to know without a shadow of a doubt that I'm not by myself," he said. "And that's the biggest comfort."

In fact, Quality of Life Retreat board members Coley and Shattuck said it is even more rewarding for them to work the retreats than it was to attend them.

"I'm giving back what's been given to me at the retreats: love, honor and respect," said Shattuck, who also manages the Quality of Life Retreats Web site at www.qualityofliferetreatshiv.org. "I watch people come in with pain and leave with joys they've never imagined having."

"It's good to be the light that says it's going to be OK," Coley said. "Somebody was that light for me."

The demographics of the Quality of Life Retreats may have changed since Frederick District Superintendent, the Rev. Terri Rae Chatten, directed the first one in September 1988, but what she gets from her continued experience with Quality of Life Retreats remains the same.



LESLI BALES-SHERROD

Thomas Rostek twirls Gail Holland as they dance at the Quality of Life retreat in Washington, D.C., Dec. 3.

"It keeps me in touch with the diversity of God's people," Chatten said. "I can live in a bubble, and these retreats have helped me not to do that. I see people, and I see the real struggles. It has made me very conscious that the church isn't just about those of us who sit there on Sunday mornings."

The retreats, Coley said, are "just a glimpse of what the wider picture is" as HIV/AIDS perpetuates. In 2008, Centers for Disease Control estimated that 56,300 people were newly infected in 2006, the most recent year that data are available, according to its Web site. At the December retreat, about two-thirds of the participants were new to Quality of Life Retreats, and five were younger than 25, Coley said.

And so Rostek will keep coming back.

"There's got to be a reason for me to be here - to be a healer and a teacher for those coming down the road, newly diagnosed, because after their diagnosis, there's life," he said. "These retreats have made me the person I am."

Baltimore: Ministries renewed

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churches in each of the city's neighborhoods.

This year, as of Dec. 1, there were 216 murders in Baltimore. While this decline may be a sign of hope, November proved to statistically be one of the deadliest months in the city, pointing to the significant challenge that continues to confront Baltimore.

In April, one of these 216 murders occurred in West Baltimore, down the street from Unity UMC, while a funeral was being conducted in the church. That murder was apparently in retaliation for the murder that had occurred just a few days earlier, of the person being memorialized at the church.

Each of the 216 people counted on the rolls of the dead in the city so far this year represent the sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts of many people. Each of these murders, like those of the three individuals at whose murder sites we prayed last year, represent lost hopes and dreams, lost potential, promise and possibility.

In 2008, we in the Baltimore-Washington Conference have sought to follow through on the commitments we made last December. This year seven new Communities of Shalom, involving nine congrega-

tions, have been commissioned and have begun to implement their action plans for ministry; several people continue to receive grief counseling through Hope Counseling Services; and 46 children and youth affected by death and violence against a family member attended camp this past summer.

One compelling story is that three of the people who attended West River Camp were connected to Unity UMC. The grandmother and her two grandchildren had recently lost their son and father to murder, and she shared of experiencing a bit of healing and hope in the few days afforded them to be away from the violent reminders incumbent in their West Baltimore community.

In 2009, we are committed to strengthening each of these ministries with specific plans to start at least three new Communities of Shalom and to offer camping opportunities for at least 100 city youth next summer. Signs of hope can be found in the ministry that each of us can offer to those who are hurting among us.

The Rev. C. Anthony Hunt is superintendent of the Baltimore Metropolitan District. Read more about Hope for the City on his blog at <http://newurbanministry.blogspot>.



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