



Challenges

TresslerCare—helping children find refuge

"The strength of a nation can be measured in the health of its families—and the health of the family can be seen in the condition of its children."

—Phil Quinn

The cherished notion that the family is a safe sanctuary of peace and harmony is not always true. The harsh reality is that family violence is more common than "stranger" violence and that the home is not always a safe refuge.

Good intentions and instincts are not enough to guarantee effective parenting and ensure safe and healthy childhoods. No greater challenge faces our nation than the protection of our children. The state continues to invest much time, money, and effort in the development of intervention and prevention programs for families.

It is that challenge to which TresslerCare has sought to respond

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for 26 years, since its origin in 1976, as an alternative treatment program for youth. TresslerCare has experienced many changes, but the mission and purpose of the agency have remained the same. However, the intensity, the urgency, and the effectiveness of the programs continue to develop at an ever-increasing pace. The TresslerCare name now encompasses a vast continuum of services for children and youths throughout three geographic regions of the state.

In this issue of Meeting Challenges, a special tribute is made to George and Pat Edsall, who have served 25 years with the TresslerCare Foster Care program. This remarkable couple continues to provide foster care services, emergency respites, and invaluable assistance to the agency, enabling TresslerCare to provide unique and comprehensive services to counties. Additionally, TresslerCare has 45 active foster families, a dedicated staff of six intensive case-managers, more than 20 part-time therapists, and a consulting psychia-

trist who provide hours of individual, group, and specialized therapy for all children and youths in placement.

We anticipate working with every youth referred to our program, and are committed to providing quality care and professional services within a compassionate setting.

Nina Poe

***Family Development/
Intake Manager
TresslerCare Foster Care Services***

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Wilderness Center Breaks Ground

Despite the hot and dry summer, Wilderness Center youth harvested a "bumper" crop of corn, green beans, melons and tomatoes from the garden.

The produce, grown as part of the horticulture program, was used in the preparation of meals served in the dining hall.

Thanks to the hard work of Wilderness School residents, a new water garden, complete with waterfall was recently completed. Not to be outdone, girls participating in the Weekend Alternative Program completed a second water garden that includes fish and frogs.

The 7th Annual Reunion of former residents of the Wilderness School and Challenge+Plus programs and participants in the Weekend Program and 31-Day Wilderness Challenge took place Sept . 28.

The event went very well, with a number of graduates in attendance.

Staff at the Wilderness Center spent the summer hosting church, school, and community groups. Activities designed for team building and fun, such as climbing the Alpine Tower or navigating the Initiatives course, drew more than 300 visitors in August alone. The schedule is filling up fast for open fall dates. Anyone interested in discussing how the Wilderness Center can serve a group should call Jeff Brown of our Wilderness Services team at (717) 258-3168.

The Wilderness Challenge+Plus Program students and some staff members spent a few days at the New Jersey shore. They went on a fishing expedition that included both deep sea and surf fishing. The students not only caught their meals of sea bass and flounder, but also they caught their own bait. They also learned a lot about what it takes to run a charter boat by helping the captain clean it and get it ready for



TresslerCare Wilderness School students work in the center's garden.

the next group. Participants camped at Sandy Hook and Allaire State Parks and spent time around the campfire sharing how this type of activity teaches teamwork, patience, and appreciation for others, and a feeling of accomplishment.

The Wilderness Center Capital Campaign to improve and expand the residential and program facilities at the center has reached nearly half its \$2 million goal. Construction is expected to start later this fall.

Rich Weikel recently accepted a promotion to the position of Director of Clinical Services. Along with directing the treatment activities for the Residential Wilderness School and 90-Day Wilderness Challenge+Plus, Weikel serves as referral contact for these programs.

Amanda Shaffer joined the Wilderness Center to fill the case manager position vacated by Weikel. Shaffer, who has worked as a counselor in a variety of settings, is a recent graduate of Shippensburg University. She holds a degree in criminal justice, with a juvenile justice concentration.



The Wilderness Center had a bumper-crop garden this summer.

25-year commitment to helping children

For the last 25 years, no matter the time of day or night, George and Pat Edsall have opened their homes and their hearts to children in need of foster care, the majority of which has been emergency care.

For TresslerCare Foster Care and the children they serve, the couple has been a consistent, reliable source of comfort and new opportunity.

“They consider themselves to be ordinary people who work well with us, but they are extraordinary and a very valuable service to the agency,” says Nina Poe, family development/intake manager, TresslerCare Foster Care Services.

With 10 children of their own and 27 grandchildren, it might seem that the Edsalls have had their share of parenting. So when they start estimating the number of foster children they’ve cared for in the last 25 years at well over 1,000, it is easy to understand that there is something special going on within their home.

“We have never turned down a child in 25 years. It doesn’t matter what race, color, creed, or problem,” explains George Edsall. “We have had to have some removed for various reasons, but we’ve always given them an opportunity. When they walk through the door of our house, they have no record. What

was in the past stays in the past. We try to build it from the moment they walk into our home.”

Emergency foster care is often required when a child is between foster placements or needs time away from foster parents. “I find it more of a challenge because the children who come here are aware of their birth parents. Then, if they have problems in a foster home, it really takes some special care,” says Edsall, who has a special understanding for their circumstances. “I came from a split family and I needed help and didn’t get it. I learned from that how important it is for these kids to have somebody to talk to them and to help them.”

The children that have passed through the Edsall home have had their share of issues to deal with, from assault and battery charges to sexual abuse. “At times the stories can be heartbreaking,” says Edsall. “I can’t tell you how many times I have shed tears over children,” he says.

But smiles are also part of foster parenting, according to Pat Edsall. “Helping kids put a smile on their face and moving forward with their lives, that is rewarding,” she says. “We like the kids to set goals and achieve those goals, knowing we are a part of that.”

In the last year alone, the Edsalls have housed nearly 50 youths, according to Poe. “They work well with children and youth of all ages,” she says. “They integrate them into their daily lifestyle. They take them to family social events. Both of them



Pat and George Edsall

“We like the kids to set goals and achieve those goals, knowing we are part of that.”

are retired, so that allows full-time supervision with the children.”

The Edsalls chalk up their longevity as foster parents to the fact that they discuss everything. “If a problem comes up, we discuss it and work out a solution,” Edsall says, adding that TresslerCare has made a difference as well. “We have a great support team with all the staff at TresslerCare.”

No matter if they are needed for a night or several weeks, the Edsalls say they will continue to welcome children into their home for as long as TresslerCare will have them.

Laughing, Pat Edsall adds, “We keep saying just one more year.”

Need to serve motivates independent living counselor

Known as “Miss I” or “Mom” to the children who have had the pleasure of knowing her, Idotress

Joseph is a perfect example of what you can achieve when you put your mind to it.

The counselor and independent living instructor for TresslerCare Services grew up in the projects in York, and went on to build a life that centers on serving God and her community. “I started at an early age, just doing community service with the local senior citizen centers and my church,” Joseph says. “From there, I went on to the mission field in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, W.I. That really taught me how to be a servant.”



For more than 20 years, Joseph built a career in human services. “I have been a youth care worker, therapeutic staff support, behavior specialist, and mobile therapist,” she says.

Joseph and her husband, Elias, also served as foster parents for eight years, caring for 57 children in a foster group home setting. “That was the beginning of my move into Independent Living,” she says.

Today, Joseph holds a master’s degree in human services from Lincoln University. She counsels adolescents and serves as an independent living instructor. “I try to teach more goal-oriented skills—how important a high school diploma is, moving on to a trade school or college, and stable and successful employment—with the end result being a high quality lifestyle,” she says of her work with TresslerCare. “The children are my passion. Independent living is my passion—teaching them to stand on their own two feet and enhance the world.”

Joseph, who has a 13-year-old daughter, Idotress Joy, indicated that having 57 foster children has had a major impact on her ability to relate to the adolescents she now counsels. That foundation brings about the rapport that allows her to gain their respect and admiration. “I am very forward.

I am very honest. I make them face the truth,” she says. “That is why they love me.”

In addition to her work with TresslerCare, Joseph also works as an independent living specialist for the University of Pittsburgh and attends college in Harrisburg, Pa.

It is her faith in God that continues to motivate her, adds Joseph, and her need to show others that if she

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can succeed, so can they. “I like serving those who haven’t had a chance in life,” she says, referring to less fortunate children. “Adolescents are just getting their first stab at life and they should be given all the opportunities that society can afford to give them that they might become an active, valid part.”

Idotress Joseph

Transitional living program takes form

TresslerCare is in the process of developing a residential group home program for adolescent girls as a transitional step toward self-sufficiency and independent living.

Called the TresslerCare Transitional-Living Program, the service can be used as:

- A first-time, out-of-home placement
- A transitional placement from foster care
- A step-down placement from a more restrictive residential placement.

The program components include 24-hour supervision and support; physical care; daily-living skills instruction; independent-living

skills instruction; case management; individual and group counseling; educational advocacy and support; employment counseling; transportation; recreational and spiritual activities; and community service.

The Transitional-Living Program will be able to serve up to 16 girls, ages 16-21, adjudicated either dependent or delinquent. TresslerCare anticipates that the majority of youths served will be 16 to 18 years of age, adjudicated dependent, and attending public school. Referrals will be considered from any county department with which TresslerCare has a current contract.

TresslerCare has identified a facility in York as the site for the program, which is expected to open in the first quarter of 2003. The building has 12 bedrooms and 9,705 square feet of living space.

TresslerCare will notify county departments of a planned open house when the project is finalized.

Foster Care Kids Receive Donated Bikes

Sixteen children from the TresslerCare Treatment Foster Care program received new bikes from L.B. Smith Lincoln Mercury in July. The bikes were donated by the auto dealer in conjunction with Lincoln's national sponsorship of professional bike racing.

"It's refreshing to have such a positive event," says Craig Smith, TresslerCare executive director. "In foster care we often work with unpleasant situations. It is great to see something so positive for these kids."

Each child also received a safety helmet. L.B. Smith's service technicians assembled the bikes on their own time.

"We are happy to have this opportunity to make these kids' lives a little brighter," says Dave Shuey of L.B. Smith Lincoln Mercury.





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REGIONAL NEWS

TRESSLERCARE - SOUTHEAST REGION

TresslerCare of Chester County recently hired Jennifer Myers, MA, as an on-call mobile therapist. Myers served TresslerCare as an intern last fall and winter. She earned her master's degree from Hahnman University in Philadelphia.

TRESSLERCARE - CAPITAL REGION

The Foster Care program held its annual foster family picnic on City Island in August, drawing the largest crowd ever of approximately 170 people, including staff and families. In addition to a picnic meal, crafts, face painting and bingo, participants were treated to City Island's multiple activities.