



# Challenges

## The Importance of a Father's Influence

**A**s I prepare this message on Father's Day, I think about how we cannot overstate the importance of a father in the lives of the youths we serve. Yet, sadly, for so many of them their fathers have been a less-than-affirming influence on their lives.

Why is that? There are many reasons, but the one most often encountered is that many fathers are absent from their children's lives—divorce, incarceration, or just plain abandonment heads the list. This point was illustrated the other day, when one of the young men here at the Wilderness Center wished me a happy Father's Day. After thanking him for the honor, I asked, "Where is your natural father?"

"Somewhere in New York," he responded. Where in New York, he did not know.

Sadly, many fathers just don't care, are too involved in their work, or are willing to let their spouse (or ex-spouse) do the parenting. Still others embrace negative values through involvement in drugs, alcohol, or illegal activity. Regardless of the reason, without the steady, sustaining influence of a father, these young people's

lives are set adrift. And, when they come to us for help, the role of "father" becomes a major responsibility and challenge.

Fathers teach, guide, direct, and protect among many other qualities that demonstrate commitment, involvement, and caring. But what was missing in the youth's life before coming into care becomes a real opportunity for our counselors and foster parents.

They take on the role readily, filling the gaps and forming the relationships that are essential to building trust. The task may be as simple as teaching how to throw a baseball or cast a fishing line or as difficult as remaining steadfast in a decision that is right, despite angry protests to the contrary.

The impact can be truly powerful. Our staff and foster parents, like true fathers, do what is best for the child. They are there to take advantage of the opportunity to listen and to help when it is most needed or wanted.

Fathers embrace values that become the building blocks of successful lives. At the Wilderness Center we call those building blocks pillars: Respect,

Responsibility, Trust, Effort and Courage. Like good fathers, our staff members find opportunities to teach and encourage the demonstration of these values in everyday activities.

Fathers defend what is right and demonstrate through their actions commitment to family, employer, community and country. To us at TresslerCare, Father's Day is more than just a day to remember Dad. It is an opportunity to say "thank you" to all those who fulfill the role of father to those most in need of one.

**George Eckenrode**

*Executive Director, TresslerCare  
Wilderness Center*

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LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

# TRESSLERCARE NORTHWEST REGION

## Dedicated Staff Helps Program Grow

At age 45, Rod Burlingame made a career change that took him from working with severely disabled adults to working with at-risk youth.

There are similarities between the groups, he says, in terms of dealing with multiple issues. “But, the youth have more potential. The die has not been cast yet for many of them and the potential to bring about change is more dramatic.”

The clinical director for TresslerCare Northwest Region, he had spent 20 years working in vocational rehabilitation for a social service agency, when he took a job heading up a one-time summer program for TresslerCare that would eventually evolve into the Regional Aftercare and Prevention Program.

“We were initially funded to serve five youths,” he says of the home-based treatment program developed to prevent costly

out-of-home residential placements and to provide structure and support to youths returning to the community following placement.

Under Burlingame’s leadership, the DuBois, Pa.-based program has grown in the six years since that time to offer a specialized form of home-based treatment specifically for youths who exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior, Independent Living Skills Program, and DuBois Day Treatment. In addition, TresslerCare Northwest Region sponsors a Boy Scout Venturing Crew in collaboration with a Christian coffee house in DuBois.

Serving Jefferson, Clearfield, Clarion, and Indiana counties, Burlingame and his staff of nine have been successful where some competitors have found it hard to survive. “What has happened is that some agencies haven’t been able to make a go of it here in a

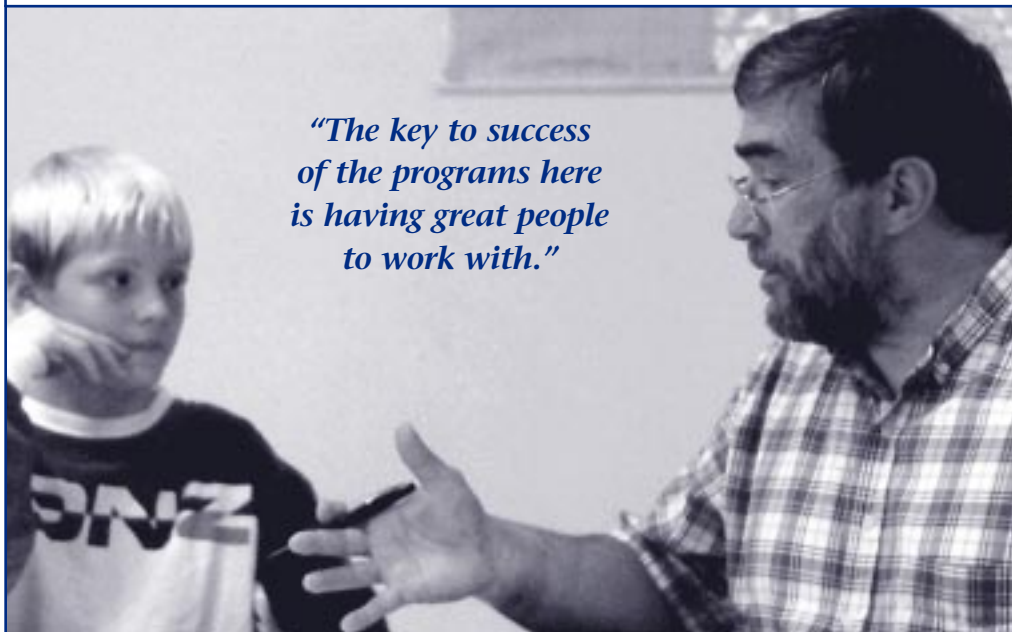
rural area,” he explains. “I think maybe they had a larger program model. Our programs are priced appropriately and we are careful to manage our cost. We are very flexible and adaptable.”

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Burlingame, a licensed professional counselor with a master’s degree in counseling psychology, and his staff have also been successful because of their ability to develop good working relationships with juvenile probation and children and youth services staff.

“We’ve worked with a number of the same staff and we have an understanding of their expectations,” he says. “We are very willing to modify. Each year, we’ve done things a little bit differently to better address their needs.”

Although referral relationships are a big part of TresslerCare Northwest Region’s success, Burlingame points to his staff as the key reason for their achievements. “The key to success of the programs here is having great people to work with,” he admits. “We have very little turnover. The staff is a group of very dedicated and talented folks.”



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## Teens Mark Turning Point with Graduation

On June 4, amid the brightly colored decorations and warm congratulations offered by friends and family, three high school graduates proudly accepted their well-earned place in the limelight during a party thrown in their honor at the offices of TresslerCare Foster Care.

Elizabeth “Lizz” Geltz, 18, Hosea Twiggs, 17, and Jason Wolfe, 18, members of TresslerCare’s foster care program, stood before everyone looking like ordinary graduates, but knowing inside that their journey to this point took a much different path from what most children their age take.

Overcoming a challenging childhood is one of Elizabeth Geltz’ many accomplishments. A recent graduate of Northeastern High School in York, Geltz participated in several extracurricular activities, including playing the violin for six years. She performed in the pit orchestra for two school musicals

and with the Hershey Symphony for two years.

Geltz, who counts art among her talents, spent two years as a member of the National Honor Arts Society and received an award from the society at graduation. She also was the recipient of an U.S. Education Improvement award. With acceptance to the Pennsylvania School of Arts and Design in Lancaster in one hand and an interest in massage therapy in the other, Geltz is currently deciding which interest to follow this fall.

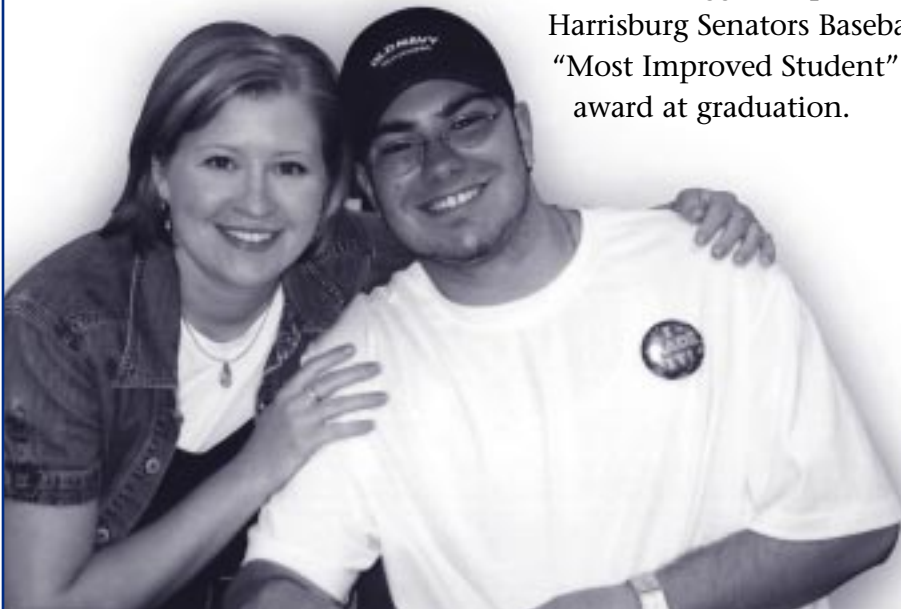
A graduate of TresslerCare Wilderness Center, Hosea Twiggs’ talents appeared on the track while a student at John Harris High School, Harrisburg. The recent high school graduate participated on the track team and excelled in relay and short-distance races. A student who has overcome a tough road by always meeting the challenges life threw at him, Twiggs accepted the Harrisburg Senators Baseball Club’s “Most Improved Student” award at graduation.



With plans to enter barber school this fall, Twiggs will remain with his foster family until he completes school, continuing to draw on the support system he has established with them and TresslerCare.

Jason Wolfe, a graduate of West York High, loves sports and enjoyed swimming and playing football before an injury put him on the sidelines for the remainder of his high-school career. But it is his relationship with his foster mother and experiences with TresslerCare that have given him a positive outlook on life and something to look forward to, he says. Interested in auto mechanics, Wolfe will begin an apprenticeship program this fall in the hopes of becoming a diesel mechanic.

In addition, Samuel Rannels III, 18, a graduate of TresslerCare Wilderness Center, graduated from Susquehanna Township High School. At six feet, nine inches, Sam was co-captain and a strong player of the Susquehanna Township High School varsity basketball team until he was sidelined mid-season with a broken clavicle.



## Baseball Touches Base with the Youth



Playing baseball with a big league ball player, even if it's a former big-leaguer, is "pretty cool."

That was the consensus of children and teens from TresslerCare's foster care, in-home, and Wilderness School programs, who played ball on a hot afternoon in June under the tutelage of former Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher Dock Ellis.

The game was held at the Doubleday Country Inn and Farm near Landisburg, Perry County. The event is becoming an annual activity for youths served by TresslerCare.

Wearing old-fashioned baseball uniforms, the youths were divided into two teams, with Ellis coaching first base for both teams.

"It's great getting out to play and have fun," said Jason, a foster youth. "It's pretty cool" rubbing elbows with Ellis. Another youth, a resident of the TresslerCare Wilderness Center for adjudicated delinquent or dependent boys, said

he enjoyed seeing that Dock Ellis "was just a regular guy, like us."

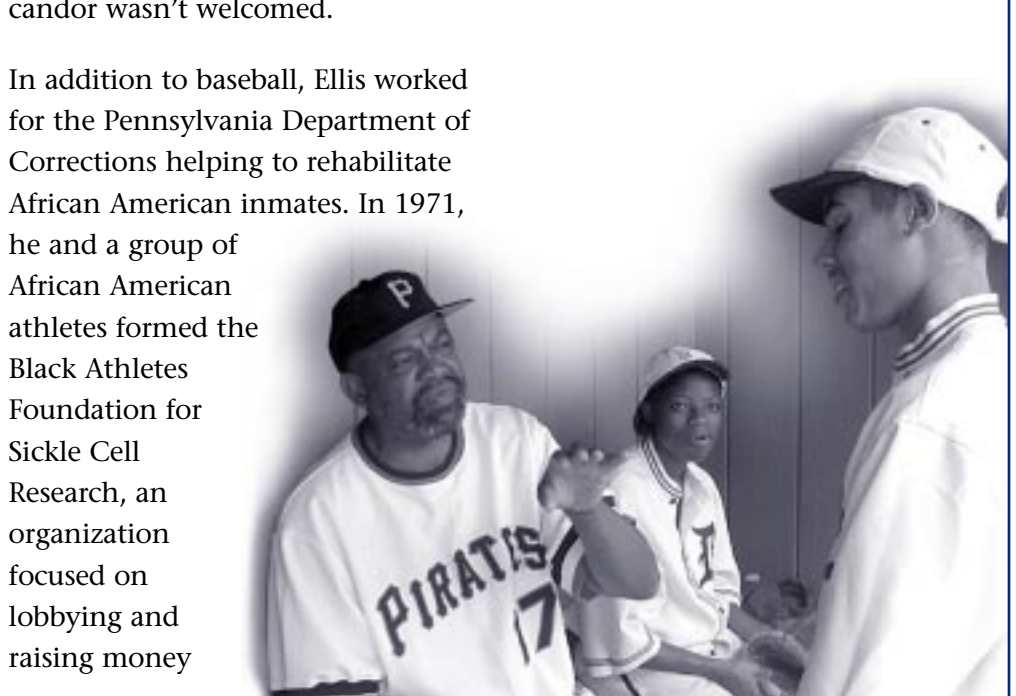
While he may have come across as down to earth to the TresslerCare youths, Ellis made sure his life both within and outside baseball has counted. While his 12-year major league baseball career (1968-1979) had its sometimes-controversial moments, he took the risks of speaking out for African American athletes at a time when such candor wasn't welcomed.

In addition to baseball, Ellis worked for the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections helping to rehabilitate African American inmates. In 1971, he and a group of African American athletes formed the Black Athletes Foundation for Sickle Cell Research, an organization focused on lobbying and raising money

for research and treatment of sickle cell anemia.

Ellis spent the majority of his Major League career pitching for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He also played with the New York Yankees, Oakland Athletics, Texas Rangers, and The New York Mets.

The event is designed to introduce youths served by TresslerCare to a variety of people who have made life count, as well as simply to have some fun playing the all-American pastime.



## UPDATES

### **TresslerCare Capital Region:**

The following interns have completed a semester or longer at **TresslerCare Foster Care:** **Sara Kievit**, Messiah College, family studies major (January to May 2002); **Kelli Heckard**, Temple University, social work major (August 2001 to April 2002); and **Jeanne Schott**, Temple University, social work major in master's degree program (August 2001 to May 2002). Currently interning with **TresslerCare Foster Care:** **Angie Vicchiotti**, Mansfield State University, social work major, (May 2002 to August 2002).

In response to increased referrals and every desire to minimize the waiting list, **Specialized In-home Treatment Program** will be adding a full-time staff person this summer and looking at other programmatic adjustments in order to be more responsive to referral needs without reducing the quality and effectiveness of services. Providing community



services while maintaining safety of all of those in the community remains a priority.

### **TresslerCare Wilderness Center**

**Anthony Stukes**, a former residential school student and current Wilderness Center employee, recently graduated from Temple University with a degree in criminal justice. Stukes is contemplating continuing his education and pursuing a career in law.

### **TresslerCare Northwest Region**

**The DuBois Day Treatment Program** started the summer term on June 25 with field trips planned to the Quehanna Boot Camp and the Sweet Soil surface-mining reclamation project. A guest presenter from Project Rapport will speak about Abstinence and a Penn State

English instructor will lecture on goal setting. The Day Treatment Program has also joined the Jefferson County Chapter of PA Clean Ways and will assist in "cleaning up" the county.

### **TresslerCare Southeast Region**

The Chester County Aftercare program continues to emphasize staff diversity in addressing and meeting the needs of the children & families served. Families have responded very well to a focus on providing culturally sensitive services.

**The Bridge Program** is starting a new drug & alcohol education group designed specifically for girls to complement the group that has been provided over the last year.

**Megan O'Neill**, formerly a probation officer with Delaware County, joined the Bridge Program in mid-May as a casemanager. She brings with her extensive experience in working with juveniles and will be an asset in strengthening the program.



## Wilderness Center Breaks Ground

TresslerCare Wilderness Center officials broke ground May 13 on a \$2 million renovation project that will improve housing and build classrooms and a gym for recreational activities at the facility, which is used as an alternative to incarceration for juveniles.

Competitive pressures, new licensing requirements, and aging housing accommodations necessitated the need to expand and upgrade facilities off Mountain Road in Boiling Springs, according to George Eckenrode, executive director.

“Renovations to the existing dormitory include the addition of two wings and increasing the

number of beds from 39 to 48,” says Eckenrode, adding that a capital campaign to fund the improvements is under way.

“The pledge drive will continue for three to five years and be aimed at individuals, congregations, and organizations across the state that have relationships with TresslerCare,” Eckenrode explains.

The official construction start for the renovations is planned for this fall and the project should be completed within a year. All reconstruction following the Jan. 1 fire at the Wilderness Center has been completed.



*Breaking ground for the Wilderness Center's expansion are, from left to right, current student Jason Kissinger, Wilderness Center Executive Director George Eckenrode, and Hosea Twiggs of Philadelphia, a former student and recent high-school graduate.*