‘It’s OK. You’re safe. You’re at Childhaven.’

By Maria Chavez Wilcox
Childhaven President

One of our teachers was putting a 3-year-old down for her afternoon nap recently. As the little girl held her dolly closely and laid both their heads upon the pillow, she snuggled in and whispered softly to her baby doll, “It’s OK. You’re safe. You’re at Childhaven.”

Children treat their precious things like they are treated. Given love and nurturing care, they give the same back — and not just to their dolls. They grow into confident and compassionate adults who can then care well for their own children.

That’s why Childhaven’s mission and vision are not solely focused on healing children today, but also on ending child abuse and neglect forever by breaking its generational cycle.

It’s also why you, the generous supporters of our work, reap such a meaningful and lasting return on your investment in Childhaven. Your gifts make an immediate impact on the lives of the babies, toddlers and preschoolers in our care. And as today’s children grow and thrive, your support continues to make a difference for generations to come.

At nap time, or any time when I witness the profound impact of Childhaven’s work with children, I am reminded of a quote by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter: “Gratitude is one of the least articulate of the emotions, especially when it is deep.” From the deepest part of my heart, thank you for caring about Childhaven.

Breaking the cycle

Helping families start over, heal and thrive

Children repeat what they see. So do parents.

Bryann Ballard grew up with a stepfather who abused drugs and alcohol. The same bad habits chased her. She was addicted to meth by age 15, tried to get clean for years, but kept making the same mistakes — over and over.

Substance abuse can be a vicious cycle. It’s a leading cause of child developmental issues, abuse and neglect — and the reason many children come to Childhaven.

Here, we nurture the children in our care so they can heal, learn and grow. And we support parents like Bryann, so they can embrace their role in breaking the cycle before it takes a toll on another generation.

Bryann lost custody of her first child because of drug abuse, and was determined to get clean the second time around. She was in treatment and making steady progress when a public health nurse referred her baby daughter, Lucy, to Childhaven.

Like many drug-affected infants, Lucy got easily over stimulated and had a hard time calming down when she was upset. In our infant room, she started to settle down with greater ease.

Bryann became involved with Childhaven’s parent group, helping to create an orientation manual for new families. It felt reassuring to connect with others in similar situations, moms and dads who were just as determined as she was to do right by their children.

“We call a child’s mind ‘small’ simply by habit; perhaps it is larger than ours is, for it can take in almost anything without effort.” — Christopher Morley
Restored funding opens the door to five more classrooms of kids

State legislators stepped up for the children of Childhaven earlier this year and voted to restore funding that had been cut from federal sources. “Childhaven supporters — including those in the Washington State Legislature — understand the far-reaching wisdom of investing in early childhood education, especially for children who have suffered abuse and neglect,” says Childhaven President Maria Chavez Wilcox.

“We are grateful to the Legislature and to all our loyal donors and supporters for ensuring that we can heal the kids who need our help the most.”

The restored funding opened the doors of five additional classrooms, allowing us to provide critical childhood trauma treatment to nearly 50 additional children.

“Government is one of several important and diversified streams of funding that keep Childhaven strong,” Maria explains. “Because we have such unwavering support from our generous donors, Childhaven has a stable and growing financial base to fuel our mission.”

Claudia Forero Acevedo
Supervisor, Broadway branch

I’ve spent most of my 14 years at Childhaven as a teacher, focusing on the 10 kids in my classroom. I love sharing smiles and hugs and laughter with 2-year-olds and 3-year-olds. It’s fun and rewarding.

Two years ago, when I became program supervisor at our Broadway branch, I knew I would miss being in the classroom — reading to my children at circle time, playing games on the floor, soothing them to sleep at naptime.

I do miss it. But now instead of 10 kids, I have 96! I get to visit classrooms — all of them! — all the time.

Before, my job was to nurture the children in my care, to make them feel safe and loved and happy. Now, my job is to give teachers the support they need to help every child thrive.

Sometimes it takes a creative approach, like when we set up obstacle courses for kids age 3 to 5, giving them a chance to crawl through tunnels, take turns waiting, and move their bodies around in a way that not only calms them down but also helps with cognitive development.

The kids loved it! And teachers said some children started to shake off aggressive behaviors like hitting or kicking when they got angry. They started talking about their feelings and solving problems with their teachers and classmates.

I will always be a teacher at heart — and seize every chance I get to help every teacher and every child at Childhaven succeed.

Visit us at our new home on the ’net

Childhaven is changing lives today and for generations, thanks to the support of our generous community. Now, we’re showcasing that impact more powerfully than ever in our brand new website. Please take a few minutes to browse Childhaven.org to learn more about what your investment is accomplishing!
In home visits, Bryann has learned how to give short time-outs to Lucy, who’s now 3, and how to avoid over-explaining — a pitfall that can overwhelm any child.

"Bryann is amazing," says Kelly Emery, her Childhaven home visitor. "Every step of the way, she’s had a goal. When she was in treatment, she got clean, then she found housing, then a job so she could support Lucy all on her own."

Lucy has made huge strides right alongside her mom. Today, she’s a strong-willed, expressive, smiley little girl who’s still figuring out how to share and cooperate at school — and she loves her mama more than anyone else in the world.

“I feel so blessed,” Bryann says. “Childhaven has been a life-saver.”

Parents who hurt their children aren’t all monsters. I know. I was one of them.

The physical abuse I inflicted on my two sons, Sean and Mac, was bad enough. But the emotional abuse was even worse. After each incident, I swore I’d never do it again. But I did, even though I loved my children with all my heart.

But my head was another story. I was unknowingly living with undiagnosed manic depression. The fact that I’d been physically and emotionally abused as a child myself didn’t help.

Because of what I put my kids through, I have compassion for other parents who do the same. I’m not a Pollyanna. I know that there are real monsters who do unforgivable things to children. But I believe the majority of parents truly want to love and care for their kids. Mental illness, addiction or poor parenting role models stand in the way.

I want other parents to know that there is hope for them, too, if they are willing to face their demons and seek out the help that’s available to them.
Micah

Most times, when a child is crying or having a tantrum, a hug is all it takes to smooth things out. Not for Micah. When he came to Childhaven, the 1-year-old would recoil any time someone offered him a hug.

“He thought you were going to hit him,” one of his teachers recalls.

His mom was rough with him at home. She yelled a lot. So, Micah was scared of the world. He didn’t smile or laugh. The only ways he could communicate were yelling and crying. He would push, hit and try to bite other kids.

“He was the bull in our china shop,” the teacher says. “It was like he was always on the defensive.”

His classmates steered clear of him. When he’d hit someone, his teachers would take him aside and say, “Let’s check with your friend and see if he’s OK.”

Teachers slowly got through to Micah with their calm and consistent responses to his aggression. He began gravitating toward groups, sitting down and listening at circle time. He finally started resting at naptime.

“You could see he understood what you were trying to tell him,” a teacher says. “He was beginning to learn other ways to deal with situations and people that weren’t violent.”

By the time he left Childhaven, Micah wasn’t afraid of hugs anymore. He would give them as warmly as he’d receive them.
Ready for kindergarten — with a capital R!

Jennifer Trice had no doubt her son was ready to make the leap to kindergarten when school started last fall. Nehemiah had learned all his letters at Childhaven, was writing his name (Nemo for short) and getting along famously with his teachers and classmates.

Still, Jennifer was nervous at first. Would Nemo continue to thrive in the hustle and bustle of one teacher minding more than 20 kids — compared to the one-to-five adult-to-child ratio in his pre-K classroom at Childhaven?

The smile on Nemo’s face every time he came home and quickly finished his homework answered that question with a resounding YES!

At the start of the year, Nemo needed some special education services for speech delays, along with support for reading and math. Soon, he started adding and subtracting with ease. His vocabulary soared. By the end of the year, he was reading on a second-grade level and no longer needed special ed services.

A study by University of Washington school psychology graduate student Kate Daderko found that, on average, Childhaven graduates did just as well as their non-Childhaven peers on kindergarten readiness indicators — recognizing letters and numbers and social skills like cooperating and showing empathy.

Another positive finding: Childhaven kids remained on track with their social skills throughout the school year, maintaining scores in the average range by the end of kindergarten.

“It’s important for us to be researching this,” Daderko adds, “because we want to set kids up for success in school when they leave Childhaven — so we can have a bunch of Nemos.”

Celebrate Childhaven with our Super Bowl champs

We are thrilled that our very own 2014 Super Bowl champions will be joining us for Childhaven’s 13th Annual Dinner and Auction Monday, Nov. 10.

The Seahawks have been one of our strongest partners for more than a decade, helping us raise millions of dollars by lending their name and support to our auctions. Year after year, players, coaches, staff, their families and friends take part in the event and contribute hot-ticket items, like luxury box seats, trips on the team plane and VIP game experiences.

Join us on Nov. 10, and be a Childhaven champion — just like our Hawks!
A legacy of their own

The Greater Seattle Service League establishes an endowment for Childhaven

Thirty-five years ago, a group of college softball players and a few of their friends decided that college graduation and a losing sports season should not stand in the way of forever friendship. The young women formed the Greater Seattle Service League and dedicated their charitable mission to supporting Childhaven.

The League's first gift back in 1979 paid for blackout shades to ease naptime in Childhaven classrooms. Through the years, League members have generously supported our library, ongoing operating expenses and many special projects as donors and volunteers.

Then, following the death of a founding member a few years ago, the group made a decision that would ensure a lasting legacy for both the League and Childhaven: They established an endowment.

“It was a small leap to invest our love for both Childhaven and for one another into a perpetual form of support and commemoration,” says League President Susan Formo.

An endowment is a permanent investment account that grows through earned interest. By drawing out just a small percentage of the fund’s income each year, Childhaven can count on its endowment as a vital source of diversified and stable revenues.

While the League's members will one day pass on, they take comfort in knowing that their support for Childhaven will live on.

“Regardless of the economic times, an endowment makes it possible for Childhaven to continue to help abused and neglected children for years to come,” Susan says. “That's reassuring to our members who love Childhaven so much. And it's wonderful to know that the League's legacy will continue to inspire others to support the Childhaven mission.”

Look how far you’ve brought us!

We are getting closer and closer to our Second Century Campaign goal! Please help us build brighter futures for abused and neglected children by investing in the campaign today. Donate online at Childhaven.org or contact Dawn Griffey Petricciani at 206.957.4808 or dawng@childhaven.org to learn more about how you can get involved.

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.