

Spotlight

A SOCIAL MAGAZINE EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF FRENCHMAN'S RESERVE

September 2017

Place
Of

Memo Murray Photography

HOPE



Charles Bender, Founder & CEO

PLACE OF HOPE

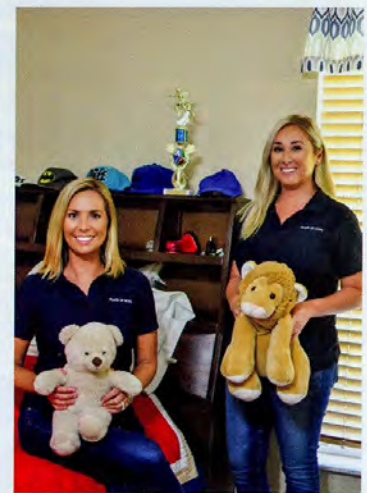
— Caring for South Florida's Children

To anyone who does not live or work on the campuses, Place of Hope's communities are just that – normal communities. They function like other South Florida communities, in that parents and adults care for children and youth, providing love, education and guidance. What makes the Paxson and Villages of Hope campuses of Place of Hope unique is the composition of the families.

On the Paxson campus in Palm Beach Gardens, trained, dedicated foster parents, work with children who have been neglected, abandoned or abused and placed in this new environment for their safety. Parents, aided by volunteers, supporters and staff, help their children understand how to be a part of a family structure, sometimes for the first time in their young lives.

On the Villages of Hope campus, east of the Paxson campus off Northlake Boulevard, youth who have aged out of foster care or young adults who have been homeless live with other people their age, under the supervision of a trained adult. The tight-knit campus is composed of apartments, single-family homes and a cottage for new and expectant mothers. Here, young adults are taught how to manage their households, become knowledgeable parents, pursue their careers and education, and chart a path toward independence.

With more than 300 children and young adults in its care, Place of Hope has become a model for success in foster care and with emancipated youth. However, as the number of children in state care grows, so does the need for more support of these very special communities.



Paxson Campus Grows with Fitness and Enrichment Centers

Place of Hope is a unique faith-based, state-licensed children's organization providing family-style foster care (emergency and long-term); family outreach and intervention; maternity care; safety for victims of domestic minor sex trafficking; transitional housing and support services; foster care recruitment and support; hope and healing opportunities for children and families who have been traumatized by abuse and neglect throughout our region.

Currently, the largest provider of traditional foster care in a six-county region from Broward to Indian River, the nonprofit organization is expanding this year with the addition of the Gray Fitness Center on its Paxson campus, where it all began. Place of Hope was established in 2001 with the campus that is home to 44 children and their live-in foster parents. The Place of Hope model is designed to encourage consistency, stability and normalcy, while allowing sibling groups, who are typically separated, to remain intact within a home environment.

"Our Family Cottages are located within a unique, safe, and serene gated neighborhood. Although individual circumstances and the courts determine the precise length of stay for each child, we strive to provide a stable and loving family home for children until they either attain permanency (family reunification or adoption) or are of age to live independently," said Founding CEO Charles Bender III.

The new Gray Fitness Center will add to the campus' amenities, inviting POH families to work out together in a state-of-the-art facility within walking distance of each home. The center will feature cardio machines, weight racks and modern equipment for all forms of cross-functional training.





Families will also enjoy the opening of the Berlin Enrichment Center, which will be the hub for our comprehensive enrichment programs. We strive to provide our kids a full spectrum of enrichment experiences including educational support, sports, music, the arts, career mapping and life-skills development. Equipped with a computer lab, tutoring & counseling rooms, and life-skill training rooms, mentors will be paired with our kids to help develop their skills and prepare them for eventual independence.



Setting Young Adults Up for Success

On the Villages of Hope campus, Place of Hope's mission is slightly different. Young adults who have aged out of foster care or were homeless, including new and expectant mothers, work to better their lives and to live independently.

"At Villages, we are committed to strengthening families and ensuring the well-being of homeless young adults in our community. With their primary need of housing met, these individuals and families are offered the skills and support necessary to live with dignity, independence and stability," Bender said.

The Lake Park campus programs feature an Extended Foster Care (EFC) program, in addition to the existing Independent Living transitional housing. The EFC program provides the missing link between supportive childhood and successful adulthood. Designed around the traditional maturation process that occurs between 18-22 years old on a college campus, the program uses a live-in residential assistant (R.A.) and incorporates mentoring, tutoring and life skills training.

The ECF program is an intermediary step that allows VOH's youngest residents to complete, at a minimum, their high school education, while still living in a home supported by an adult caregiver.

The Transitional Living Apartment and Transitional Parenting Apartment models allow young adults to learn how to manage their households with the support of roommates, experiencing similar life challenges. Sharing responsibilities, expectations and lessons create a supportive home space for individuals and young mothers. Within Joann's Cottage, new and expectant mothers live in a beautiful, multi-room home setting with their babies, learning how to balance the demands of work, school, parenthood and personal life, under adult supervision and guidance.

A Place of Hope Success Story -- Dorson

"We live and breathe for our success stories, proof that our children are adjusting to normalcy and breaking the patterns of abuse, homelessness and lack of faith," Bender said. "When they begin to emulate the lessons from their foster parents or mentors, we know a new life is being ingrained in them and that their children won't suffer the life they had."

A recent Place of Hope success story is Dorson's. Dorson, his brother, and their mother were living on the streets, constantly moving back and forth between hotels, abandoned houses, and homes of family members.

With nowhere to turn and no income, they found themselves digging for food in dumpsters. The two brothers were not enrolled in school for almost a year and a half, due to moving around so much.

Even though Dorson endured such hard circumstances, he never lost hope that someday, things would be different. At 12 years old, Dorson and his brother were brought into the care of Place of Hope. They were so grateful to have food and a roof

over their heads, and they also realized that they were together and safe.

Going from the streets to a traditional family home setting is a hard adjustment. Dorson was not used to having stability and accountability. His Cottage parents loved on him each day and encouraged him in school, sports and daily activities. Dorson attended Jupiter Christian School and was able to participate in football and track. Since graduating, he has won numerous track meets and has competed at the national level. Dorson plans to attend college in Kansas on a full scholarship for track.

How You Can Help

To become a part of the solution is simple. Visit www.placeofhope.com and click on the Donate button. The cost to sponsor a child in care is \$10,000 annually. This amount ensures a holistic provision of support services, stable housing and independent living skills for each child and youth. All funds generously given toward our One Life Annual Fund (for operations) are matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis. Every gift at every level will change real lives today. Place of Hope has received a 4-star rating for five consecutive years (2013-2017) from Charity Navigator for its excellent financial stewardship and management, a testimony to its sterling level of care of Florida's children.