Hope and Healing: Erin’s Story

Janie Thompson* remembers what she calls the worst day of her life well. “I'll never forget it,” she says and it pains her to think of it still.

On a bright Tuesday afternoon, she picked up her four-year-old daughter, Erin, from her child care center. The director of the center seemed concerned and took her aside. She asked Ms. Thompson, “Does your daughter know a man named Ricky?” Ms. Thompson told her yes, he was the neighbor whom often looked after Erin when Ms. Thompson had to run to the store. He always seemed so helpful. “Why?” she asked with rising concern. “I could feel my heart in my throat at that point, before I even heard the rest of what the director had to say.”

The director told Ms. Thompson about drastic changes in Erin’s behavior that pointed to signs of abuse. Erin had shown increased aggressive play, explosive tantrums, withdrawn behavior, and had become highly sensitive to physical contact with adults; all uncharacteristic three months before. “I’ve also had trouble with Erin lately, she hadn’t seemed herself, but I thought it was because I had been working so much and she was acting out because she missed me,” Ms. Thompson said. Erin’s suspicious play was a red flag to the child care staff, and it took only a few questions for them to know that something horrible had happened.

Initially Erin was on edge. She was always worried about something bad happening. Erin’s play was unfocused, but told the story of someone who didn’t feel safe. “It took time. Slowly, by allowing Erin to lead this healing process, she started to open up,” said Ms. Thompson. Through her play, she told the story of a small bird left alone in the nest and a big mean snake coming to eat her. Over time, the story evolved. Erin was able to bring the mother bird back to the nest. She brought in other friends from the woods to help protect her from the snake. She was able to draw a picture of the snake locked away in a box; she drew a chain and padlocks on the box, and then drew stamps and an address label on the box to send to, “an island far away from here where there aren’t any children or birds.”

Erin’s clinician worked with her mother, as well as the adult men in her life to help her feel safe and secure, and to help them to be patient and compassionate. “We all had to be part of this healing process and I felt such support from my family and from ChildSavers during this time,” said Ms. Thompson.

Eventually Erin will never be able to erase her experience, but it won’t define her. She is now able to play and grow, knowing that although there are bad people in the world, there are far more people who love her and want to protect her.

*Names and details have been changed to preserve confidentiality.
Small Time Care, Big Time Impact: Rene’s Story

Rene Burton Brown knew she always wanted to work with children. “I have always loved being around younger children, even as teenager.” Ms. Brown attended Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and earned a degree in Special Education. She worked with children of all ages from infant age to high school age but it was the younger children that really inspired her.

“There is something about the daycare setting. I love watching their little faces light up a room and [their readiness] to explore the world excites me.” In 1989, after becoming a mother, she began her at-home, child care business. Since becoming a child care provider, Ms. Brown has sought out ways of improving her business and her professional development in order to provide quality, safe care to the families and children she with which she works. She enrolled in Virginia Quality to help ensure quality care.

“I have always participated in ChildSavers’ training programs,” she said. Ms. Brown has found the programs informative and helpful. She describes her experience as always being positive. As a Virginia Quality and USDA Food and Nutrition Program participant, she attends speaking engagements to learn from experts about childhood development, child nutrition, and better ways to serve her children and parents.

Ms. Brown says that ChildSavers gives her ideas on how to create learning environments for her children and new ways to prepare food and the proper serving sizes for each age group. “The information I receive from ChildSavers encourages me as a teacher to introduce the children to new foods at an earlier age. When I introduce new foods, I encourage my parents to do the same,” she says. New parents welcome new tips on their children’s development, growth, and nutrition. Ms. Brown engages parents in addressing behavioral issues and picky eating through these programs.

Early child care can be difficult to access for many families and it is small family child care homes like Ms. Brown’s that provide valuable, affordable, and quality child care for working families. Family child care homes offer a unique service to our communities. The home atmosphere and flexible non-traditional hours (nights and weekends) are better suited for the complex lives of some working parents. There are three types of family child care homes in Virginia.

Licensed family child care homes can care for up to 12 children, depending on the children’s ages and the number of adults supervising the children. Voluntarily Registered and Unregulated providers are limited to no more than four children (excluding those living in the home).

In Virginia, there are 3,789 family child care homes. Last year, ChildSavers ensured that 313 of these family child care homes provided quality child care and education by offering professional development, and training and mentoring on topics such as quality child care and education, healthy nutrition, and safety.

Ms. Brown found ChildSavers programs beneficial. In particular, she says “Virginia Quality has opened the door for me to look at how I could better myself as a teacher, and how I could manage my daycare center areas to better help my student’s learning experience. This is a very rewarding experience for me.”

Your gifts support children and families every day!

★ Yes, I want to make a difference in my community by giving children the confidence and skills they need.

Name: ______________________________________________
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My gift is in honor of: _________________________________
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★ Enclosed is my check for $__________ payable to ChildSavers
★ Please charge $__________ to my credit card:
  ○ Mastercard  ○ Visa  ○ American Express  ○ Discover
  CardNumber: _______/_______/_______/_______ Exp. ___/___
Sec. Code/CVN: __________________________
Name as it appears on card: ____________________________
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★ I have included ChildSavers in my estate plans.

A financial statement is available upon request from the State Office of Consumer Affairs in the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
Mission Inspired Volunteer: Taylor Muniz

Taylor Muniz has volunteered for ChildSavers for more than two years. In that time, she has not only raised thousands of dollars for projects and completed multiple toy drives, but has also spread awareness throughout her network.

Muniz rallied her colleagues at Old Navy Stores, where she works as Senior Business Operations Manager, to support ChildSavers. The staff conducted school supply and holiday toy drives, created a team for the Monument Avenue 10k, and held bake sales. Muniz’s belief in the ChildSavers mission drives her efforts. “Bringing awareness to ChildSavers’ mission makes me feel as though I am making a positive impact in our community and putting a spotlight on a stigmatized issue such as mental health and how trauma affects children.” When asked what inspires her to support ChildSavers she notes that not many children’s organizations have a trauma-informed focus and that she has always been a big advocate for children’s mental health. Having trauma-informed health, she says, prepares children for a healthy and successful future.

Muniz enjoys her work with ChildSavers and loves informing others in the community about the mission. Muniz believes that the more people who hear about and understand the mission, the more children may benefit. “I choose to volunteer for ChildSavers because I know I would’ve benefitted greatly from this organization during my own childhood and I know so many others would as well.”

Muniz says that it is not difficult to get her staff excited and involved in the work. “The mission really inspires my team to get involved in events I have organized. I have managed to get all five Richmond area stores on board as well, mostly by organizing the actual event and informing them of when, where, why and how many individuals are needed. I am also fortunate I work for an organization such as Gap, Inc. that places a huge importance on giving back to our community’s youth. The fact that ChildSavers is based in Richmond and has served Richmond for over 90 years really hits home for my team.”

Muniz played basketball and softball throughout her childhood and youth and attributes her success as a volunteer to the essential life lessons she learned from the sports such as teamwork and leadership. She says that she would eventually like her work in the community and her career to lead to a position with the actual Gap Foundation where she can have an even greater impact.

Mark Your Calendars

Om at the Overlook
September 9 - October 14, 2016

ChildSavers is thrilled to collaborate with Humble Haven Yoga for a series of donation based yoga classes in support of ChildSavers!

Classes are on The Overlook at ChildSavers, offering stunning views of the downtown skyline. Enjoy yoga as the sun sets on Richmond.

Going through October 14, classes will take place every Friday from 5:15pm-6:15pm.

For more information, visit humblehavenyoga.com and click on events.
8th Annual Artists Support ChildSavers

October 20 & 21, 2016

Artists Support ChildSavers Show is a special reception, silent auction, and sale of artwork benefitting ChildSavers. Mingle with the artists on Oct. 20th during the Opening Reception. This is a ticketed event and includes hors d’oeuvres and libations. Individual Tickets are $40 in advance and $50 at the door; Junior Patron Tickets are $100.

For more information, including participating artists and silent auction packages, and to buy tickets, go to childsavers.org/events. The Show continues Oct. 21st.

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