



A Bright Start

Celebrating our 6th annual graduating class of Thornwell's four-year-old kindergarten program.

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Thornwell **life**

Building Tomorrow's Families Today

2019 Vol. 2



Defying the Odds.

A new hope. A new start.

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The Rev. Elliot Smith

President

864.938.2100 | elliott.smith@thornwell.org

Mr. Norman Dover

Vice President for Educational Services

864.938.2794 | norman.dover@thornwell.org

Ms. Jill Gibson

Vice President for Mission Advancement

864.938.2739 | jill.gibson@thornwell.org

Mr. Greg Haselden, CPA, CGMA

Vice President for Finance/CFO

864.938.2722 | greg.haselden@thornwell.org

Ms. Sonya O'Neal

Vice President for Programs & Clinical Services

864.938.2701 | sonya.oneal@thornwell.org

Ms. Lindy Scott

Executive Vice President

864.938.2685 | lindy.scott@thornwell.org

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A Bright Start

Last month we celebrated our 6th annual graduating class of Thornwell's four-year-old kindergarten program (4K) – the Class of 2019!

It was also the second graduating class of Thornwell's three year-old (3K) kindergarten, a program which friends like you support so that our Early Head Start families have a warm and welcoming learning environment for their children in the "gap year" between Early Head Start (which serves infants through twos) and 4K.

You can imagine the excited, smiling faces of the 77 children, their proud families, and our teachers and administrative staff who change lives every day.

Early Childhood Director Jenn Adams expressed her gratitude for the support of Early Head Start, SC First Steps, and Thornwell supporters. She shared, "It's not just a day care center we're operating. We come alongside families and their children to nurture, support, and foster life-long change."

As the children and families were leaving the church following graduation, one mom, whose adopted son was in our Early Head Start program as a two-year-old when we opened in 2016, said, "I know I've said it before, but I just love Thornwell. Thornwell has changed our lives!"

A bit of back story will make this all the more special to you. This was a child whom we thought was potentially developmentally delayed when he came to us as a two-year-old because he lagged significantly behind his peers due to severe neglect as an infant. Not any more – VP of Education Norman Dover says, "His development has exploded! It's nothing short of miraculous." He continued, "He is a very intelligent little boy!"



Defying the Odds.

A new hope. A new start.

Graduation is bittersweet for seniors in our residential program. It's a time of celebration and a time of anticipation, a time of reflection, and a time of change.

And thanks to friends like you, high school seniors at Thornwell have the option to transition to our independent living program. As part of this program, they continue to receive housing, support, and love as they attend college classes and join the workforce. Abby and Kourtney, two graduating seniors on campus in Clinton, SC, are especially thankful for this opportunity.

You see, for Abby, Thornwell represents healing, family, and preparation for life after graduation. Since graduating in December, she's been working hard to get herself ready for what's next.

"I've learned how to manage my money and pay bills," she said when sharing about life skills training. "I didn't like it at first, but now I see how much it will help me."

Kourtney has grown into a leader in his cottage, in his workplace, and in his community. "I know the younger kids look up to me, and I take that seriously."

This summer, he's going to work two jobs. He's even been promoted to manager! Thornwell not only gave him the space to be a kid but also the opportunity to grow into the kind of man he wants to be.

"I've learned to make better choices and I understand the way I live matters to others."

Kourtney and Abby both plan to pursue higher education and careers of service. Kourtney wants to be an RN. You would be inspired by his desire to care for others.

Given the chance to spend time with Abby, you would instantly sense she's a nurturer and care giver. She hopes to explore nursing or maybe a vet tech program. She is also an active volunteer at a local nursing home with her cottage family and serves as part of Thornwell's Strengthening Families program.

This summer, all the seniors will soak up a bit more fun before taking these next steps toward adulthood. Your kindness and support allow our kids be kids. They will go Carowinds, frequent the pool, and experience life-changes at camp. As you can imagine, it's special for them to experience the joy life has to offer and not just its brokenness.

With only a 50% graduation rate, high-school dropout rates are 3 times higher for foster youth than other low-income children.

Because you care, Abby and Kourtney have bright futures and will make an impact in this world. What we do to support these kids really matters. Abby shared, "I only have Thornwell, and Thornwell has helped me a lot." Thank you for myriads of ways you support to provide an environment of stability, safety, and love so that they can develop their unique gifts and identities as beloved children of God.



A Helping Hand Made All the Difference.

The Building Families program provides families with an in-home service designed to equip parents and guardians with the tools they need to teach their children appropriate behaviors and improve their overall communication and functioning as a family. A mastered level family specialist works alongside families to develop parenting plans that are centered around each family's unique experience and goals. Often, parents want to do the best that they can for their children, but parenting is never easy. Sometimes, all it takes to transform a family is the helping hand of someone who can recognize and build upon the strengths a family already has with new skills and evidence-based techniques.

A helping hand made all the difference for Manny and Marty, a couple excited for their journey as grandparents who were also tasked with raising two of their grandchildren, Alyssa and Joseph.

At the end of Joseph's first grade year, he began experiencing anxiety at school. He would tell his grandparents that the other kids were bothering him and the teacher wouldn't listen to him. When he started the second grade, Joseph's difficulties in school only escalated. He refused to go, often resorting to violent behavior—pushing furniture, throwing objects, screaming forcefully—to avoid attending. Meetings with the school seemed to offer no solutions.

Marty and Manny were lost. Joseph's anger was spiraling out of control and becoming a threat to the safety of their family. They loved him and wanted more than anything to be able to help him. Then, someone referred them to the Building Families program at Thornwell, and they were immediately encouraged. A family specialist, Elizabeth, could work with their whole family, and she would meet them exactly where they were, in their home where Joseph felt the most comfortable.

Elizabeth began to visit their home twice a week. Other counselors and teachers had never been able to engage Joseph in a way that made him want to participate in activities and exercises, but Elizabeth connected with Joseph almost instantly. He looked forward to her visits, and he joined the rest of his family in playing games, completing activities, and establishing family rules. She taught Marty and Manny how to help Joseph control his anger, and gradually, he started to listen respectfully, follow instructions, and even help around the house.

While they were involved in the Building Families program, Joseph was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. This left Marty and Manny with a whole new set of questions about the best options available for Joseph's

education. Thankfully, they were not alone. Elizabeth attended every meeting that every school had about Joseph's education plan. With her help, Joseph was placed at a new school that was more equipped to meet his individual needs. Now, he's not just attending school; he's looking forward to it!

Manny says that God used Building Families to restore hope and joy to his family. That's what the program hopes to do. Only 39% of dads and 51% of moms feel as though they're doing a good job as a parent. Building Families has the power to change that. With your support, we can continue to give parents the assistance they need to be confident, good moms and dads. With your support, we can continue to give children the type of families they deserve.

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Byron Dendy, Director of Foster Care



Three years ago Thornwell received a call from the Department of Social Services (DSS) regarding residential care on behalf of three siblings in need of a home.

It didn't take us long to realize these same children were just previously at Thornwell. The repeat call meant issues at home escalated and the children's safety was again at risk.

It's hard to be a kid shuffled from place to place. You can imagine the fear of not knowing where you'll lay your head at night, or the risk of being separated from the only other people in this world that understand you. It later became evident the kids needed a new forever family, of their own.

At the same time, a new foster family stepped forward; the teacher of one of the three siblings. She and her family could only take one of the siblings but expressed the strength of their community and willingness to rally for these kids. In a matter of days, the other two were accepted into foster homes within the same family as the teacher.

That's God, right?

Fast forward nearly three years, many court hearings and a lot of love later, and these siblings are being adopted into their forever homes, together forever. This summer, in fact!

Your generosity provides kids just like this sibling group with a safe and loving place to heal. It allows our foster care team to determine the next best step of permanency.

Thornwell's full continuum of care meets families and children wherever they might be on their journey.

To learn more about how you can get involved with foster care, visit [Thornwell.org](https://thornwell.org).



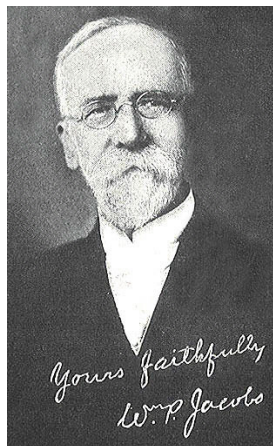
Byron Dendy,
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A Legacy That Lasts

Once just a dream in the heart of a young Presbyterian minister, Dr. William Plumer Jacobs, Thornwell represents a legacy that is changing the future of children and families across South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Dr. Jacob's belief that "God so willed and would, therefore, support the endeavor," represents a boldness that can exist within each of us to make a difference.

What would you do if you had the power to do something remarkable today while making an impact that would last forever, the kind of impact that takes little time and costs you nothing?

If you have any of the following, then you have a great opportunity to leave your own lasting impact:

- **IRA, 401(k) or 403(b) retirement accounts**
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