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Unexpected Gifts

By Timothy Bracey ■ House Manager, Amani Therapeutic Group Home

A young man arrived at Elk Hill's Goochland Campus, full of anxiety and unknowns. Jacob had been placed with us through Social Services on probation.



As we began to unwrap Jacob, we discovered that he seemed institutionalized but intelligent. We also found out that he was heavily involved with a gang and had little regard for his own life or others'. Once he was enrolled in the Harambee School, Jacob began trying to recruit fellow gang members and maintain his "gang life" environment within the school. Everything he did or wore had to represent his gang affiliation. He soon violated his probation and was re-incarcerated.

However, we never give up on our youth. We discussed Jacob's options with him and granted him another chance to return to Elk Hill. This time, he seemed to be a little different and less gang-focused. He learned to trust some of our staff, but then made a bad decision to go AWOL from the Goochland campus. He was eventually detained and served some time, during which he completed and received his GED.

Upon discharge, Elk Hill placed Jacob at the Amani House, our residential home in Chesterfield County. Now he arrived as a mature young man who had discovered that he was ready to live. We began the journey of helping Jacob become

independent. He maintained a demanding job constructing fences, and he learned to manage his money by saving, shopping with a budget, sending money home to his mom, and paying his cell phone bill.

Elk Hill provided substance abuse counseling, therapy, and multiple groups in which Jacob participated daily and weekly. He figured out how to cope with news he didn't like and unexpected changes in routine. He received very few write-ups, and before we knew it we reached his discharge date. Jacob successfully entered an independent living program and is doing well.

Jacob gave us his trauma and we gave him the gift of hope. He gave us his challenges and we gave him the gift of courage. He gave us disruption and we gave him the gift of balance. He gave us his dysfunctional upbringing and we gave him the gift of the sense of home. He gave us the rejections he had experienced, and we gave him the gift of acceptance. Once again, Elk Hill's core values — respect, responsibility, education, hard work, and courage — remain the gifts that keep on giving. ■

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A Note from Michael Farley

Chief Executive Officer • Elk Hill



In Their Own Words—Four of Elk Hill's clients share their experiences.

"Play is often talked about as if it were relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood." – Mr. Rogers

This summer, 130 campers aged 5 to 17 did just that: learn from play. They discovered how to interact with their peers appropriately, make good decisions, handle their emotions, and have fun. Elk Hill's camps are designed for children who can't participate in traditional camp settings because of their challenging behaviors and/or emotional issues. Our camp counselors help these children develop the skills necessary to communicate, participate, and develop friendships. And they do have fun! The campers go to the zoo, go swimming almost every day, pick berries, go bowling, sing songs, and engage in other activities.

Each week of camp has a theme with lessons and activities intended to promote positive values. Weekly themes include conflict resolution, mindfulness, and how to be a friend. Reading is also a central part of camp: Story time for younger children helps build listening/comprehension skills, while older campers participate in book clubs that involve reading a book, discussing central themes, and sharing snacks.

The camp program is another Elk Hill project made possible by the generosity of our supporters. For helping children learn through play, I thank you! ■

Their success isn't possible without you! Thank you for your support.



"Since being with Elk Hill's treatment services, I really enjoyed every therapist I worked with, each for the same and different reasons. When I first started treatment it was very hard, because I didn't see the real purpose of it. But working with Ms. Donna helped me through a lot. She was very easy to talk to about almost anything.

When working with Ms. Pam, at first I wasn't too sure how it would work out. Now, I truly look up to her. She always listened to my problems, big and small, and always gave amazing and helpful advice.

I greatly enjoyed my senior year working with Mrs. Carlton. I grew very close with her over the school year. She was there for me, by my side through everything with my senior year. She understood me and my personality more than I did myself. She helped me grow more love for myself than I ever had. I appreciate her and everyone with Elk Hill that I worked with. They all played a big part with molding me into the young lady I am today."

— K., who received Elk Hill's outpatient therapy ■



"When I was awarded custody of my two youngest grandsons due to abuse and neglect, I was totally at a loss educationally and emotionally, as my youngest child is 30! The counselors at Elk Hill have helped the children and me so very much. One child is no longer needing services, and the other has shown so much progress. The counselors are very professional, but are right in there with the kids on their level. I don't know how I would have handled things without their expertise!"

— J., whose grandchildren have received therapeutic day treatment services and attended Elk Hill's summer programming ■

"I learned how to have self-control, how to react to bullying, and how to focus and stay on task.

I remember when my counselor stood up for me when kids were teasing me and playing games fairly. She did not let them treat me badly. I also liked receiving rewards for positive behavior. My therapist, Ms. Pam, made me feel positively about myself."

— K., a participant in TDT, summer programming and outpatient therapy ■

"I learned to be kind, to always be brave, and to respect others.

At summer camp, I enjoyed going roller skating. I like spending time with my counselors and learning how to control myself. My counselors helped me make friends and helped me learn self-control. They were always there for me in times of need.

My advice: Always believe in your counselor, because they know what's best for you. Always be yourself."

— I., a participant in TDT, summer programming and outpatient therapy ■

At Elk Hill Summer Camp, One Girl Tests Her Wings

Pam Pitchford ■ Community Service Coordinator, Richmond Region

Leighton was adamant about one thing: She absolutely did not want to attend summer camp.

She had worked hard over the past school year to develop skills for managing her social anxiety. But the prospect of going to Elk Hill's summer camp, where she'd be the only rising eighth-grader, made her anxiety worse. Leighton's Therapeutic Day Treatment counselor encouraged her to go anyway, knowing it would benefit her to practice her anxiety-management skills in everyday social settings.

Leighton had a rough start. She didn't show up to camp for the first two days. Once she began attending, she said she didn't want

to attend the afternoon activities, because they challenged her to get outside of her comfort zone and engage with others.

TDT counselors, camp leaders, and peers gently urged her to participate. "Just try," they told her. When Leighton was encouraged to "just try," she would smile sheepishly and agree to give the new activity a chance. Over four weeks of camp, staff watched her confidence grow along with her willingness to move past the anxiety and engage with others. She began to speak with assurance and became willing to try new things without being nudged.

During the course of camp, staff watched a very anxious girl emerge from her shell

and step into a helping role. "At first I didn't want to participate in camp," Leighton admitted, "but I ended up having fun and enjoying the activities."

When the school year started, memories of camp gave her new confidence as she worked to develop these skills. Camp was evidence that she had succeeded before and she could move past the anxiety and enjoy things; all she needed to do was try.

We thank our supporters who help fund summer camp for kids like Leighton! Your generosity allows our youth to make progress over the summer and return to school with renewed energy and confidence. ■

SCENES FROM CAMP



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Shamay Scott, QMHP-C ■ Lead Residential Counselor, Elk Hill Spring Garden



One success story that always comes to mind is a past resident, Marlee.

Prior to Elk Hill she had many failed placements and was unsuccessful in numerous drug rehab programs. I've worked with many children over the years, but she had the most extensive drug history I had ever seen. She had abused intravenous drugs since the age of 9, which delayed her speech and caused some learning disabilities.

When Marlee arrived at Spring Garden, she was very quiet and closed off, but something about her really intrigued me. After a few weeks I started to notice her building relationships with her peers and opening up to staff. She had a loving father, but was missing one thing. She always talked about the bad relationship she had with her mother.

I felt she really needed a woman in her corner, and I did my best to be that for her.

I remember sitting with her late at night or even early mornings as she would cry because she could not control her drug cravings. She realized very quickly that the staff at Spring Garden genuinely cared. The more she let down her guard,

the more she excelled in the program. She made some mistakes along the way, but always managed to take her consequences with no complaints.

While at Spring Garden she maintained good grades and also worked part time at Arby's. Once she was discharged in

October 2018, she was offered the chance to continue her employment at Arby's in her home town. She graduated from high school in May, and is still

attending therapy. One Sunday while sitting at work I received a call from Marlee. She told me thank you for believing in her; and because of that, she now believes in herself. We are so proud of her! ■

The more she let down her guard, the more she excelled in the program.

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
jcoccione@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

*"The most difficult thing is
the decision to act, the rest
is merely tenacity. The fears
are paper tigers. You can do
anything you decide to do. You
can act to change and control
your life; and the procedure,
the process is its own reward."*

— Amelia Earhart

See what's happening
at Elk Hill!

Find us on...



Facebook: ElkHillVA

Receive the Elk Hill
newsletter via email:

Sign up at elkhill.org or email
your name and address to
libanez@elkhill.org

Remembering Elk Hill in Your Planned Giving

*"I have had Elk Hill in my will for some time. One thing I learned
when active on the board is that there are always going to be children
who need the services Elk Hill provides. I just want to be sure there
are funds available to support that work."*

—Randy Street ■ Elk Hill Society Member and Honorary Trustee



Elk Hill is deeply grateful to our supporters who
have made giving to Elk Hill part of their legacy.
The generosity of these special people has an
impact that reverberates over years, as their gift
helps transform the lives of so many Virginia
children.

Please consider including Elk Hill in your
planned giving to support the growth we have
for our 50th anniversary and beyond. **To learn
more, or receive your well-deserved recognition
for your giving, please contact Jessica
Coccolone in the Development Office
(804) 457-4866 (ext. 312).** ■

Back to School Drive

Do you remember what it was like starting the
school year with a fresh set of school supplies?
Without the help of our community, many of
the children we serve will not be starting their
school year with that same excitement. Many
will go back to school wishing for a new back-
pack or new school supplies. They just want
the same chance for success as the other kids
in their class.

**School is just starting, but school supplies are
a constant and ongoing need. Your support
makes it possible to meet our students' most
basic needs.**

Gifts can also be made online at www.elkhill.org.

Elk Hill will happily take donations of new school supply products only!

We need markers, pencils, crayons, colored pencils, chalk, glue sticks, pencil
boxes, 3-ring binders, notebook paper, construction paper, colored paper,
composition books, hand sanitizers and tissues.

**Interested in doing a back-to-school drive? For more information,
or to arrange delivery of school supplies, please contact Erin Nord at
enord@elkhill.org or (804) 457-4866 (ext. 312)** ■

Won't you consider making a donation to
support our students at Elk Hill's Goochland,
Staunton, and Charlottesville schools?

- ✓ **\$ 25.00**
Basic school supplies for one student
- ✓ **\$ 50.00**
One school uniform for a student
(shirt, pants, belt)
- ✓ **\$ 75.00**
Ready for school
(basic supplies & one uniform)
- ✓ **\$ 100.00**
Backpack, basic school supplies
and uniform



We'd love to celebrate with you!

On Tuesday, November 26th, we will be hosting our annual
Thanksgiving on the Hill. Then, on Tuesday, December 17th, we're
celebrating **Holiday on the Hill**. Both events take place at 11:00
a.m. at our Goochland Campus, 1975 Elk Hill Road. Please join Elk
Hill family and friends for lunch, and a fun-filled festive program to
celebrate the holidays. **If you'd like to join in the festivities, please
send your RSVP to Lee Ann Ibanez: libanez@elkhill.org** ■

