

MEETING

SUMMER 2003



Challenges

Wilderness Center expansion gets under way



As the last of the winter snow melted away, the Wilderness Center moved into high gear with construction of a new dormitory and renovations to the existing cabin. Scheduled for completion in early October, the combined renovations will increase the school's capacity from 39 to 48 youths.

"With these long-awaited improvements, the facilities will house all the residential youth under one roof and meet updated licensing requirements," notes George Eckenrode, TresslerCare director of marketing and fund raising.

Improvements are also under way to the center's electrical system and infrastructure of the waste-management system. "Using an innovative 'greenhouse' system, the new facilities will not only meet expanding needs, but will also provide wonderful new opportunity for the center's gardening program when it becomes operational this fall," he says.

All center programs and activities are continuing without interruption during construction. The photograph is from late spring.

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TAPP—“*The best thing that ever happened*”

There was not one day of school that was enjoyable for him. Diagnosed with AD/HD, the 16-year-old boy had suffered for years in a school district that didn't recognize his learning disability and attempted to “mainstream” him in regular classrooms.

“They created a nightmare for him by trying to channel him into programs he couldn't function in,” remembers his father. “He had so many in-school and out-of-school detentions that it was almost illegal, the amount of school he missed.”

Although his teachers continued to expect a lot out of him, the teenager couldn't function because of his AD/HD. He couldn't, for example, organize his thoughts. “We had counseling. We had a support network. But it wasn't adequate,” the father continues. “We needed to break the vicious cycle we were in.”

Often with AD/HD, a child becomes either depressed or angry. With this young man, his frustrations turned to anger. “When the legal system started coming into play, our son started getting help,” the father says. “It was the worst and the best thing that could have ever happened for him.”

At the recommendation of the court system, TresslerCare Aftercare and Prevention Program began working with the young man and his family.

“Because our school district was not coping well with our son's education needs, we requested the Capital Area Intermediate Unit,” says the mother, who admits they needed help seeing their son through his last two years of high school. “Tressler worked with a mediator and made sure they were getting their parts accomplished.”

TAPP also provided counseling, with one counselor assigned to school and one to the home, working as a team. “He was doing much better because he had support with someone to help him at school. That was the best counseling we had. It was more complete,” the mother adds. “If our son was not doing what he should do, he had lots of consequences. It really worked. I don't think he would have graduated without them.”

Throughout the two years they worked with TAPP, the family often found support in TAPP's respite program. “Because our son was challenging and getting bigger every day, we had to use logic [when dealing with him]. That didn't always work. He often would do things and we could not enforce the consequences,” the father explains. “TAPP would remove him from the house [to foster care] for one day or up to a week. It was absolutely necessary for us to have that cycle broken.”

Adopted as toddlers, both the boy and his brother brought many emotional issues to the table that

had to be dealt with from day one, according to the parents.

“You tend to [parent as] your parents did, and it wasn't working. These kids had baggage my parents didn't deal with,” the mother says. “We had to learn new ways to do everything. Sometimes [the counselors] gave us exercises of our own so we could be better parents. They really dealt with us and our issues more than any other program did.”

Two years after entering the TAPP program, the young man that at one time talked of quitting school donned a cap and gown and joined his peers at graduation.

“That was probably one of the proudest moments for us as parents,” says the father. “If our son would not have had the encouragement of his TAPP counselors and his Capital Area Intermediate Unit teachers, he would never have graduated. It is a parent's greatest reward. For that we are eternally grateful.”

PERRYfamilies Initiative—Grant gives program life

Thanks to the generosity of the Carlisle Health and Wellness Foundation's \$141,000 grant, TresslerCare is bringing its in-home services to the families of Perry County as of July 1.

Modeled after the successful TresslerCare Aftercare and Prevention Program (TAPP), the PERRYfamilies Initiative will feature individual and family counseling for up to six youths. "Perry County does not have any in-home services except for Medical Assistance wrap-around," says Joan Lotz, clinical director. "They are a small county with limited funding."

It was Perry County's own Suzanne Dell, TresslerCare family therapist, who first approached Lotz with the idea.

"We have hired a full-time case manager and located an office at 14 West Main Street in New Bloomfield," says Lotz. "The full-time person is Desiree Fasnacht and Suzanne will do the majority of the family counseling."

Families participating in the program will be eligible for up to one year of services. "The families we work with are usually working-class or middle-class families who need intensive services," Lotz explains.

"They either don't have insurance or their insurance won't pay for the level of intensity that is needed. We fill a real gap that exists in the economy."

Targeting 13- to 18-year-old youths who are referred by county Children and Youth Services and

Juvenile Probation, PERRYfamilies Initiative will help to prevent recidivism, as well as assist with the transition home from placement.

"In addition to individual and family counseling, we also keep in regular contact with the school to ensure the youth are doing well academically and behaviorally," Lotz says. "We'll have respite, or temporary foster care, as a back up for the parent who has lost control of the youth."

The program stresses skills building, specifically in areas such as anger management, drug and alcohol abuse, conflict resolution and assertiveness training. "It teaches skills that they don't have, but that they need," Lotz adds.

Continued on back

Law of Love leads to company's generosity

Thanks to the generosity of Harrisburg-based Continuing Care Rx, TresslerCare was able to purchase 39 car seats for its foster families.

New Pennsylvania legislation known as the "Law of Love" was the impetus for the purchase, according to Nina Poe, family development/intake manager, TresslerCare Foster Care Services - Mechanicsburg. Once legally able to ride in a car without a car seat or booster, four-year-olds must now be restrained in a booster until they reach eight years of age. After that, they must use a regular seatbelt.

"The most dramatic change is the booster-seat regulation for kids ages four to eight," says Poe, adding that the unplanned cost could be a financial hardship for some parents. "We first discussed buying the car seats for staff members needing to transport foster children. Then we decided to purchase a quantity at a reduced price so we could supply foster parents who have small children."

As the idea developed, Continuing Care Rx stepped forward with a \$1,750 donation that made the purchase possible. "It is important to us that we give something back

to all our not-for-profit customers," says Scott Habecker, chief financial officer. "We know it is going to get used for a good cause."

TresslerCare distributed the seats to foster parents served at the Mechanicsburg site during a continuing education training session conducted by the South Central Pennsylvania Highway Safety Commission. The program taught foster parents about the new law, transporting children, and proper safety seat installation. Foster parents affiliated with the Topton location also received car seats.

PERRYfamilies Initiative—Grant gives program life *Continued*

TresslerCare's emphasis on family therapy has earned TAPP an excellent reputation since its start in 1995, and it is expected to do the same for the PERRYfamilies Initiative.

"You can work with a troubled youth and have him do very well in residential services, but when he comes back home, he is still dealing with the same issues that troubled him before he went away," Lotz says.

"The youth may come back changed, but the family still has all those unresolved feelings and problems from when the youth went away. The youth has to learn how to be a respectful family member again, in the school, and in the community. The family therapy helps a great deal."

REGIONAL NEWS

TresslerCare Mechanicsburg

- Casemanager Tara Plessinger (Foster Care Services – Mechanicsburg) gave birth to Justin Tyler on March 27. She returned to TresslerCare after a three-month maternity leave.
- TresslerCare has decided to indefinitely suspend development of an independent-living group home for girls, initially planned to serve the Capital Region counties and be based in York, Pa. Financial constraints related to the capital improvements already committed to the Wilderness Center were a significant factor in this decision.

TresslerCare Topton

- Returning to work in mid-May from maternity leave was Lauren Roth Conzaman (director, Foster Care Services – Topton), who gave birth to Alexander on Feb. 10.