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# Thornwell **life**

Building Tomorrow's Families Today

2019 Vol. 3



## William and Meneatrice say, "Thank You!"

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Stories of how you give hope and wholeness to children and families



# Thornwell

Building Tomorrow's Families Today

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# William and Meneatrice say, "Thank you."



Because you care so deeply for children, we've taken a bold leap of faith to address child welfare at its root--the family level--to prevent instability and breakdown before it ever happens.

Three years ago, we partnered with the Children's Trust of SC and Gateway Counseling to bring Strengthening Families to South Carolina's Laurens County. On September 3, we began our eighth cycle with 11 new families who will spend the next 14-weeks learning how to love, connect, and communicate with one another.

### You are giving families this new start.

You supported William and Meneatrice with your donations, but they are not just graduates of the program. Today, they also lead and teach Strengthening Families classes.

### Your gift to Thornwell has multiplied!

Your generosity gave William and Meneatrice a chance to learn and grow, and now, they're giving back to others. You may never know the vast magnitude of your kindness.

### Wow, thank you.

As William tells it, "Strengthening Families helped us learn to communicate. When we recognized that everyone in our family has a voice, we began to address some of the issues we were experiencing."

Meneatrice echoes William's sentiment about communication, and she expresses the importance of a family meeting, "It's not just about us telling the kids what to do—it's allowing the kids space to share and be heard, too."



You would have melted at the sight of William and Meneatrice's daughter, who spoke up at their graduation and expressed her excitement over the growth in their family.

**You gave that little girl a voice.**

Your gift of Strengthening Families made such an impact on this family that William and Meneatrice now lead the same classes in which they once participated.

William said, "I immediately bought into the program. The difference Strengthening Families made in our lives inspired us to do more; we want to make a difference by helping others learn what we've learned."

"And we're still in the process of learning and growing," he continued. "It never ends. Each one, teach one."

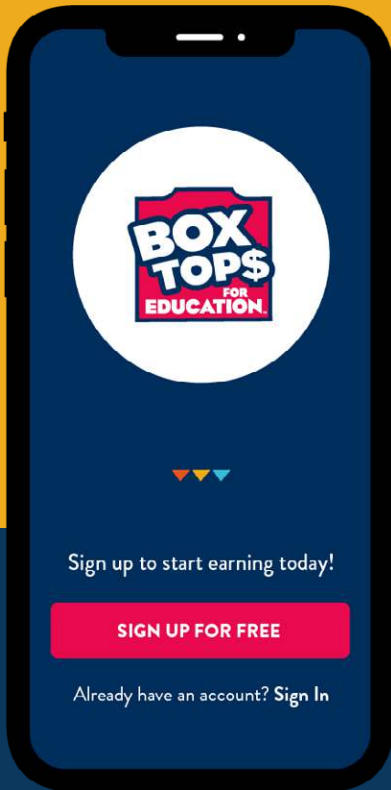
Strengthening Families Site Coordinator Ashley Smith says, "William and Meneatrice are full of life and encouragement. They are incredibly intentional and thoughtful to learn and know everyone's name. It's been so fun to watch their journey."

**You are providing new opportunities for healed families to help families.**

Meneatrice sums it all up, "This program is saving marriages and building stronger families."

**When a family gains access to loving support, resources, and care, it can change just about everything.**

You make this possible!



# Box Tops for Education

You know those little box tops that come on General Mills items at the grocery store? Those seemingly small, insignificant pieces of cardboard or plastic have made quite an impact at Thornwell.

Over the last five years, thoughtful friends like you have helped us earn \$19,999.30!

Wow! Did you know those little squares had such potential to help a ministry like ours?

Supporting children and families with Box Tops for Education has become even easier!

Now, there's no cutting, counting, or mailing. Instead, you can download the app and scan your receipt from the grocery store. It's so easy!

## Just follow these instructions:

Step 1 - Download Box Tops for Education App.

Step 2 - Sign Up for Free.

- Email address and password needed to create an account
- Agree to terms.
- Find School - 29325 (Thornwell)
- Complete Profile (name, birth date, zip code)

Step 3 - Shop and purchase Box Tops products.

Step 4 - Scan your receipt on the Box Tops application.

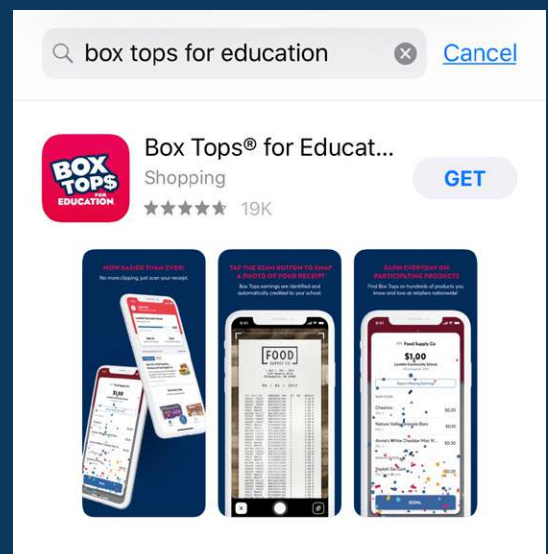
Step 5 - Earn cash for Thornwell.

Your Box Tops help Thornwell's Learning Center provide after-school care and transformative Read Right tutoring and education support. **Thank you for supporting us with Box Tops for Education!**



We know not everyone has a smart phone. Give me a call so we can help.

Sarah Bowers - 864-938-2704





# Momentum

## You're Giving Children A Brighter Future

Your heart would light up at the sight of Thornwell's bustling summer program, Momentum. It's not hard to imagine the campus full of children, running between the learning center, the pool, the playground, and the craft rooms, and being led by loving teachers who aren't afraid to have fun...or lose a sack race to a 7-year-old. Because, after all, children learn and grow as they play.

It's during the hot summer days that children like Lincoln return home not only with a precious, sun-kissed face, but also with education that helps propel them into the future.

**Momentum: The program name says it all – you're helping us build momentum in the lives of children.**

It's important that you know we assess each child when they arrive at Thornwell. We want to understand each child – where they are and where they should be – developmentally, academically, emotionally, and spiritually. It's our goal to meet each child where they are, with an individualized learning plan to fully address their needs.

**You give kids an opportunity to shift their attitudes about school and education.**

Education is a process of self-awareness, acceptance, ownership, and empowerment.

Imagine, then, the potential of a child who is not just passing tests, but also becoming an educated learner.

**Thanks to your generosity, these kids are playing the lead role in their education story.**

Lincoln is no different. He joined Momentum for his third summer, now a rising fifth-grader. This summer, he soared academically – testing out at seventh grade math and reading levels!

Lincoln's teacher, Emily Cowart, says, "He's worked very hard on our Learning Lions team. Lincoln is a dedicated student who is going to change the world one day!"

Program Director Marianne Hollingsworth says, "Our kids respond exceptionally well to the personalized learning approach. We want them to have fun and take steps forward with our hands-on learning plans, not backslide like so many students tend to do in the summer months."

**What a difference you are making in the lives of children!**

At his graduation, Lincoln told us, "I feel really confident going back to school." And confidence builds courage for a brighter future!

Thank you for believing in us. Thank you for caring enough to help kids like Lincoln. **You're really making all the difference!**



# Victim to Victor

There are more than 42,000 children in foster care across South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. These children – Caroline, Constance, and Bryce, to name a few – have lost the only sense of home and family they’ve ever known. And because there aren’t enough foster homes, more than half of these children are shuffled from county to county.

Can you imagine being removed from your home and losing your people, your church, your school, and your life as you know it?

**We can’t. That’s why we’re so thankful for you.**

Your boldness in supporting Foster Care is helping countless children and families find healing and hope.

Derek Clark is no stranger to the foster care system, and he knows the sense of loss all too well.

Derek was abused and neglected as a child, and then abandoned at a psychiatric hospital when he was just five years old.

**His parents never came back for him.**

**He was tested and labeled as mentally retarded, and then entered the foster care system, where he remained for 13 years.** He was shuffled from home to home, and eventually labeled again – this time, as un-adoptable.

**His story didn’t end there, however.**

Today, Derek is a nationally recognized author and motivational speaker. He has written seven books, speaks at events internationally, and is an internet sensation for his viral “Rapping Dad” videos.

He did not let his past or the labels define him. The trauma and abuse he experienced were not the end, but the beginning of his God story.

Derek served as the Keynote Speaker at our Annual Foster Care Conference, and later spent time with our children on campus to share his message of hope. He says, “What happened to me is not my fault, but it is my responsibility to heal.”

During his traumatic young life, he found healing through rapping, through the comfort of animals, and through two selfless foster parents who gave him a chance and refused to give up on him.

A self-proclaimed misfit, he says, “More than anything, I wanted to belong.”

You give so many children like Derek the chance to belong.

**Thank you for believing that every child is worthy of love and a safe home!**



# Support to Succeed

Thornwell Foster Care

## Thornwell's Third Annual Support to Succeed Foster Care Conference



More than 125 people joined us for a day of community-building, training, and fun! Among them were current Thornwell foster parents and prospective foster parents, along with foster parents from other organizations and child welfare professionals - and more than 50 children (bio and foster) who received free childcare!

Guests heard from a diverse group of experts on topics ranging from behavioral support strategies, managing stress, and marriage and fostering, to common loss, bio/foster children relationships, drugs, and trauma.



One family said, **“Foster Care is full of long and hard days. The sessions not only confirmed we’re doing a lot of things right, but also provided new tools to support our family.”**

**Your kindness makes all of this possible.**

Another family said, **“Foster Care can feel lonely. But today was fulfilling and gave us reassurance we’re not alone.”**



We were deeply moved by Trustee Sylvia Collins, who shared her own brave and personal story of growing up in the foster care system. She inspired all in attendance with a message of resiliency and hope, and she expressed her appreciation for the gift of quality foster care.

Because you care so deeply, we get to come alongside these same heroic families who are doing the hard work of loving children from hard places.



You might also choose to extend a “high five” to the organizations who helped us host an incredible event! Special thanks to The Duke Endowment (Charlotte, NC), Fourth Presbyterian Church and Prisma Health (Greenville, SC), Simpsonville First Baptist (Simpsonville, SC), Presbyterian Fellowship of (Fountain Inn, SC), and First Presbyterian Church (Greer, SC).



# YOUR GENEROSITY *builds families.*

*You might be surprised to learn how many grandparents in your community are raising their grandchildren.*

You're helping some of those very same grandparents find healing and hope a second time around.

Just like strong and feisty Joseph, who began living with his grandma at the age of four. His grandma did her best to provide a home and enrolled him in school, but unlike many children his age, he didn't know his numbers or colors. He was behind, and spent every day fighting to overcome the first four years of his life.

## **Life was hard for him.**

Can you imagine living with a mom who was using drugs and drifted in and out of relationships? It was far more than little Joseph could bear, much less to process and comprehend. You can imagine, then, Joseph's struggle to rest at night. He struggled to get up in the mornings and refused to go to school. When he did go, he couldn't focus. This was more than attention deficit; this was circumstantial hardship. Joseph's grandmother was at a loss, but thanks to you, everything changed when a pediatrician recommended that she call Thornwell.

## **Your kindness is what gave Joseph's grandmother that option - Building Families.**

Building Families Specialist Katie Brophy began visiting with Joseph and his grandma. During the initial visits, Joseph made it clear, with choice expletives, that he didn't want anything to do with Katie.

But it wasn't long before Katie learned that Joseph shared a love for grapes, and she began to gain his trust.

Beneath the hard exterior, Joseph didn't feel safe; he was restless and scared.

You might be surprised to learn just how tough Joseph is. He would leave the house and search for his mother at night. As a small and mighty 4-year-old, he felt responsible.

## **You helped him be a kid again.**

Katie taught Joseph's grandmother how to help him feel safe while also implementing some consistent routines. They would meet in the morning before school and again for bedtime in the evenings. Katie stood with his grandma, quite literally in the trenches, to meet Joseph right where he was. Slowly but surely, grandma began earning back the role of parent, and Joseph began responding to the trauma tactics and consistent structure. Once he really felt a sense of safety, he began to sleep... and wake up rested, ready for school. Joseph missed the first 35 days of school, but today, he attends regularly and even earned 'most improved student' in his classroom.

**Building family is a process; that's why we believe it's so important to provide families like Joseph and his grandma aftercare support services one year after they've graduated.**



## Meet Chris

You probably remember the village of people who helped you transition from high school or college to life as an adult. And if you didn't have a village, you recognize how much easier life would have been had you had one. It's not easy and we all need help navigating life. But sadly, many foster kids who reach 18 don't have a support system to guide their transition.

### **Thank you for believing things should be different.**

"I was extremely fortunate when the Department of Social Services took me, my sister, and my two cousins away from my grandmother," said Chris, a student in Thornwell's Independent Living program.

"It was the start of my senior year of high school, and I was one month from my 18th birthday. If the police hadn't come when they did, I would have been too old for care. And that would've changed my life completely."

### **Because you so generously give, Chris has been given a new start.**

"My grandmother wasn't a bad person. Yes, she did yell, insult, curse at me, and hit me and my 19-year-old sister, but she only did that when she got angry. I have attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and I am on the autism spectrum, and my sister is mentally disabled, so we often made her angry. But she never took her anger out on my younger cousins. It wasn't the abuse that caused DSS to take us. It was neglect—my grandmother just wasn't able to take care of the four of us like she was supposed to."

### **You can imagine the impact an established community and education can make in the life of a young man like Chris.**

"A lot of people ask me why I didn't sign myself out, why I stayed in care after I turned 18. It's simple. Why would I leave? I found a support system that provided a place to stay, food, clothes, and so much more. And, most importantly, I received help with the one thing that I was worried about the most: paying for college."

### **Education readiness tools, tutoring, budget training, and therapy are just a few of the incredible resources you provide to young people like Chris.**

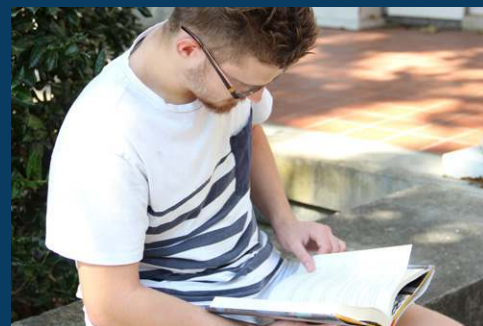
Today, Chris is thriving as a college student who loves to read, play cards, and practice Tae Kwon Do. He's studying journalism and wants to write for a living.

### **Thank you for caring enough to give him this opportunity!**

Chris shared, "Because of all of the people in my life, I have a future bright enough to ensure that the shadows of my past are just that—shadows, without enough weight and substance to stop me from achieving my dreams."

### **Your loving heart has turned a broken story into one of redemption. Chris is using his testimony to do good and encourages all of us to do the same.**

"I've learned to look at things from another's point of view, and I've realized that your past, while it doesn't have to affect your future, does have an impact on how you act in the present. Seeing the kindness of strangers, as well as the cruelty, hatred, and violence that some people have to endure, has made me realize something very important. Humanity has infinite potential, in either direction. A torch can be used to guide us through the darkness and into the light, or it can be used to set the world on fire."





Thornwell:

## Where Love is Never Wasted

"Through the Eyes of Another"

**Hey, friends! My name is Shannon, and I've spent the last three summers living at Thornwell as an intern for volunteers, ministry, and activities.**

I think it would be easy to sit on Thornwell's campus and feel surrounded by the kind of unfathomable pain that renders us all unable to speak, unable to stand, unable to breathe. But, if you can somehow find the courage to sit down in this world of unfathomable pain, compassion may allow you to look without turning away. Once you start to look—to see, to listen—you begin to discover a world that constantly whispers, "It's a good life." In the kitchens and backyards and basketball courts, you discover the way joy permeates this life we have been given, even amidst the realities of trauma, abuse, and neglect.

Thornwell proves to me over and over and over again that there is boundless love in the world. When I walk across campus, the same teenagers whom society has stereotyped negatively yell, "Hey, Miss Shannon!" and run over to give me hugs. They ask about my day, while they are bearing the unfair weight of their own. There is goodness in this place and in its people.

Sometimes, a difficult concept for us to grasp is the temporal nature of foster care, this idea that while

Thornwell is a home, it was only ever meant to be a temporary one. A lot of us are quick to associate "temporary" with a wide-range of negative experiences and emotions. We run away from temporary because the cost-benefit analysis doesn't seem worth it, or we're scared of the inevitable hurt accompanied with goodbye. When you start to think about it, though, that seems like a pretty silly reason to run away from something. Of course it's temporary. Everything is. Temporary doesn't make trauma any less ugly; it doesn't make people any less remarkable.

When I look at Thornwell, I see temporary, and I see good. I also see a lot of hurt people, a lot of hearts longing for community, for acceptance, for love. That could be discouraging, except I also see the elation in moments when they find it. I remember all the moments in my own life when I finally found it, and I can see in their eyes when they find it, too. When someone looks at you and says, with their words or their actions, "I see all of you. I love you, and I'm staying," it changes everything. Here, they have the opportunity to discover that life-altering love. I've seen them find it, and I've seen them give it.

Friends, love is never wasted. It wasn't wasted 2,000 years ago when Jesus shared his last meal with Judas, and it won't be wasted any time you decide to love your neighbor, whether or not you think they love you back.

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*"Establishing a will helps us to ensure our assets aren't left to the state, and creates a way for us to continue to make a difference in lives of children and families who need it the most."*

You are the **beautiful** untold story of a legacy yet to be written...

You're touching hearts with your kindness and moving mountains with your faith. And by the power of your will, you can stand for what matters - a voice for the voiceless and hope for the hopeless. You can continue to fight the good fight and inspire generations with your generosity.

How will you leave your mark?

## Your gift is important to us.

While many may think philanthropy is reserved for a select few, the truth is that every bequest to Thornwell helps us continue our work - because everyone deserves a thriving family.

**We invite you to contact us to learn how you can use your will to help children and families.**

**Jill Gibson**  
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