



the Advance

Summer 2020



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Spring Garden Girls Find Healing in Nature

Photo credit: Elizabeth Knotts

As the pandemic shut down activities and programs, that loss was keenly felt by the young women at Spring Garden. “We’re being limited in what we can do,” says Daphne, a Charlottesville native. But as many doors closed, one stayed open: the door outside.

Prevention Services Coordinator Elizabeth Knotts has organized outdoor programming during spring and summer breaks for Elk Hill’s youth for four years, after a grant from the Ballyshannon Fund first made it possible. She now leads outdoor activities for the young women living in Spring Garden five days a week (as weather permits).

They’ve been going on adventures all over Central Virginia. One popular destination is Paul’s Creek, a natural waterslide in Nellysford. The most challenging hike so far has been to Humpback Rocks, a steep trail just off the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Two girls, daunted by the climb, really wanted to give up. Others encouraged them to keep trying. One was Daphne, who, Knotts says, “just shows up with a good attitude, and she keeps going.”

The girls decided they would all reach the finish line together — and they did. “They stayed motivated and took some breaks and they all got to the top, eventually,” Knotts says.

Their reward was a stunning view of the Rockfish and Shenandoah Valleys.

Recently, they headed to Crabtree Falls, only to find the popular trail was closed. Knotts took them to the Tye River instead and taught them how to safely start campfires with magnifying glasses. It took them close to an hour, but they beamed with pride when they succeeded.

On other days, Daphne explains, “we do things around the house, like gardening.” In raised beds, the girls are cultivating watermelon, cucumber, carrots, beans and zucchini. They recently began volunteering with a local animal sanctuary and bed-and-breakfast called The White Pig, where they’re helping with farm chores and learning how to care for the animals. On their first day, they enjoyed a delicious plant-based lunch to learn about healthy food choices, made with fresh produce donated by Fairfield Farm.

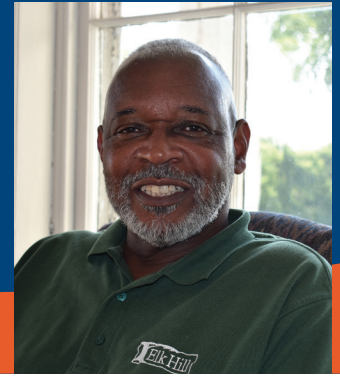


The girls decided they would all reach the finish line together — and they did.

Knotts worked in a wilderness school before coming to Elk Hill, and has certifications in wilderness first aid and ecotherapy. Being in nature can be healing, she says, as the girls find the courage to talk about some of the traumas they’ve endured. She has also seen them overcome fears to become more comfortable outdoors. “I’ve really seen their energy levels increase,” she says, “and their ability to push further than they have before.” ■



A Note from Ronald Spears | Chief Executive Officer | Elk Hill



We at Elk Hill stand ready, willing, and able to be a part of the solution.

As I step into the role of CEO, I first want to thank my friend and mentor, Michael Farley. Michael dedicated four decades of his life to Elk Hill, and we worked together for 36 of those years. I look forward to building on his legacy of leadership. I also want to thank the board of trustees for their vision and support.

I'm fortunate to have a strong and agile executive team at my side as we navigate these challenging times, and I want to recognize that team: Chief Administrative Officer Ebony Jones, Chief Development Officer Jessica Cocciolone, Chief Financial Officer Dan Fitzsimmons, and Chief Operating Officer Laura Easter.

Together, we're working diligently to keep our youth and staff safe as we prepare to resume serving children in schools this fall. Here are some of the actions we're taking:

- We're heightening our sanitation and security protocols, and providing all staff with masks.
- We're surveying parents to determine the effectiveness of our remote instruction this school year.
- We've provided our students with Chromebooks and are investing in Google Classroom and Apex Learning, two essential tools that will allow us to return to remote instruction as needed.
- We're reopening an additional cottage on the main campus, so that we can serve more residential youth.
- We're evolving to become a trauma-informed organization from top to bottom. Trauma-informed care means shifting a therapeutic approach from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?", thereby promoting healing and recovery.

As we adapt to our present circumstances, we are, as always, looking to the future. I'm collaborating with staff and trustees to develop a three-year strategic plan that will enable us to work our way through and out of this pandemic while remaining nimble in this very fluid environment.

We face some significant challenges. Due to changes in managed care and the unforeseen impacts of COVID-19, Elk Hill is operating at a deficit for the first time ever. I ask that you, our supporters, help us move forward by making a donation in honor of our 50th anniversary.

Lastly, please know that we are engaging our youth, our staff and our leadership in the crucial work being done to end structural injustice in America. We at Elk Hill stand ready, willing, and able to be a part of the solution. We're grateful for your support! ■

In a Time of Crisis, He Showed Inner Strength

JT, a junior at Elk Hill Staunton School, just wanted to be done with school. In the classroom, he was known for doing the bare minimum to get by. If a class didn't have an SOL (Standards of Learning) test at the end of the semester, he didn't see the point of taking it.

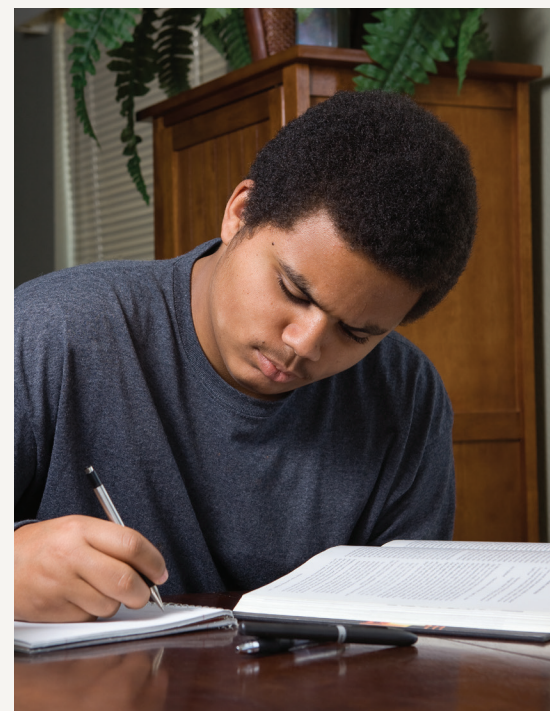
When COVID-19 forced the school to move to distance learning, JT's teachers worried about him. Without constant encouragement and reminders, would he fall behind? Or give up entirely?

His teacher, Kristin Quinn, kept in touch as best she could. She emailed JT and her other students with information about their assignments and invited them to contact her with questions. She also texted parents and guardians to check in on her students and find out how things were going.

To her delight, JT's mom said he had been working hard and completing all his assignments. He'd decided he wanted to end the school year with a good GPA. "I told her I was proud of him," Quinn said.

When JT encountered some technical problems with online learning, he didn't give up, as he might have before. He reached out to his teacher, asked for help, and then found a workaround and emailed her his assignment. The skills he learned at Elk Hill Staunton School — including perseverance and self-reliance — helped him thrive in challenging circumstances.

He discovered his internal motivation and has been "the essence of resilience," Quinn said. "I'm very proud of what he has accomplished and see a bright future ahead of him as he continues down this motivated path." ■



“We Were Taught to Love”: Wisdom’s Elk Hill Story

Wisdom “Antwan” Bryant had a tough childhood in Norfolk, where he was in and out of juvenile corrections. In 1990, his case manager referred him to Elk Hill.

Compared to the city, Goochland was a whole other world. But the biggest change, Bryant says, was the culture: “coming from juvenile facilities to Elk Hill, where we were taught to love, and you don’t have to bully each other, and you don’t have to fight for yourself... it was a big challenge for me.”

He moved into Ball Cottage and adjusted to a new daily routine of work, school and exercise. For Bryant, one of the best things about Elk Hill was learning how to earn and save money. He worked in the kitchen with Miss Mary, the beloved cook known for her Southern food. “She taught me how to make macaroni and cheese, baked chicken, smothered pork chops,” he recalls. Early in the morning, around 4 or 5 a.m., he’d get up to unload delivery trucks. Bryant also learned how to work on cars, which he still enjoys today.

When Bryant arrived at Elk Hill as a teenager, he was reading at a second-grade level. Principal Pat Grisby and his teachers helped him overcome his learning disability, and Bryant made huge strides. “When I left Elk Hill, I was reading probably on a college level,” he says.

He remembers the physical challenges, too. Jogging up and down hilly country roads. Backpacking, building shelters and canoeing. Elk Hill didn’t have a gym then,



so the boys played blacktop basketball. “Everybody got a chance to play,” Bryant says. No matter how good or bad you were, Coach Morton would teach you.

On the weekends, staff would take the boys to Richmond to go skating or bowling, or they’d rent VHS movies from the country store. “Elk Hill was really fun,” he says. And he credits it with saving his life: if he hadn’t gone there, “I probably would have died in the streets of Norfolk,” he says.

When Bryant graduated from the program in 1992, Mr. Spears told him he’d never forget Elk Hill’s address: P.O. Box 99. Nor has he forgotten what he learned: leadership, a strong work ethic, and a desire to challenge himself.

Today, he’s an ordained apostle and the Founder and General Overseer of the True Kingdom Apostolic Alliance. He and his wife, Salina Bryant, have eight children and five grandchildren. “I teach the values and teachings of Elk Hill,” he says, “and Elk Hill will always be part of this family and my life, along with God.” ■

NOTES FROM THE FIELD



Paul Bratton, MPA, QMHP
Program Director | Elk Hill Amani

“Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.”

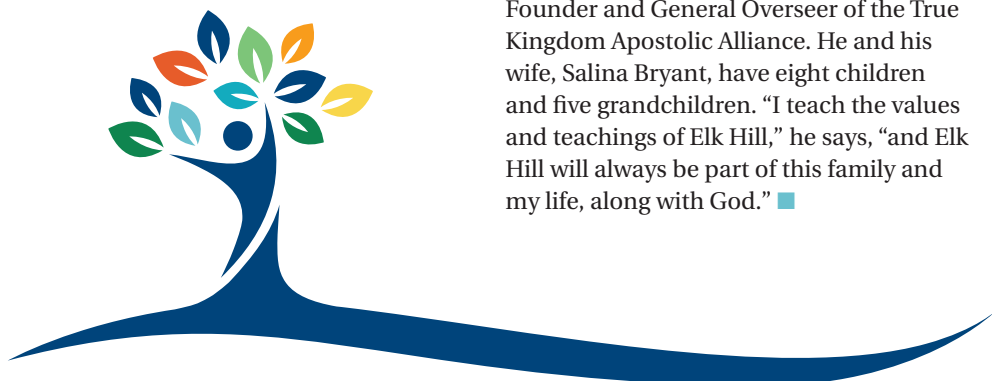
— Thomas Jefferson

We came into the COVID-19 epidemic with a new house of six young men, and we had to educate them about the severity of the situation. We told them, “These are the rules right now, guys.” The guys really took the risk very seriously. And I think I was lucky and I was blessed to have four or five young men who were already open and willing to listen.

I always like things to be super neat and super clean. So when this happened, we just kind of ramped it up a notch: wash your hands, keep your rooms clean. For activities and fun, we were able to come up with some creative ideas. We’ve done exercise outside, gardening and yardwork, even playing bingo.

Every day, they’re allowed to have a Zoom conversation with their family, to maintain those connections. That’s been an unexpected benefit, because before all this, we never really utilized the technology that we have at Elk Hill. They can now look at their loved ones and see that their family is OK.

I’ve been with Elk Hill since 1999, and my philosophy has always been to really teach the youth like regular young men, and always to be honest with them. My role here is to manage the house. I’m the one that says no. I’m sometimes the mean guy. With all that’s happened in the world, the young men have accepted what’s happening, and have developed self-awareness. They look up to us as mother and father figures. They put their faith in us to keep them safe. ■



Honoring Michael Farley

Staff, alumni, and friends share their favorite moments and memories.



"I think Michael pushes people to become better humans. I believe this is because he reflects a lot on himself – ensuring that he is treating people 'the way that he would want to be treated.' Then, he nudges everyone else to do the same. We have a little of this in common; still, I know that I am a better person because of him!" – *Ebony Jones*

"Mike embodies true servant leadership, making the betterment of others his life's work. He is a model for all. Favorite memory? So many. A great one was stumbling through the Rotherwood race with Mike and the legendary Kip Keino, Kenya's breakthrough Olympic great." – *John Mason*

"I really enjoyed working for Michael because I feel like he appreciates the importance of every job equally. He is an inspiration and he will be greatly missed!" – *Marsha Burnette*

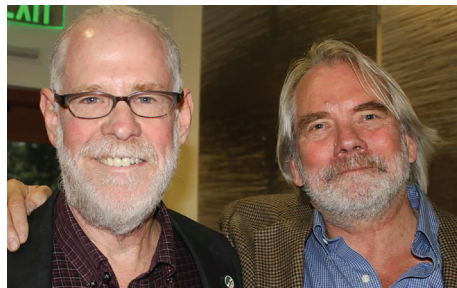
"For the short period of time that I worked for Michael, he made all of his staff feel welcome and a part of the Elk Hill family. What he did for this organization the past 40 years is indescribable! He is such an inspiration to not only the staff but the youth we serve. He will be missed dearly." – *Lindsey Talley*



"I would like to thank Mr. Farley for his leadership and daily acts of kindness. The little things a person does go a long way, and are not unnoticed. When he enters the dining room each day, he makes sure that he speaks to everyone individually before getting in line to eat. Little things speak volumes of a person." – *Shawn Freeman*

"Playing basketball against him in a pickup game. I was guarding him and he scored a fadeaway jumper on me." – *Wisdom Bryant*

"All of my memories of Michael are great! One of the nicest guys I know. So much empathy and compassion for everyone, and really funny too!" – *Jenny Kanary Bassett*



"In 1997 my dad passed away and Mr. Farley was on a trip. When he got back to work he called me up to his office, and he was so sympathetic and he had a long heartfelt conversation with me that was so comforting." – *Chrissy Daniels*

"I was a counselor at Elk Hill's summer camp for 9 years. Whenever Mr. Farley would visit our campers to play music, it was a treat." – *Nathaniel Thomas Mullins*



Check our  Facebook page for 50th anniversary updates!

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