Opening the door to the future

By Maria Chavez Wilcox
Childhaven President

A few weeks ago, I had the honor of delivering the commencement address to the graduates of Holy Names Academy. As I looked at the faces of the excited new high school grads and their very proud families, I recognized that the work we are doing in Childhaven classrooms today is laying the foundation for the future graduation day for our children and families.

Research proves that a solid early childhood education improves a child’s chances of success in school — and beyond. Studies link high quality early learning with lower rates of grade repetition, juvenile crime and teen pregnancy, along with higher rates of graduation as well as higher wages and employment rates as adults.

For children who have been abused and neglected, the education and therapy Childhaven provides is even more essential, not only to prepare them for school but to help heal the physical, psychological and emotional damage caused by their early trauma.

I quoted physician and author Deepak Chopra when I spoke at the Holy Names graduation: “There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

With your help, Childhaven is opening the door to the future for hundreds of children every year.

Guiding parents through the kindergarten transition

Two years ago, on her daughter’s first day of kindergarten, Jeniffer Trice was in the hospital giving birth to her youngest of three boys. A single mom with off-and-on support from her children’s two fathers, she felt overwhelmed.

It pained her not to be there for Tytasia. She knew the adjustment to one teacher and two dozen classmates would be tough compared to the one-to-three teacher-student ratio in her prekindergarten class at Childhaven.

It’s a shock to the system that all Childhaven kids go through when they move on to kindergarten. Childhaven has always worked hard to prepare kids for their big leap. The transition can be just as hard on parents — so many details to tend to, forms to fill out, new faces.

The Seahawks and Childhaven team up on Nov. 4

Mark your calendar for Monday, Nov. 4, for the 12th annual Childhaven Dinner and Auction. Once again, we’re partnering with the Seattle Seahawks to bring you an elegant evening of fabulous auction items, delicious food and many surprises. It’s a great way to support the mission of Childhaven while having a wonderful time. Visit our website to get up-to-the-minute news on auction items and registration.

“The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering.” — Benjamin Spock
A little time makes a big difference

Nancy Kritzer has witnessed amazing transformations in the two years she’s been volunteering in an infant classroom at Childhaven. When they first arrive, babies cry a lot and they’re hard to soothe. Some are fidgety, others withdrawn. They might struggle with the basics of cooing, crawling and playing.

Over time, those telltale signs of abuse and neglect fade to bright smiles and bubbly laughter as children warm up to her. She loves holding them, singing to them, rocking them to sleep. Every moment she spends with a child makes a huge difference.

“Our children thrive from the additional smiles, hugs and praise that the volunteers give,” says Program Operations Manager Julia Aman.

Childhaven classroom volunteers spend at least one two-hour stretch in a classroom each week for a minimum of six months. Their steady presence adds to the stable, nurturing environment that helps children thrive.

More helping hands are needed in our South King County branches. To volunteer in Auburn, call 253-833-5908. To volunteer in Burien, call 206-248-4903.
Our case managers walk parents through the process, and now a new program being piloted at our Broadway branch this summer and fall will give parents even more support.

From July to October, weekly Kids in Transition to School (KITS) workshops will focus on practical things like setting consistent bedtime routines well before kindergarten starts, and how to communicate effectively with teachers and school staff.

Parents will get a chance to role play situations where a teacher or principal upsets them. Learning how to rein in emotions and be respectful about sorting out differences models important coping skills for children.

The idea to enhance the kindergarten transition support we give parents came from our Parent Advisory Committee. (See a related article on this page.) We reworked elements of the Oregon Social Learning Center's KITS curriculum, in partnership with Frontiers of Innovation at Harvard's Center on the Developing Child.

Jeniffer is much less anxious now that her son Nehemiah is gearing up for kindergarten. He knows all his letters and can write his name. She's hoping the KITS workshops will bolster her homework-helping and story-time skills.

She's fully embracing the philosophy that guides KITS, as Parenting Skills Program Manager Nell Robinson puts it: “As your child graduates, so do you.”

When children first come to Childhaven, it can be a scary, unsettling experience for a parent. Amid a sea of unfamiliar faces, there are so many questions that it can be hard to know which ones to ask first.

There’s a handbook that explains what Childhaven is all about, and thanks to the insights of a group of parents whose children have graduated from Childhaven, it's now much easier to understand than it was a few years ago.

Revising Childhaven's handbook was one of the first tasks our Parent Advisory Committee took on when it formed back in 2010. Now they’re producing a parent orientation video that will answer even more questions.

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Childhaven listens and learns from parents

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Home visits build relationships to benefit children

Children thrive on the warm hugs, one-to-one attention and consistent routines at Childhaven. Life can be more complicated at home. Sibling rivalries flare up. Family stresses mount. Maybe mom or dad suffered childhood abuse and never had any strong role models to teach them how to parent.

It’s important for kids to feel safe and nurtured at home just like they do when they’re at Childhaven. That’s where home visitors like Kelly Emery come in.

Kelly levels with moms, dads and other caregivers about the highs and lows of parenting. She models positive ways to react when a child ignores them or throws a tantrum.

“Sometimes it’s just helping the parent recognize that being a mom or dad is difficult. Not having all the answers is normal,” says Kelly who, like other home visitors, meets with families at least once a month, sometimes more often.

Danielle Goodwin-Encinas remembers feeling anxious about her first home visits with Kelly. She had lost custody of her kids before, and she feared it might happen again if she didn’t seem like the perfect mom.

“Kelly really accepted me for me,” Danielle says. “She built a relationship. She wasn’t coming in and telling me what to do or being judgmental.”

It took Danielle awhile to admit she was struggling to bond with her daughter. She thought it might raise a red flag that she was in over her head. Instead, Kelly encouraged her to visit her daughter’s classroom to see how Naomi was thriving.

“They gave me a new vision of my daughter and helped me build that bond,” Danielle said. Those breakthroughs inspire parents’ hope in their ability to provide calm guidance and a stable and joyful home.

Wei’re all here for the kiddos,” Kelly says. “But to help change the child’s life and make a better future for them, you need to change the parents as well.”

Our annual boxed lunch event in May generated $35,000 for Childhaven — 30 percent more than last year’s event. We are grateful to the 223 companies who ordered 3,400 Gretchen’s Shoebox Express lunches for the one-day dining fundraiser. We also owe a big thank-you to more than 100 volunteers and staff members who traveled over 400 miles to deliver the tasty treats.

Sorry you missed out? Check our website next spring and sign on to join us.

Thank you for chowing down for Childhaven!
Seth

Some children are constantly overflowing fountains of energy who resist any attempts to rein them in. Seth was one of those kids, but so out of control, his teachers at Childhaven feared for his safety.

He would leap up on tables and windowsills, hurling curse words and insults at anyone in earshot. He would ball up his fists as he snatched toys from other kids.

Nothing his teachers did to try to calm him worked — until they gave him a special paper bag. “OK, Seth, put all those words in that paper bag and throw it away,” a teacher said.

Something clicked. Slowly but surely, he quit swearing. He started listening when his teachers would say, “Use your words. Ask for a hug if you need one.” When he spotted a car or truck he wanted to play with, he would ask to take a turn.

He even started trying to comfort his teachers when they were having a tough time with a child. He would say: “I care about you. Are you OK?”

As kindergarten neared, he learned his letters and numbers. He could sit through stories at circle time and beamed proud smiles when he mastered the monkey bars. His teachers were sad to see him go. “It was a blessing to have him — to see him grow.”

Like any 4-year-old, Seth would still misbehave sometimes. But when he realized he had done something to hurt a friend, he would approach them and ask, “How do you feel? What can I do to make you feel better?”
Childhaven graduate now shines in elementary school

The Second Century Campaign ensures early learning successes like Ismael’s now and for decades to come

Two years ago, we shared Ismael’s story with HavenSent newsletter readers, telling you about the struggles that faced the little boy and his grandparents after his early abuse. Their sad story became a happy one after they came to Childhaven, where Ismael healed and his grandparents learned how to help him manage his often uncontrollable anger and violent acting-out.

Today, Ismael has just completed the first grade where he is “an outgoing, smart and positive little boy,” according to his grandmother, Lorrie Henry, who now has custody of the boy and his sisters.

Earlier this year, Lorrie shared their story at Childhaven’s annual luncheon fundraiser, describing Ismael as kind, thoughtful and loving. “At Childhaven, Ismael learned social skills along with his ABCs,” Lorrie told luncheon guests. “And by the time he graduated in 2011, he was ready to enter kindergarten — academically, socially and emotionally. Thanks to Childhaven, Ismael now has a life that is full of joy and a future ahead of him that is full of promise.”

The transition to a successful life in school — and beyond — is at the core of Childhaven’s mission. And, it’s what drives the Second Century Campaign.

“ ‘This campaign is not traditional. We’re not building a new building. But we are laying the foundation for countless success stories like Ismael’s over our next hundred years,’ explains Childhaven President Maria Chavez Wilcox.

Your investment the campaign will help us reach our goal of raising $20 million by the end of the year 2017. For all the children like Ismael who are success stories just waiting to happen, please consider making a gift.

second century CAMPAIGN

The Second Century Campaign is a forward-thinking, thorough and ambitious five-year initiative to diversify and stabilize Childhaven’s sources of revenue and further secure our mission for another century.

To learn more about how you can become involved, please contact: Maria Chavez Wilcox President mariacw@childhaven.org 206.957.4802 Dawn Griffey Petricciani VP – Leadership Gifts dawng@childhaven.org 206.957.4808

Our vision is a community where child abuse and neglect no longer exist.

Our mission is to forever end the cycle of child abuse and neglect by healing its youngest victims with scientifically proven therapeutic care, preparing them to be successful learners, supporting their families, and laying the foundation for lifelong loving relationships.

Childhaven is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

To respect the privacy of the children and families we serve, we may change their names in articles, hide or obscure their faces in photographs, or use stock photos.