

Meet Marissa

Age 20

Served at Burlington United Methodist Family Services

Marissa first arrived at Burlington's Level III facility in December 2014 at the age of 15, after four prior failed placements. She had been physically abused until the age of 9. She was consuming alcohol and cannabis regularly and had inappropriate relationships with much older men, all of which was condoned by her mother who wanted a 'friend' relationship with her daughter.

Marissa had depressive symptoms including nightmares, crying, loss of appetite and a history of cutting. Burlington staff provided treatment for Marissa's substance abuse, depressive disorder, disruptive behavior disorder, and assisted her in building self-respect, better decision making skills, and appropriate relationships with her peers and adults.

Marissa was reunited with her father, who she had been estranged from for some time and left Burlington within a year. She was able to live with her father and complete high school. She went on to work for the Mt. Olive Correctional Facility and married.

While her husband was deployed overseas with the military, Marissa decided to enroll at Valley College in Beckley. She was a recipient of the Burlington Scholarship and invited our staff to attend her graduation from the Clinical Medical Assistant Program in November 2019 and is working in her field at a local hospital.

We always look forward to Marissa visits to our campus where she frequently shares her experience with the current residents.

Meet JD

Served at Board of Child Care

A Board of Child Care staff member recently received a call from a past resident, JD:

"JD reached out to me by phone today. He was one of my toughest kids - the youth who did about \$1500 worth of damage to my car. Burlington was his 28th placement since his initial removal from his biological mother. Even though her rights had been terminated, the thing JD wanted most was to be with her.

Knowing he planned to reunite with her no matter what when he turned 18, his MDT advocated that contact be permitted that would allow for a therapeutic transition rather than an abrupt reunification.

Reportedly free from drug use for several years, his mother progressed from supervised calls to unsupervised calls and then she flew out from Indiana to see him for the first time in more than 8 years. I came in that weekend and facilitated their first face-to-face visit and cried watching them embrace.

JD eventually moved to Indiana to live with his mom. He was calling to tell me that "all my hard work wasn't for nothing" and that he "turned out good" and that "we really helped him." He also told me that he worked for a treatment facility in Indiana and was helping other kids! JD recently enlisted in the Navy and will be leaving for Basic Training soon."



Names have been changed to protect the identities of youth served.

Meet Jarrett

Age 17 | Taylor County
Served at Davis Stuart

Jarrett first arrived at Davis Stuart, Inc. late one evening in April 2018. Jarrett was upset and behaving erratically because he felt he had been deceived regarding this placement. He was led to believe that he'd be going to an independent living placement where he would have video games, increased freedom, independence, and normalcy. Imagine his disdain when he was literally dropped off by a transporter to a Level II treatment program. Video games were not permitted, his days would be highly structured, and nothing about this treatment facility would be "independent." But it was the level of care that Jarrett needed at the time. Cold and removed, Jarrett appeared unable to bond with anyone.

Jarrett and his siblings had been removed years earlier from his home due to horrific child neglect as a result of his parents' drug use. Available kinship placements had agreed to take the younger siblings, but not the older Jarrett. He struggled with major depression and acted out in anger over his circumstances, which led to failed placements. He experienced severe suicidal thoughts which resulted in psychiatric placements, in and out of state, throughout his adolescence. While residency at Davis Stuart offered him a chance to return to West Virginia, the transition proved more than challenging. Jarrett refused school, and refused to socialize or participate in required programming.

The facility worked to secure on-site educational services which permitted Jarrett to work towards his TASC (GED) in spite of his barriers. However, Jarrett's suicidality and depression worsened as his 18th birthday approached. Despite efforts to prepare him for an Independent Living situation, Jarrett's mental status continued to decline. All attempts to motivate Jarrett about his future were met with dismay. Jarrett appeared to be unwilling to contribute to his future planning.

In late September, two major turn of events occurred that changed Jarrett's outlook. With persistence by the treatment team, Jarrett's physician ordered a complete blood panel to rule out any medical condition that might be contributing to his depression that had been so resistant to pharmacological and behavioral interventions. Jarrett was diagnosed with hypothyroidism and was immediately placed on thyroid medications. Within a few weeks, the team began to see a different Jarrett. He began to participate in his treatment planning and voiced wishes for his future.

Jarrett wanted to be reunited with family. Although the team was elated to have Jarrett actually provide input into his treatment/permanency planning, the team was equally disheartened because there seemed no way to provide Jarrett his wishes of reunification with any family member.

Due to nothing short of a miracle, a team member was able to identify an aunt to whom might be a possibility for unification. In that moment, a small glimmer of hope existed for Jarrett. Just weeks before his birthday, Jarrett's legal team was able to make contact with his biological aunt. On his 18th birthday, Jarrett was released from state's custody into the home of his aunt. Thanks to the persistence of a team who would not give up, Jarrett was able to have victory over years of abandonment. He left state's custody and was able achieve his dream to return home to Taylor County into the home of a family member.



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the identities of youth served.*



Meet Joshua

Age 24 | Western District
Served by Stepping Stone, Inc.



Joshua was 17 years old when he came to live at Stepping Stone in Fairmont. His mother had passed away and he had never met his father. Arrogant and argumentative, he denied he needed any kind of treatment. He had experienced years of trauma that had him living in fight or flight mode and was a year behind in his education. Joshua had a difficult time forming genuine connections with people and was not likely to trust anyone. On his second day at Stepping Stone he declared that when he turned 18 he was “walking out the door and living on his own!”

After living with a routine and structure in a supportive environment, Joshua was able to settle in and begin making positive decisions about his behaviors, as well as set a few goals for his future. He was given the opportunity to participate in virtual school while also attending high school with the hope he would be able to graduate on time. He earned a spot in the high school’s madrigal choir and obtained a part-time job.

Now that he was living in a safe and stable environment, he also began opening up in therapy sessions and forming real relationships with staff. Joshua began making tremendous progress. He worked hard to increase his positivity and apply the healthy coping skills he learned in therapy and practiced those daily during supportive counseling sessions. Staff continuously encouraged him to utilize his skills in difficult and overwhelming situations so that these became routine responses to life stressors.

Joshua graduated from high school on time by completing two years of courses simultaneously. His confidence grew and he showed incredible dedication and determination to achieving his goal of joining the US Marines. Stepping Stone staff supported Joshua in developing a nutrition and exercise program and continuously encouraged him to work hard and stay focused. Joshua met with a nutritionist weekly and exercised with staff every day to prepare for his enlistment.

Joshua discharged from Stepping Stone and left for Parris Island, South Carolina just before his 19th birthday. He told staff that he felt scared and sad to be leaving as he feels “home” here. He remained in close contact while he was in boot camp and sent at least two letters every week. He listed a staff member as his emergency contact with the Marines and even invited that staff to attend his graduation from boot camp as his family. Of course, our staff member attended family day and graduation. Throughout the years, Josh has remained in close contact and still considers us his family. We’ve continued to support him through his four years in the Marines, his honorable discharge, the birth of his daughter, and his transition to civilian life. He is a source of great joy and we could not be more proud of him.