

# CHILDREN'S



# VILLAGE

*Hope and Healing for Children*

WINTER 2023

Children's Village is a Christian home that provides hope and healing for abused and neglected children.

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# Merry Christmas!

On behalf of the families and staff at Children's Village, I wish you a Merry Christmas.

My name is Matt Rogers, but everyone just calls me Mr. Matt. I came to Children's Village in December 2021 to start my journey as the Executive Director of this amazing organization. My first two years have been a roller coaster ride as we have reopened the campus and searched for the right staff to serve in our cottages. We have experienced the joy of watching children heal and live happy lives. We have also experienced the sorrow of watching children we have bonded with leave us.

Each of the children placed at Children's Village during my short tenure have returned to their birth families. I am confident we are faithfully executing our mission to provide hope and healing for these children and their families. We all know the goal is for children placed with us to return to their families of origin, or to be adopted when that is not possible. Still, we build families with these children while they are here and feel a sense of loss when they leave.

So, during this season of thankfulness, generosity, and love, we wanted to take some time to reflect and share some of the things we do to celebrate the holidays and events that are important in each child's life while also honoring their family traditions. Each of us have traveled different paths to arrive at this point in time where we serve together at Children's Village.

Please, enjoy, or at least indulge our thoughts on sharing holidays with the children.

My first experience with foster care was working as a cottage parent in 2000. I was only 25 years old, had no parenting experience, and was placed in charge of a house full of teenaged boys. I was in that home for eight months, with only two days off, before accepting that I could not maintain that pace and be a proper role model for the boys. I stepped away from foster care for about three years before trying again as a member of the direct care staff at a residential treatment center (RTC) for teen boys. In total, I worked in one residential treatment center and three cottage homes. Afterward, I returned to college to finish my degree before joining Child Protective Services for eight years. Realizing I could make the most difference working directly with children in foster care, I became a program director for an RTC in Tyler for four years before joining Children's Village in 2021.

During the 20+ years I've worked with foster children I've learned that what children want most is love, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. While over-the-top birthday parties and piles of presents under the Christmas tree are fun, those presents are just things. The memories we all typically hold dear from holidays past are of the people we shared them with. Despite whatever abuse or neglect may have taken place before they entered foster care, children miss their biological families, especially during holidays and special events. One way we can serve these children and help to ease the pain of missing their families is to uphold some of the family traditions they love. For me, the simplest way to do this was through food.

As a cottage parent, I began asking each child not only about their favorite foods, but what foods their mom, grandmother, or other close family members cooked for them. If they couldn't answer, I would ask if there was any food, they had always wanted to try but had not been able to. Birthdays became a special event where I cooked any kind of meal the child wanted, whether it was barbecue, neck bones and collard greens, or chili con carne "like grandma used to make". My boys always knew I would do my best to make their day special. That was what they truly craved – time, effort, and attention.

As I moved from direct care into case management and program administration, my role didn't always allow me to cook special meals for the kids. However, I always made a point of celebrating their birthdays with a meal out and some one-on-one time. My wife started baking cookies, muffins, and cakes for the facilities on special occasions and holidays. We have a thank you card hanging on our refrigerator from a 16-year-old young man for whom she baked a birthday cake. No one had ever baked him a homemade cake before. He was so excited that someone had spent the time making a cake just for him that he ran to call his father to share with him about it. That card is a reminder that so many of the little things we take for granted are the big things for a child, especially in foster care.

At Children's Village we encourage our cottage parents to share their own holiday traditions with the children, as well as create new ones. Our cottage home model allows us to provide a community similar to what a child may experience at home with extended

family members. Last year we had our first large "family" Thanksgiving with both cottage homes, all our employees, and some friends and family members. We fried turkeys and had every oven on campus working to feed the crowd. Everyone stuffed themselves and had a great time fellowshiping and playing together. We're definitely looking forward to this year's celebration.

During the month of December, we are usually blessed with parties and Christmas gifts from local businesses, churches, and families. Our foster families stay busy with school and church events and visits with the children's birth families. There are often trips on the Polar Express or outings to Christmas light displays. As Christmas day nears, we try to take a step back and slow everything down on campus. We want our cottage parents and children to be able to enjoy some peaceful time at home decorating their trees, reading the story of Christ's birth, and enjoying their hot chocolate while awaiting Santa Claus. Maintaining a family atmosphere on campus throughout all the craziness of the holiday season is very important to us.

Our mission is to be a Christian home that provides hope and healing for children in East Texas. Those who come to Children's Village will typically spend at least one major holiday away from their families. Our mission to provide healing includes their birth families, as well. We want them to be able to feel included in their child's life, even if it must be from a distance. Celebrating the family traditions of each child, while sharing our own traditions with them, plays a significant role in the healing process for these children. We take many pictures of the kids throughout the holidays and help the kids assemble photo albums to share with their families. We don't want this season of their lives to be lost, and we want their birth families to know that we celebrate with the children and try to incorporate many of their own family traditions into ours.

Thank you all for supporting our work at Children's Village! We want to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,  
Mr. Matt

To view previous newsletters, please visit our website at <https://www.childrensvillageoftexas.org/>  
Also, please follow us on Instagram: @ChildrensVillageTexas and Facebook: @ChildrensVillageTexas and share our information with the community.

# Messages from the Cottage Parents

In September of 2022, Tommy and Ruby came to Children's Village to become cottage parents. They are a young couple who have not raised children of their own yet. They wanted to share their lives and their love with children and felt they were called to serve on our campus. They spent their first holiday season as parents on campus with a sibling group that included an 18-month-old girl and 7-year-old boy. They asked several times "what are we supposed to do" for Halloween, for Thanksgiving, for Christmas, for whatever comes next. We always told them, "Just do what your family does and ask the kids what their family does." As they entered the second holiday season at Children's Village, as seasoned veterans now, we asked them to share their thoughts on spending holidays and sharing their lives with the children. This is what they wanted to share with each of you.

## Hello friends, family, and community!

We are so excited to be heading into the holiday season here at Children's Village. The holiday season can be an emotional time, especially when our kids are celebrating the season without their immediate families. There are plenty of traditions and activities that we do to make this time special for our kids and their families. For Holiday meals such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, we always ask our kids if their families have a traditional meal or side that we could add to our spread. We also encourage them to join us in the kitchen to stir and mix and pour. They love to cook and bake with us.

My favorite Holiday to celebrate with the kids is Christmas Day. A tradition that we have in my family that I like to share with our kids is that we open one gift on Christmas Eve. We let my mom choose which gift and she chooses a new pair of Christmas pajamas for everyone. So, we get all cozy in our new pajamas after the Christmas Eve service at church. My mom makes us cinnamon rolls on Christmas morning and this year, I'm going to have her teach me how to make them. To celebrate the season, last year we were able to experience the Polar Express in real life, and it was a blast. We had cookies and hot chocolate, we got to meet Santa, we wore our PJ's, rang jingle bells, and sang the night away!

We also love Thanksgiving at Children's Village because we have such a nice, relaxing time together and our kids usually have some delicious traditions to bring to the table as well. This year we will be enjoying some bacon wrapped jalapeno poppers, mashed potatoes, and sweet potato pie with marshmallows. I can't wait! The weather is also beautiful around Thanksgiving time, so we can play outside on the playground, throw the football around, or watch the football games.

For Halloween, we attended the Boo at the Zoo event at the Caldwell Zoo. We loved going out in the community, seeing everybody else all dressed up, and of course seeing all the wonderful animals. We have two kids who wanted to be gorillas and one that wanted to be a purple princess fairy. We also enjoyed coming together for a feast of different finger foods and dips to eat while we carved and painted pumpkins.

When holidays come around, we always want to include our kids' families, so we set aside time to write and draw cards as well as make crafts (and ornaments at Christmastime) for their parents and loved ones. Last year our kids made a Build-A-Bear for their mom for Mother's Day and brought her chocolates on Valentine's Day. The Holiday season is a time to spend with loved ones, to celebrate, to be still, to reflect and to rest. From our Children's Village family to yours, we hope you have a blessed season, full of joy and hope.

Love,  
Tommy & Ruby  
Cottage A Parents

During the summer of 2022, we were blessed to have Mr. Joe and Mrs. Denise join us as Assistant Cottage Parents. They had retired from being full-time cottage parents at another agency the prior year but missed working with children. They brought a wealth of experience to the campus and served as exceptional mentors to the younger staff on campus. They were always available to help with the children and holidays in any way that was needed. A couple of months ago, we had an opening for cottage parents. Joe and Denise once again proved to be invaluable members of our village and asked to fill the vacancy. This Christmas, they will be enjoying the holidays as cottage parents in Cottage B. Joe and Denise had the following to say about sharing Christmas with their children

## Christmas Time at Cottage B

We love Celebrating Christmas with our foster loves. We decorate the home with a Christmas tree covered in pretty lights, colorful ornaments, and candy canes.

The children color and paint multiple decorations for the tree and the home. We celebrate the gift of giving, and have each child make a wish list. If they like, they can write a letter to Santa, telling him their wishes and how good they have been. The children at the Village enjoy a variety of fun-filled Christmas parties, with delicious food, candy, stockings, and gifts, celebrated with foster parents, family, staff, campus friends, and neighbors. Throughout the week of Christmas, we celebrate with classic Christmas movies and cartoons, while eating

popcorn and sipping hot cocoa. We enjoy family outings driving through our community to admire the beautifully decorated homes, listening to Christmas songs, and singing together. Christmas Eve is celebrated with the family gathered around the tree for a reading of the Nativity story from the Bible and to discuss the birth of Jesus and how he came to save us. Each child picks one gift to open from under the tree. Santa arrives while the children are sleeping, and they awaken Christmas morning to find that their wish list has been fulfilled. Christmas Day is celebrated with different delicious foods. Each child gets to pick out their favorite dish, which they get to help prepare, that is included in the meal. Finally, we attend a special candlelight ceremony at our church to celebrate the birth of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ... the most important part.

Mr. Joe & Mrs. Denise  
Cottage B Parents



# The people who keep us going!

There are so many other people that support our mission, and we thank you all. However, it would be downright negligent for us not to talk about the rest of our village.

When Mr. Matt joined Children's Village, he came as a package deal with his wife, Katie, and daughter, Amelia. They have been on this journey with him throughout the course of Amelia's life and play a significant role in Children's Village today. As mentioned, Katie loves to bake and cook for the children and families on campus. She is the planner and organizer behind the scenes of most gatherings on campus. Anyone who has visited campus during the year and complimented the seasonal decorations should know that is all Katie.

Amelia grew up with her dad working with foster children. She literally shared her car seat with another child Mr. Matt used to transport during his time at CPS. She has passed along her toys to other children as she outgrew them and is always generous. Over the past couple of years, Amelia has worked at Timberline Baptist Camp where she has begun sharing her faith with other youth. Through Amelia's work at Timberline, some of the children living at Children's Village has been able to attend camps and meet other children who are learning about Christ's love.

Like all parents, our cottage parents need an occasional break. Children's Village employs Assistant Cottage Parents to work in the homes and provide some downtime for the parents. Addi and Julie have been part of Children's Village for

well over a year and go above and beyond to support everyone on campus. Aside from their regular duties in the cottages, they are always ready to join in for celebrations and make life on campus fun for the children. They blow up balloons and hang decorations for parties. They made Easter baskets for the children and set up an egg for them last Easter. They help in the office to keep the children's files organized and up to date. They come in on their days off to help around campus projects from cleaning and organizing our supply closets, planting flowers, painting, or anything else that is needed to keep things moving along.

We are truly blessed to have a Village of people working toward the common goal of providing hope and healing for children.



# CHILDREN'S VILLAGE

Hope and Healing for Children

P.O. Box 6564  
Tyler, TX 75711-6564

**Address Service Requested**

*Children's Village does not receive any state or federal funds, but relies solely upon contributions from individuals and organizations. If you would like to help us provide for the daily care and needs of our children please contact our business office at 903-531-0551. Your generosity and compassion can positively impact a child for a lifetime.*

## How can you support Children's Village?

### Give Gifts That Keep On Giving

Do you have a friend or loved one you wish to honor in a special way? Children's Village can help honor that person through our Memorial Program or our Tribute and Remembrance Program. The funds you provide in this manner are used for food, clothing, shelter, and education for our boys and girls. At the same time, it is a thoughtful way to say to a friend, relative or bereaved family that you care.

### Here's How It Works

**Memorials:** Donate in memory of a lost loved one as a thoughtful way to say to a friend, relative, or bereaved family that you care. No mention is made of the gift amount.

**Honorariums:** Donate in honor of a birth, birthday, anniversary, graduation, recovery from illness, or a special occasion such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. Honorary gifts are acknowledged, and the amount of the gift is not mentioned.

**Donations:** Children's Village is a charitable non-profit organization that is privately funded. We provide residential care for children in need of a safe home to recover

from abuse, neglect, and childhood trauma. We do not accept state funding and rely on the generosity of community support to provide for our children. Your donation will be used to provide food, clothing, shelter, and education for the boys and girls who reside at Children's Village

### **Giving through your will:**

Children's Village will graciously accept support from individuals and families given through their will. Whether in the form of a specific amount, percentage of residue, or entire estate, please have legal forms prepared through your attorney for this type of donation.

*Thank you for your gift! It will help make a difference in the life of a child.*  
Please submit physical donations in the envelope included with this newsletter.

Make checks payable and mail to:

**Children's Village**  
P.O. Box 6564  
Tyler, TX 75711-6564

Memorials



Honorariums



Donations



Donations may also be made online:  
(Scan the codes below)