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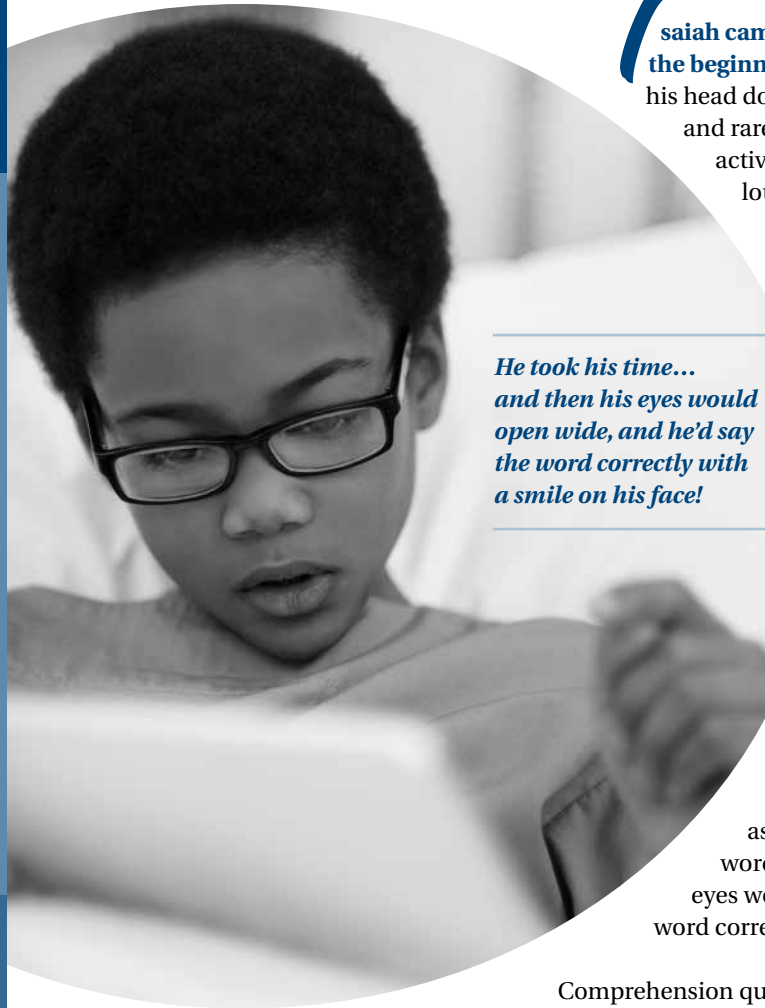
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“Wait, Don’t Tell Me!”

One Student’s Literacy Journey

By Lissa Weathers, M.Ed., QMHP-C ■ Reading Intervention Teacher, Elk Hill Charlottesville



*He took his time...
and then his eyes would
open wide, and he'd say
the word correctly with
a smile on his face!*

Isaiah came to us August 23, 2017, which was the beginning of his 1st-grade year. He kept his head down, struggled to make eye contact and rarely participated in social or group activities. He was easily overwhelmed by loud noise or a lot of things going on at once, and different triggers would cause him to shut down. It was very difficult to understand him, as he spoke very quietly and struggled to express himself. His frustration led him to do things like kick the walls and run away from faculty and staff. Isaiah read at the mid-kindergarten level, and not enthusiastically. He wouldn't even look at text; he'd turn his body away, or look away from the words.

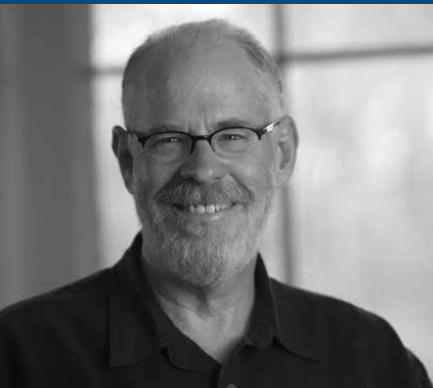
With one-on-one coaching, however, his attitude soon began to change. “Hold on, hold on, wait, don't tell me,” he'd say, as I could see his mouth forming the words. He took his time... and then his eyes would open wide, and he'd say the word correctly with a smile on his face!

Comprehension questions were a tough challenge. Isaiah insisted on reading everything himself, and he always picked the wrong answer first — even though he'd had a lot of training on how to work through answer choices. But then, every single time, he would say, “Hold on, hold on, wait. It's this one.” And then he would choose the right answer, and we'd laugh together.

Isaiah now goes to the reading corner in his classroom, reads aloud, corrects himself, asks himself questions and keeps on reading aloud. He doesn't care if anyone is looking at him. He just does his own thing! The most amazing thing about Isaiah's development since coming to work with our team is that he has become very independent. He is his own man. He is attuned to his classmates, but he's also very focused on getting his work done and doing the right thing. At the end of the school year, Isaiah won the reading award for elementary school. He's now reading fluently at a second-grade level — and most importantly, he loves to read. Elk Hill's literacy program made all the difference. ■

A Note from Michael Farley

Chief Executive Officer • Elk Hill



In 2020 Elk Hill will celebrate our 50th anniversary! Over those many years much has changed with our organization. As you will read in this edition of The Advance, our services have continued to expand and “go way upstream.” We’re working with younger children, sooner – in their communities, in our schools, and in public schools.

You will also read that we are continually seeking new, creative ways to enrich the lives of our children – including music, animal-assisted therapy, and hydroponics. Our program modalities and clinical expertise have evolved, always striving to meet the needs of our children and their families.

So there has been a great deal of growth and change. However, the constant in our nearly 50 years is that Elk Hill exists to serve children. We have always believed in helping children from a CORE values-based foundation, which intertwines our principles with everything we do. We surround these children with professionals whose own values sync up with ours. These adults live those values not only in their work with Elk Hill, but also in their personal lives. For those caring adults, I am truly grateful. ■

For One Young Man, Music Bridged the Gap

Music is a powerful and transformative force in young minds. “Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic regulation is what regulates the brain stem, and when it’s not regulated, we can’t truly reach the rest of a child’s brain,” says Dr. Bruce Perry, a leading child trauma expert.

At Elk Hill, in partnership with the Modern Improvisational Music Appreciation (MIMA) program, we seek to create a space where musical expression is respected and celebrated within all three of our schools. The MIMA curriculum is adaptable and dynamic. It emphasizes the foundational elements of music, such as rhythm, pitch, melody and form. During the program, students collaborate to create an original piece of music and have the opportunity to record in a professional music studio.

One participant was Andrew, who arrived last year at our Elk Hill school. “He was a bit of a ‘black sheep’ from the start,” says MIMA Instructor Joshua Dowell. “He looked different and had some issues with hygiene.” Our staff noticed Andrew isolated himself and struggled to make friends, sitting by himself during breaks and lunch.

When Andrew was introduced to MIMA, something began to change within him. “We all soon learned that this young man was an amazing writer,” Mr. Dowell says. “The way he naturally put words together got the attention of his peers. They were asking for his advice and listening to his ideas.” Over the course of the 12-week class, new friendships formed. Andrew went from pushing others away to practicing self-care and building lasting relationships. “It was pretty cool to see this transformation happen!” Mr. Dowell says. Music is truly a language that connects and heals the hearts and minds of developing youth.

This program is only able to happen because of our generous donors, like you. Thank you for helping us transform a child’s life with the gift of music. ■



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Rachel Kozella, BA, QMHP ■ Program Director, Elk Hill Spring Garden



Spring Garden Motto: Love them anyway.

I am entering my third year as Program Director for Elk Hill Spring Garden. The road has not always been easy, and certainly obstacles come up along the path.

Our purpose here at Spring Garden is to provide the young ladies we serve with a judgment-free atmosphere of unconditional positive regard.

The youth we serve come from various economic and social backgrounds, but the unifying characteristic they all have is unimaginable trauma in their past. Many of the girls come with minimal family support and emotional walls as a result of failed or missing relationships. Many don’t know how to trust. At Spring Garden, we understand that breaking these barriers is a time-consuming process. How do we reach them on a deeper level in the short time that they are with us?

The staff provide a family atmosphere to these young ladies and seek moments to provide each girl with little affirmations throughout the day: words of encouragement, words of praise, uplifting words. In addition to affirming them individually, we provide community activities where the girls can learn, experience new things and let their guard down, even if just a little. Regardless of their behaviors, words or actions, we love them anyway. We laugh with them, cheer for them, cry with them, and set limits for them. This is often tough for the girls, because these aren’t the responses they’re used to. It is these moments, these words, these experiences that bring the girls to a place of trusting, where change happens. It’s staff partnering with them, rather than challenging them when they are in crisis, that lets them know we only want what is best for them.

As we watch the girls grow and see improvements in their behavior, grades and attitude, we know that although the work we do is sometimes challenging, it is certainly worth it. ■

Expanding Elk Hill's Reach — Thanks to You!

In the spring of 2016, we began to notice a trend: More and more students attending our school in Charlottesville were coming from Staunton, Augusta County, and other neighboring counties. These students were riding for 30 minutes or more to get to school.

Elk Hill's leadership team saw an opportunity to help an underserved community. Conversations began with the city of Staunton and Augusta County about their need for a unique school such as Elk

Hill. In August 2016, the Elk Hill Staunton School officially welcomed our first class of 10 students on the grounds of the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Today, our school is serving 36 K-12 kids and growing. Additionally, in 2016 we began providing our Therapeutic Day Treatment service to three schools. We're now in seven schools, supporting over 50 students.

The opportunity to serve a new com-

munity doesn't happen without you, our donors. Private dollars have enabled us to lease space, hire staff and fund services for children before we can get reimbursed from Medicaid or local school districts. Now that we're up and running, the need continues. Last year we provided over \$100,000 in services to Staunton and Augusta children who needed help, but had no access to funding for services. Over the next few pages, we'll share with you the impact of your giving. Thank you for your steadfast support and belief in us! ■

A Staunton Student Finds Her Way

10-year-old Minnie was having a tough time in public school. She got angry easily, and she was bullied for being different. She's never been the type of person who hides her emotions, she says: "I wasn't like a turtle, hiding in its shell. I was out there."

When Minnie came to Elk Hill School Staunton for fifth grade, she found herself in an unfamiliar environment. "I thought it was a little weird, having only six students in the class," she says. "I really missed a lot of my friends. But I knew I was coming back to see them soon."

The biggest difference was the way the Elk Hill teachers and TDT counselors treated her. "They were really nice," Minnie says. "I felt like they understood me more than normal teachers at public school." Before, when something bad happened her teachers would tell her to ignore it or just get over it. Elk Hill's teachers and

counselors, on the other hand, talked to her about her problems and helped her figure out how to resolve them.

Minnie also found new friends at Elk Hill. "A lot of them had the same story as me,"



she says. "They were bullied and made fun of for being different."

Minnie participated in Elk Hill's mentoring and summer programs, which helped provide further wrap-around supports. She felt better after every mentoring session, she says, and it meant a lot to have someone there when she was feeling sad. She successfully completed both programs; in addition to her school-based

successes, she was now able to experience success in the community.

The next fall, Minnie returned to public school at Shelburne Middle, where she was again supported by Elk Hill TDT staff.

"I feel like a new person," she says. She has learned to manage her anger, so that small things no longer set her off. "People are starting to like me now that I'm not throwing a fit over everything," she says.

Lunch meetings with her Elk Hill counselor and with peers give her an outlet to talk about what's going on in her life and help keep her on track. Minnie has been invited to participate in the Governor's School gifted and talented program and has been recommended for advanced English and math. Without Elk Hill, she says, "I'd still be this sad, lost person who didn't know who they are." ■

Elk Hill's teachers and counselors, on the other hand, talked to her about her problems and helped her figure out how to resolve them.

Elk Hill Brings **Therapeutic Day Treatment** to Augusta County Schools

Last year, administrators and teachers at Stuarts Draft Middle School found themselves “kind of overwhelmed,” as Principal Scott Musick puts it. The problem wasn’t major disciplinary infractions; it was the burden of dealing with ongoing, minor behavior problems, such as tardiness to class and conflicts with peers.

Musick didn’t want to suspend students for these lesser transgressions, but they had to be addressed in order to prevent future issues. “Once kids get in a downward spiral, they sometimes have a hard time getting out of that,” he explains.

Miranda Ball, with Augusta County Pupil Services, suggested bringing in Elk Hill to provide therapeutic day treatment (TDT). TDT is intended to help children manage the mental health,

emotional, and behavioral challenges that prevent them from learning. TDT often can help uncover the underlying causes of problem behaviors. Acting out in class, for example, may be just a symptom of a student’s struggles to keep pace in academics.

“We started out with a list of kids who we knew were struggling to be successful in school,” Musick says. He believed these 10 students had the potential to do well and would be receptive to getting help. He and Elk Hill staff then contacted the students’ parents to secure permission for them to receive TDT, and met with them one on one.

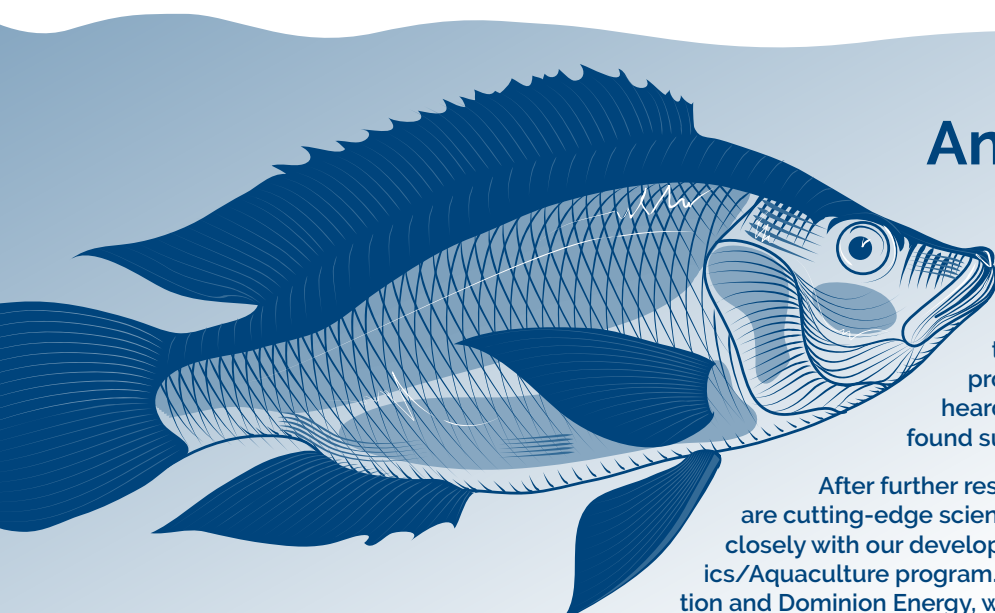
The problem wasn’t major disciplinary infractions; it was the burden of dealing with ongoing, minor behavior problems, such as tardiness to class and conflicts with peers.

Assessments helped Elk Hill’s counselors, Kahla Myers and Morgan Rouzie, develop an individualized plan for each student. They supported students in the areas

where they most needed help, whether paying attention in class, being prepared for school, or building positive relationships with their peers.

“Overall, we’ve been very pleased with what they’ve done,” Musick says. While the TDT program at Stuarts Draft is still in its first year, and data collection is ongoing, he can tell it’s having a positive effect. Kids are being sent to his office less often, and they’re willing to ask for support from TDT staff.

Managing behavior in middle school isn’t just about imposing consequences, Musick says. “It’s really about helping them learn to make better decisions.” He hopes that as every Stuarts Draft student heads to high school, they can remain open to learning new things and trust adults to support them in that process. ■



An Edible Experiment

By Chuck Longerbeam
Head of School, Elk Hill Staunton School

In order to comply with new state graduation requirements, Elk Hill Staunton School needed to create a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. During an educational conference, I overheard that another private day school in Virginia had found success with hydroponics.

After further research, I learned hydroponics and aquaculture are cutting-edge sciences that are simple and sustainable. Working closely with our development team, we decided to launch a Hydroponics/Aquaculture program. Thanks to the Blue Ridge Community Foundation and Dominion Energy, we have been able to launch our new program.

Additionally, we are receiving technical support from a partnership with Johnson County High School in Mountain City, Tennessee. They have generously helped us get up and running, starting with a tour of their 12,000-square-foot hydroponics facility in October.

Mrs. Quinn, our illustrious science teacher, began the first classes in January for high schoolers, but all grades will be able to utilize the program for their science classes. In a closed system, our students are raising tilapia fish. The fish’s waste feeds the plants. The plants clean the water and re-oxygenate it, and then it’s sent back to the fish! The only outside influence is the students feeding the fish.

As we move forward with the program, we’ll be augmenting our lunches with the fresh vegetables that the students grow. Students will learn the basics of plant structures as well as planting, cultivating and harvesting fresh vegetables. They will also learn the proper care and feeding of fish, from fingerlings to fully-grown fish. These new and innovative programs are only made possible with the support of donors, for which I’m truly grateful. ■

Reaching More Children By Teaching the Teachers

Thanks to our generous donors!



Counselors Melissa Albrecht, Karen Robertson and Kevin Crawford help students deal with "all the feels."

Did you know that Augusta County is the second-largest county in Virginia? In its more remote, rural areas, in-home providers and non-Medicaid services are hard to find. As a result, it can be challenging for children and families to access the services they need.

Elk Hill's Community Services staff are constantly devising innovative and creative ways to meet children where they are. Recently, thanks to a grant from the Augusta Health Foundation and donor support, they were able to lead a special training session in which around 50 Augusta County teachers and teacher's aides learned about resiliency skills related to trauma. Participants learned about the impact trauma has on students and practiced strategies for responding, both physically and verbally, to students who are in crisis or who are dealing with chronic stress.

Learning these techniques can help teachers manage their own stress as well. "It's identifying your own strengths and resiliency skills, and modeling to students how to do it," explains Heather Lewis, Elk Hill's Community Services

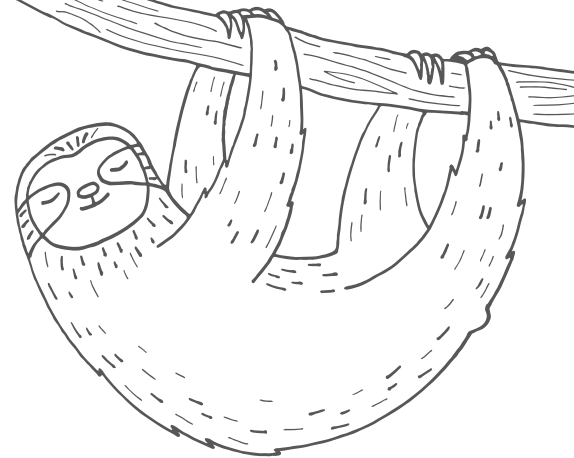
Coordinator for Staunton and Augusta County. With this new private funding, Elk Hill also is placing libraries of therapeutic materials in schools for counselors and staff to use with their students.

Elk Hill staff are often faced with a serious dilemma: How can we serve children who need support, but whose behaviors are not critical enough to qualify for funded services? They may not have Medicaid and/or may not need the intensive services that TDT provides. However, if they don't get some help, there is a significant chance that one day they will.

Elk Hill staff are often faced with a serious dilemma: How can we serve children who need support, but whose behaviors are not critical enough to qualify for funded services?

Thanks to our generous donors, staff don't have to make those hard decisions. Private dollars have allowed Counselor Kevin Crawford to lead a support group for middle-school boys, while Counselor Karen Robertson leads one

for girls. Counselor Melissa Albrecht has organized an Outward Bound-style day of hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains along with mindfulness activities. The end result of all these efforts? Students build confidence, communicate more effectively and learn how to handle the stresses that life throws their way. ■



A Child Draws His Own Path Forward

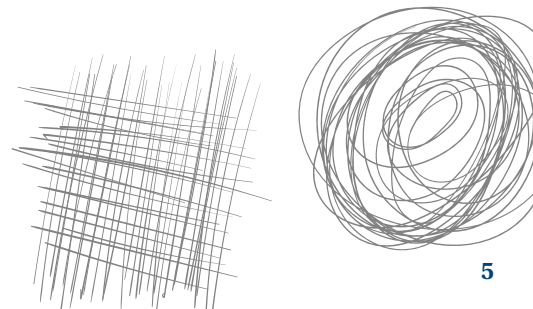
Camden is a second grader who started at Elk Hill Staunton School just after Thanksgiving. A highly active and energetic child, he was dealing with more anxiety than any seven-year-old should have to manage.

Daily, he struggled even to walk to his classroom. Camden would often sit in the entryway of the building, or in one of the resource rooms, remaining inconsolable for several hours each day.

About two weeks after Camden started — on one of the rare days he made it to the classroom and stayed in class — his teacher realized that he loved to doodle. As it happens, Camden's teacher is a doodler too.

They began sharing their drawings with each other and together watched a tutorial about how to draw sloths. The teacher was able to gain his trust and slowly created an outlet for Camden to release his anxiety and energy in class. She let him know that it was okay to doodle! As time went on, Camden gradually began to form relationships with the support staff and other students in his class.

In recent weeks, Camden has hopped out of his car and headed straight to class. His enthusiasm for drawing has spread to some of his classmates, who often can be observed sharing their daily doodle with each other. Sometimes, it just takes a little time — and a sketch pad — for our students to learn that they are safe and valued at Elk Hill. ■





Tails and Scales:

Animal-Assisted Therapy Motivates Elk Hill Youth

In January, a young man on the autism spectrum arrived at Elk Hill Staunton School as a new student. There was only one problem: He would not get out of the car.

“We tried everything we could think of,” says Head of School Chuck Longerbeam. Staff encouraged and cajoled him, to no avail. Then, the dean asked him a very important question: “Do you like lizards?”

“What?” the student said.

“We have a bearded dragon upstairs named Joe. Would you like to meet him?” the dean said. The young man did. “He grabbed his hand, walked upstairs and has been fine ever since,” Longerbeam says.

Joka (aka Joe) is part of the Elk Hill Community Services animal-assisted therapy program. He is one of two very popular bearded dragons, which are docile and slow-moving lizards native to Australia. “There’s something oddly prehistoric-slash-cool, for lack of a better word, about them,” Longerbeam says.

Elementary-aged students can earn “Joe time” by meeting their behavior goals, which means they get to play with him and sometimes feed him. Watching the bearded dragon eat blueberries is a highlight, Longerbeam says: “It kind of looks like one of those ’50s stop-motion action movies, with the dinosaurs.” Community Services uses this program to teach calming techniques, communication skills and empathy.

Joe’s not the only animal working with kids in Elk Hill’s programs. Tucker, a trained therapy dog, meets with children in the therapeutic day treatment (TDT) program at Thomas C. McSwain Elementary. Children pet Tucker and read to him. “Last year, a student would sing ‘It’s Tucker Time’ as he came down the hall!” says Tucker’s owner, Jan Williams. “And just seeing the improvement in the students’ reading over time is wonderful and rewarding.”

For one Shelburne Middle School student, a litter of kittens made all the difference. As a sixth- and seventh-grader, he struggled daily at school. Then one day, TDT Counselor Karen Robertson introduced this student to several kittens visiting from a local foster program. The young man fell hard for them.

“It was just another side of him that we never saw,” Robertson says. “He would come to TDT just to pet and hold the kittens, and he immediately started to open up.” The student desperately wanted a cat of his own, so his father challenged him to prove that he could take on such an important responsibility.

The young man set out to prove he *was* responsible. He sought out Robertson for one-on-one coaching, and they built a strong rapport. His behavior improved dramatically, both in school and at home, and he successfully graduated from the TDT program. As a result of his hard work, his wish came true: He got a cat to call his own. ■



Tucker, a trained therapy dog, meets with children in the therapeutic day treatment (TDT) program at Thomas C. McSwain Elementary.





Holiday Celebrations at Elk Hill

Holidays are a particularly difficult time for many of the youth Elk Hill serves. For some of our Residential youth, it's a glaring reminder of being away from family, especially for those who have no home to visit for the holidays. For many of our students at our schools and the ones we serve in our communities, the holidays can feel overwhelming, especially when their families are struggling with limited resources.

For this reason, we work to make the holidays a particularly special time. We begin the season with our Thanksgiving on The Hill celebration, where our students, families, staff and friends come together in a program of thanks and enjoy a traditional Thanksgiving meal. As we move into the Christmas season, we have our Holiday on the Hill Celebration, where students, families, and staff share in music, food and gifts for our youth. Schools and cottages are decorated. This year, our volunteers and our amazing facilities team, Jason Dalton and Kenneth Johnston, spent many hours building an elaborate Santa's Workshop. Thanks to them and our generous donors, all of our youth enjoyed a visit with Santa and gifts aplenty.



CONNECT,
COLLABORATE,
and
CONTRIBUTE

at Elk Hill Charlottesville
School's Synapse Hub.
The Synapse Hub is a
networking group, but it's
more than just networking.
The "Hub" facilitates
connections between
businesses and nonprofit
groups for community and
economic development.
To learn more, please visit
www.synapsehubs.com
or email
jcocciolone@elkhill.org.

Join us on the 2nd
and 4th Wednesday
of each month, from
3-5 p.m. at Elk Hill's
Charlottesville
Day School

*"Start where you are.
Use what you have. Do
what you can."* – Arthur Ashe

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Elk Hill!

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Be a *Hero Forever* to Elk Hill's Kids

By Howard Ellis
Elk Hill Honorary Board Member & Elk Hill Hereafter Hero

There is little debate over the benefits of philanthropy for social good. Americans contribute more to charitable causes than in almost any other country. Even our tax laws are crafted to encourage giving. Research has found that giving actually releases endorphins in the brain, with results similar to the high some people get from chocolate, a glass of red wine... even exercise. *It just feels good to give.*

A charitable gift can be a single donation, a multi-year pledge, or a lump-sum endowment from which income is used to support a chosen cause. The gift itself can take various forms: cash, stocks, bonds, real estate. Your local public radio station even asks you to donate your old car to help support programming.

Typically, gifts are designed to provide current support for the recipient organization. But what about the future of that cause? Must there always be a new supply of donors as existing supporters are lost? Not necessarily; not if a future gift is made part of one's estate plan. And what is one called who provides for the support of a worthy cause even after the giver's death? How about a Hereafter Hero?

"Legacy giving." "Planned giving." "Charitable remainder trust." I find it a bit challenging to get enthusiastic about the typical terminology associated with making gifts as part of my will. But a "**Hereafter Hero**"? Now that **really** feels good.

And to make it better still, there's a way to incorporate such a gift into your will that can help your heirs buy into your largesse. Instead of citing a dollar amount for a gift, simply specify an amount equal to a percent of your estate. A 1% bequest from a \$1 million estate sounds so much more reasonable to remaining family than all those zeros in \$10,000!

Here's hoping you will treat yourself to a shot of "feel good" and join me as an Elk Hill Hereafter Hero.

[If you've already done so, please contact [Jessica Cociolone](#) or [Gillian Kunkel](#) in the Development Office (804-457-4866 Ext 312) so you can get some well-deserved recognition.] ■

Planned Giving

Join the Elk Hill Society

The Elk Hill Society recognizes individuals whose foresight and generosity ensure the long-term stability of Elk Hill for future generations. We encourage you to consider joining a very special group of Elk Hill supporters – Elk Hill Society members. Society members are those friends who express their support for the future of Elk Hill by including a bequest or other life income gift for the Foundation in their estate plan.

It's a simple gift that costs nothing during your lifetime – but makes a world of difference in a young person's lifetime. Let us answer your questions! Contact: [Michael Farley](#), CEO (804) 457-4866 ext. 311 or mfarley@elkhill.org. ■