

Connie Maxwell

MAGAZINE

Connie Maxwell Helps Graduate

“Reach for My Dreams”

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AS CONNIE MAXWELL
UNVEILS HEALING
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CHANGING IN ALL THE
RIGHT WAYS”



FROM FOSTER CARE
TO A FOREVER HOME:
JACOB’S ADOPTION
STORY

Connie Maxwell

MAGAZINE

EDITORS

Jay Boyd
Whitney Newby
Carlee Hoopes

PHOTOGRAPHY

Valor Media Group
Anathallo Photography
Carlee Hoopes

CONTRIBUTORS

Julia Bell
Lizzy Haseltine
Carlee Hoopes

DESIGN

Lokal Design Co.
Carlee Hoopes

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Dr. William D. Nicholson II

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	Dr. Roger Troutman
	Mr. Brian Whitaker

RESOURCES

The Connie Maxwell Magazine is sent to alumni, donors and friends of the ministry. Send address changes or cancellation requests to Jill Bryant at jillbryant@conniemaxwell.com or call (864) 942-1427.

For general questions, please contact us at (864) 942-1400 or (800) 868-2624.



Connie Maxwell
CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

MISSION

CMCM exists to restore the Faith, Family, and Future of vulnerable children and families through Christian services that emphasize ministry and healing.

VISION

To become a national leader in Christian ministries of healing for vulnerable children and families.



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Decade of Dreams



Keep Back Nothing.

As we unveil this edition of the Connie Maxwell Magazine, I am reminded of the last paragraph of C.S. Lewis' masterpiece, Mere Christianity. I memorized it long ago and truly believe it sums up the essence of our faith with an all-or-nothing attitude of absolute surrender. It states,

*"Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. **Keep back nothing.** Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."*

As you fumble through these pages and read about Holland reaching for her dreams, Jacob's adoption, and Erika's life-changing story, you can feel all the meaning, redemption, and impact of our ministry building momentum and strengthening our vision to be a **"national leader in Christian ministries of healing for vulnerable children and families."**

Dedicated to this unrelenting pursuit, Connie Maxwell's **"Decade of Dreams"** continues as we

seek to successfully complete **"For the Dreams of Children" Campaign** and fund the many ambitious goals that stand before us, especially, the mantelpiece of our dreams, The Healing Center (which is spotlighted on page 8). This article moves our efforts to a deeper explanation of The Healing Center and its potential impact in ministering to children and families in Jesus' name. Please read it carefully and pray about how you can be a part of this transforming work that promises to have a generational impact in the lives of children and families in our hometown of Greenwood, the state of South Carolina, and the nation at large.

Thank you for your fervent prayers, generous gifts, and constant encouragement. It means so much as we seek to **Keep Back Nothing** in our commitment to carrying Connie Maxwell to an unprecedented level of excellence.

For the Dreams of Children and the Glory of God,



WILLIAM D. NICHOLSON II, PH.D.
PRESIDENT





Film Spotlight

Sown Seeds

Alumni James Poston and Katie Dent stand as powerful examples of hope and healing, their lives transformed by the love and stability they found at Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries.

James came to Connie Maxwell at age 11 when his single father, struggling to support his six children, could no longer manage their care. Guided by Mr. Clyburn, the garden manager at Maxwell Farms, he developed a passion for horse training. James says, "Do a small thing, it could turn into a lifelong dream for someone else. And there are hundreds that would sit here and say the same thing. I am because of Connie Maxwell."

Katie reflects on her journey when she shares, "The Katie who walked in was nervous and scared. I didn't want to be here. I was broken. And the Katie who walked out was hopeful for a future." Escaping her father's alcoholism, she thrived with the farm's routine and the care of her house parents and is now a teacher.



This video is part of a larger series that won a 2025 Southeast Regional EMMY award! The collection of videos will educate and inspire audiences about Connie Maxwell, fueling our vision to become a national leader in Christian ministries of healing for vulnerable children and families.



Curious to see their stories unfold? Scan the QR code or visit conniemaxwell.com/sownseeds to watch their short film.

Excitement Grows as Connie Maxwell Unveils Healing Center Renderings

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries presented architectural renderings for its new Healing Center project at an unveiling event held in the Greenwood Country Club on May 8. Steering Committee Chair and former Connie Maxwell Baptist Church Pastor Doug Kauffman greeted the room filled with friends and supporters by noting how Connie Maxwell's powerful 133-year-old legacy continues to push the organization toward its goal of becoming a nationally-known trauma-informed expert in healing within the lives of children and families.

"First and foremost, this campaign is not about money or buildings. It is about the challenge closest to the heart of Jesus, and that is about changing lives that have been hurt and that are hurting, so that they can come to a fullness of love and service to God," said Kauffman who, along with his family, made a \$1 million transformational



gift toward the building of the Howard and Suzanne Kauffman Auditorium within the McCall Healing Center in August 2024.

President Danny Nicholson called the proposed Healing Center a "bridge between brokenness and being whole. We've learned so much now about the heart, the brain, and the spirit. We can put those things together to be much more productive in our ability to make human beings whole and to nurture them."

During the renderings presentation guests heard details from the years of thoughtful prayer and planning that led to the distinct features of the McCall Healing Center, the Nicholson Healing and Administration Center, and surrounding landscaped green spaces and gardens that will be located on the ministry's Greenwood campus. They heard from staff and board members who share Connie Maxwell's vision to become "a national leader in Christian ministries of healing for vulnerable



children and families” about how these new resources will enable Connie Maxwell to serve more individuals. Guests also learned how they can join the campaign efforts in ministry to children.

Nathan Shutte, of McMillian Pazdan Smith Architecture, said Connie Maxwell’s vision prompted his firm to design a facility that will encompass the work of healing and create consolidated leadership space. He introduced guests to the renderings through a shared presentation with a leading trauma specialist, Michelle Maikoetter, Director of Special Projects at The Neurosequential Network, who spoke to innovative design elements that will promote all kinds of healing for vulnerable children and families.

“Imagine with me a Healing Center that could provide greater breadth of assistance and support, encompassing therapy and total health,” Maikoetter said, as guests viewed depictions of



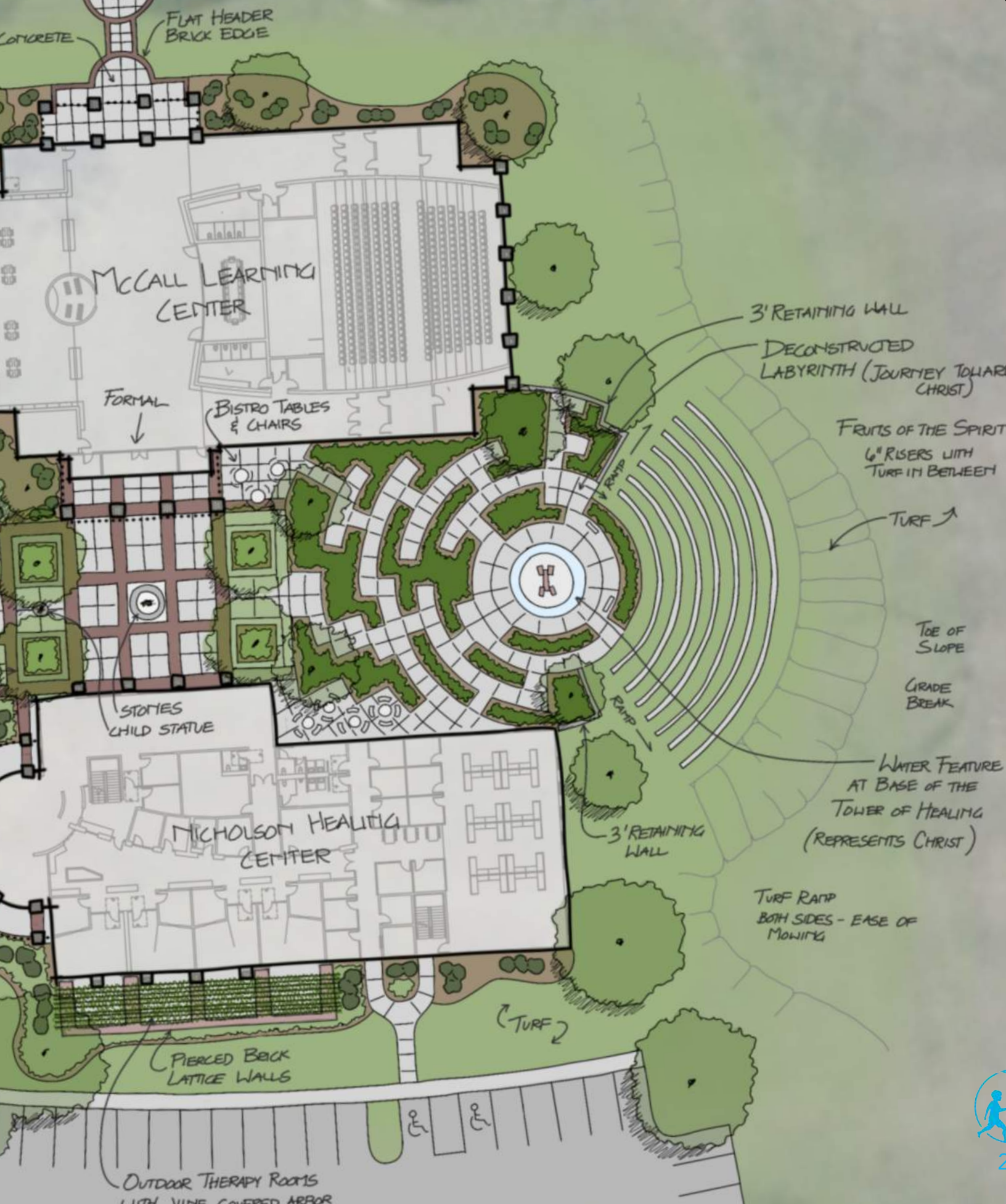


“ If we can make this happen, it will be a manifestation of God’s glory each time someone passes by...

DANNY NICHOLSON

DAVIS & FLOYD

PLAN | DESIGN | ENGINEER





play therapy centers, a sensory gym, and outdoor spaces also designed for use by counselors.

Maikoetter further complimented the healing center design descriptions by discussing the types of assistance provided there, including by medical and case management staff, spiritual leaders, and community social workers. Within the leadership spaces, Shutte introduced a proposed chapel and The Kauffman Auditorium, which is designed to seat 250 guests. The Nicholson Healing and Administration Center will also house a presidential library and a museum to honor and celebrate Connie Maxwell.



Landscape Architect Yancey Robertson, of Davis & Floyd, introduced a “dignified” outdoor design that will reflect the gospel story while creating space for children to talk, linger, and pray. His design proposes monuments including a bronzed statue of seven-year-old Connie Maxwell and a Tower of Faith and Healing, as well as a labyrinth and landscaped terraces.

“God builds monuments in our lives, things that happened to us when we say, ‘only God could do this!’ When you feel grief stricken, hopeless, or even question God’s existence, you return to these stories and remember that the Master of all creation knows who you are,” Robertson said of his design process. “Connie Maxwell children will be able to see these structures and remember the ‘monuments’ built in their lives while they were here.”



Citing this level of intentionality and planning behind the garden’s design, Nicholson believes people will travel to Greenwood just to experience and be moved by it. “If we can make this happen, it will be a manifestation of God’s glory each time someone passes by,” he said. “This is not about a building or a program, this is about things that change people and about a living God who loves us and cares deeply for us. If you’re not ministering to people, you’re not making progress.”

The Healing Center is a part of Connie Maxwell's For the Dreams of Children campaign. Its initial goal was to raise \$10 million to support three initiatives to construct the center in Greenwood, build a Charleston campus, and reimagine Maxwell Farms. As the vision for the Healing Center expanded to meet greater needs, the Board of Trustees voted to increase the campaign goal to \$25 million. To date, Connie Maxwell has received \$12.5 million in pledges and funds secured for the Healing Center project, which leaves 50 percent of the estimated project costs remaining.

In addition to the Kauffman family's gift, longtime Connie Maxwell supporters Larry and Jerry Ann Faulkenberry announced their gift of \$2 million toward the Nicholson Healing and Administration Center in 2024. Jerry Ann called viewing the renderings and imagining the scope of this new complex an "indescribable feeling. I believe God has a lot of things coming in the future for Connie Maxwell."

"When you've been blessed like we have, and knowing you can't take it with you, it's always good to leave something behind," Larry said of his family's investment gift. "We hope that 100 years from now a child will be impacted by something we might do today."

"With momentum and God's hand resting on our continued efforts, we feel absolutely sure that people will step up just like so many others have and help us make this dream come true,"

To learn more about our 10-year strategic plan, A Decade of Dreams, and the three initiatives—building a Healing Center, reimaging Maxwell Farms, and expanding our mission by creating a campus in the Charleston area—visit conniemaxwell.com/dreamon.



THE GIRLS PLAYED MINIATURE GOLF WITH THE SUMMER MISSIONARIES, TANIA (LEFT) AND SYDNEY (RIGHT).



THE GIRLS SPENT TIME TOGETHER IN THE SUMMER SUN!



OUR KIDS ATTENDED THE LIFEWAY CHRISTIAN FUGE CAMP



JAVIOUS HAD FUN ON THE COTTAGE BEA TRIP!

SUMMER



THE BOYS PADDLED THEIR WAY THROUGH SUMMER ON KAYAKS.

TANIA, OUR SUMMER MISSIONARY, POSED WITH GAVIN FOR A PHOTO BY THE LAKE.

THE BOYS
LEARNED
HOW TO
PLAY DISC
GOLF.



GABE AND JOSHUA STEPPED
FOOT ON THE BEACH FOR THE
VERY FIRST TIME!



SOME OF OUR KIDS ATTENDED THE
CAROLINA OPRY THEATER IN MYRTLE
BEACH.



RECAP



FAMILY CARE
VISITED THE
UPTOWN
GREENWOOD
SPLASH PAD
TO BEAT
THE HEAT.





Connie Maxwell Helps Graduate “Reach for My Dreams”

Some of Holland’s favorite memories of Connie Maxwell have taken place during the summertime. She recalls trips to the beach, going to the movies, and listening to music while she played volleyball at the swimming pool with her friends. She laughs as she remembers her cottage’s karaoke car rides, when the windows were down and they kept singing as they pulled up beside other cars at a stop light.

These were some of the happy times she experienced just being a child during the six years she lived at the Greenwood campus. Holland has found a sense of belonging, developed friendships, and has experienced healing through Connie Maxwell Children’s Ministries. Now, as a recent high school graduate, she’s reflecting on how this season of her life has affected her and her future.

“Even though you may not have a family that you can go home to, you still have a family here. There

are people who actually care about you, who will talk with you, and help you with whatever you need,” Holland says, adding that “kids always need that support and help, even if they aren’t asking for it.”

Relationships are important to Holland, especially the one she has with her younger brother. The siblings were adopted from an orphanage in the Philippines when Holland was 11 years old, and then spent periods of time living with a second adoptive family and in group homes before coming to Connie Maxwell. She says this move was especially hard because she initially came without her brother, but the pair eventually reunited about two years ago when both chose to live at Connie Maxwell.

“Connie Maxwell has been supportive of my decision to try and reconnect with my family, but things didn’t work out. It has been hard, but I have learned and grown over the years here. I know what

a family is and what I want in a family in the future, and that helps,” she says.

“

...kids always need that support and help, even if they aren’t asking for it.”

Holland credits Connie Maxwell with helping her realize her own potential and with challenging her to pursue big dreams for her future. She’s a great student, too, and had the privilege of delivering the baccalaureate speech to her graduating class in May of this year. It wasn’t until she started writing her thoughts that Holland fully realized the weight of this opportunity.

“At first I didn’t know what to tell the several hundred people who would be listening to this speech, because half of them didn’t know me or my



Holland (top left) at the orphanage in the Philippines.

story," she recalls. "I wanted them to hear my heart and to know they aren't alone. It's important to help others and share our stories, and I wanted the message to be about more than just graduating. It's not about the trauma you go through but about the way you accomplish things, push past the trauma, and then do something about it."

“

It means a lot to know people are proud of you."

During the graduation ceremony Connie Maxwell further recognized Holland's accomplishments by naming her as the 2025 Jamison Award recipient, noting her outstanding character and leadership qualities. Dr. A.T. Jamison was Connie Maxwell's second and longest-serving superintendent from

1900 to 1946 and was an early advocate for addressing the total needs of a child. The annual award is given to graduating seniors who exemplify Jamison's character and leadership profiles.

The recognition was such a surprise that Holland admits thinking during the presentation that "someone else is going to get this, because everyone is so outstanding here and everyone is a good student." With the reality of the honor setting in, the Jamison Award now serves as a valuable reminder to Holland that "people are watching you all the time and watching how you act. There are a lot of people at Connie Maxwell who are looking at you and looking up to you, especially the younger kids. This award showed me that I can be a leader and show others that hey, you can do this! You can achieve things, too. It means a lot to know people are proud of you."



President Danny Nicholson presented Holland with the Jamison Award.

Holland appreciates how she has grown and developed while at Connie Maxwell, including in her relationship with God. Not too long ago talking about God was a sore subject because she struggled to reconcile who He is with what she experienced throughout her childhood. Now Holland enjoys serving and being a part of Connie Maxwell Baptist Church, and will always remember playing Mary in the Christmas nativity scene for the last two years.

"I've had ups and downs trusting God and believing He's there for me. In the Philippines I had a dream to have a family that loved and cared for me, and now I see how God answered my prayer," Holland says of her faith journey today. "The more I realized how God put the puzzle pieces of my life together I think, 'Wow, you're really cool!' I didn't see that working out, but You did. It's amazing."

As her time at Connie Maxwell winds down, Holland will remember it as "one of the happiest

places I've been. I will always remember my calming walks around campus. I have loved that time to relax and have quiet moments. I will also remember the bells at church. I love that they ring with different music and that you can hear it all around."

This fall Holland will start working toward her dream job of becoming a child therapist. She will begin a five-year program to earn a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in counseling at Columbia International University. She's open to how she might use her degrees, but knows it will involve helping children.

"I want to help children who have been through hard things, like I have, to work through their trauma and move on from it so that they can reach their dreams the way Connie Maxwell has helped me reach for mine," she says before adding, "I also want to visit the Philippines again because there are many orphans there, just like me."

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries Independent Living Program

Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries offers an Independent Living Program to support high school graduates from our Residential Program as they transition into adulthood. Whether students choose to attend technical school, pursue a certificate, begin working, or enroll in a four-year university, we provide tailored support to help them succeed.

For those entering the workforce or a technical program, CMCM offers housing and a food stipend, with a gradual shift toward self-sufficiency as students begin to earn income. Students attending a four-year college receive financial support to cover costs not met by scholarships or aid.

The heart of the program is to offer continued love, guidance, and practical life skills—ensuring each young adult has the stability and trusted support they need to thrive independently.

2025 Graduates

We're proud of our high school students, college students, and Family Care moms who graduated in May! We look forward to watching them chase their dreams in the next season of their lives.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

Theorriia Acker
Ethan Charping
Natalya Hallman
Yanci Illescas-Pacheco
Seth Stone
David "Tree" Walker
Holland Waller
Kamaree Granger
Madison Capotosi

COLLEGE GRADUATES

Paul Clark
Thomas McIntosh
Olivia Pullen

FAMILY CARE GRADUATES

Grace Glover
Ashley Hays
Erika Holton

**Not all graduates pictured*





More Than Fishing: Tournaments Create Lasting Impact on Connie Maxwell Kids

As daylight broke on Saturday, May 17, a group of excited youth from Connie Maxwell took off in bass fishing boats with seasoned anglers for the Take a Kid Fishing Tournament on Lake Greenwood.

"O man, we're going fast," said Trey, a sixth grader who began screaming at the top of his lungs with anticipation. He was riding with real tournament pros including Rusty Nickles, a lifelong fisherman who cosponsors and leads Connie Maxwell's three annual fishing tournaments.

With Trey's grin of approval, Nickles continued the boat's pace to a fishing spot. He was driving one of the 15 boats in the competition, each holding one kid and two adults.

The competitors had just shy of six hours to fish before the weigh-in at noon. Within 20 minutes of casting into the water, Nickles had a fish on his line. He handed over his rod to Trey, letting him reel in the bass.

Just five minutes later, Trey had his line in the water again. "I got one! I got one!" Trey cried out, reeling

in his very own fish. With the help of Nickles and another fishing enthusiast, Trey caught around 10 fish over the next few hours.

As the sun broke through the overcast sky, it was time for the weigh in. Each kid grabbed their fish and put them in a basket on the scale. Prizes were awarded to the kids with the biggest catch.

While Trey didn't win first prize, he had an unforgettable experience, which is exactly why Nickles started the fishing tournaments. Although the kids are accustomed to fishing on Connie Maxwell's property, it was the first time many of them had been in a boat.



"I wanted to let the kids at Connie Maxwell get to experience what a real fishing tournament is like," said Nickles, who has faithfully hosted benefit tournaments for Connie Maxwell, helping more than 1,000 kids over the past 24 years.

After the weigh in, everyone celebrated with a hotdog lunch at Fish Bonz General Store and Tackle, where store owners Nikki and Tim Parker had given each of the kids new rods and reels at the start of the day.

It was a moment that Nickles hopes the kids—and adult fishing pros—will remember in the days and years ahead.

"I've had grown men who have been in fishing tournaments for years. They come up to me after the tournaments with tears in their eyes and just tell me, 'Rusty, thank you for letting us be a part of this. This is the greatest tournament I've ever been involved with,'" Nickles shared.

For the adult volunteers who fish with the kids, the tournament isn't focused on money or winning.

"It's all about making sure those kids get the experience and have fun," Nickles said. "I know these kids have been through a lot more in their life than most of us can ever imagine. For me to be able to take them out, organize that, give them a day to where they can forget about everything else and just have fun. Hey, that's my highlight that they all had a great time."

MORE THAN A TOURNAMENT

Five years ago, Nickles and local businessman and realtor Trent Smith started sponsoring Connie Maxwell fishing tournaments together, setting up a foundation for the proceeds to go toward conservation activities and scholarships.

Beforehand, Smith had been volunteering and giving to Connie Maxwell but had a desire to do



more. "I have a really big heart for those kids," said Smith, who mainly runs the April tournament. "The fishing tournament idea came along, and I think the first year we donated about \$8,500 and it's increased every year ever since."

The Trent Smith and Rusty Nickles Outdoor Fund provides Connie Maxwell with money for the kids' outdoor activities, such as the supplies or resources

needed for equestrian events, cattle shows, and hunting and fishing excursions.

"It's just something that we did to try and help keep the kids outdoors," said Nickles, who felt called to start these tournaments. "I was blessed growing up that I had a grandfather and my dad who took me hunting and fishing and spent time with me and I passed that on to my kids."

In addition, an endowed fund has been created to provide scholarships for those pursuing an outdoor or ministry degree.

"Trent and Rusty wanted to provide tournaments that would be perpetual and life-changing for Connie Maxwell and Connie Maxwell kids for generations," said Maxwell Farm Director Brad Martin, who helps coordinate the Pro-Am Fishing Tournament. "They're trying to work up a generational gift through these tournaments that provides for anything that a kid wants to pursue in the outdoor conservation world, [such as a] game warden, scientist, biology, anything like that."

"I know these kids have been through a lot more in their life than most of us can ever imagine. For me to be able to take them out, organize that, give them a day to where they can forget about everything else and just have fun. Hey, that's my highlight that they all had a great time."

RUSTY NICKLES



Each year, Nickles' and Smith's impact grows through events like the two annual benefit fishing tournaments—the Connie Maxwell Benefit Fishing Tournament in April and a Toys for Tots Tournament in December—that help raise money and supplies for the kids at Connie Maxwell.

In May, Nickles and Smith presented Connie Maxwell with the proceeds from the April tournament, including a \$17,800 check and a box truck full of supplies like bed sheets, bottled water, toilet paper, and laundry detergent.

"[It's] just a way to alleviate some of the financial stress. I run a couple of different businesses. I get it," Smith said, explaining how Connie Maxwell is a nonprofit that raises most of its funds. "When you're raising that much of your budget each year, it takes a lot of faith. I just wanted to find a way to help with that. If they can't meet their budget, they can't take the kids out. That's important to me."

Martin believes the lessons kids learn outdoors, especially in fishing, can have a long-term impact.

"The relationships you have when you fish, you can't really do it in 10 or 15 minutes in a row. You have to go out in a boat, you have to work, you have to strive, you have to learn things. The more education you get outdoors and especially fishing, the more successful you're going to be," Martin continued. "And these men and gentlemen really love to share their craft and their hobby with anybody, but kids especially, and it's something that can be duplicated throughout their lifetime, all ages, all tenures, all economic status, can go fishing."

SAVE THE DATE

Giving Tuesday

December 2, 2025



Your Gift Matters

Because of you, the children and families at Connie Maxwell find safety, hope and healing in Jesus' name.

Giving Tuesday is our largest giving day of the year! Our goal is to raise \$750,000 in 24 hours. Each donation will be matched that day. Save the date and help us serve more children and families in South Carolina!



FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

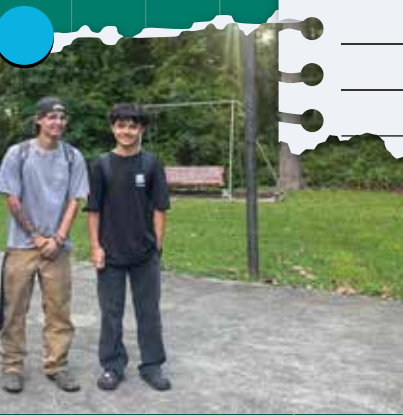


Thanks to generous donors, Connie Maxwell children started a new school year with everything they need to pursue their dreams! Many contributed to equip them with backpacks, new clothes, shoes, and supplies.

We're grateful for the Tyler Shaw Life Group at Taylor's First Baptist Church for introducing Connie Maxwell to Cheryl Carpenter, the founder of Christmas Shoes! This remarkable ministry delivers over 3,000 pairs of new tennis shoes to local children annually. This year, they donated 103 pairs to children in our residential, foster, and family care programs.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped prepare our children for success. Because of your support, Connie Maxwell kids walked into their classrooms with confidence and hope. Please join us in praying for their best school year yet!





A woman with glasses and a black top with a green skirt is walking on a dirt path, holding hands with five children. The children are dressed in casual summer clothing. The background is a lush green field with trees under a blue sky.

Graduate Calls Family Care Program

“Life Changing in All the Right Ways”

As Erika graduated from Connie Maxwell Children’s Ministries’ Family Care Program this spring, she reminisced about the ways she’s grown and developed during the past two years living in Greenwood.

“Family Care is amazing. As much as I was bound and determined to be miserable for so long in the beginning and was struggling to keep hold of my

past self, the program really works if you just do it as asked and intended,” she says, having now completed it. “It allows you to focus on yourself and your children, and gives the opportunity to heal from what you’ve been through. It’s life changing in all the right ways.”

THE ARRIVAL

Originally from Reno, Nevada, Erika is the mother of five children aged five to 12. She is an avid

reader; in fact, she's already read 31 books this year. When she and four of her children needed a safe place to live on short notice two years ago, a community contact recommended Connie Maxwell.

"I was hesitant because Family Care was not what I expected," Erika admits. "The first year was really rough. I was resistant to change, not entirely committed to getting with the program, and determined to be miserable."

Despite these mixed emotions Erika appreciated Family Care's generosity and the care her family received as they arrived, noting the immediate sense of relief she felt with being given safe housing and a gift card to help buy diapers. One of her earliest memories is of the family sitting down to have lunch together on their first day in the Family Care house. "We took a deep breath. It was everything I'd hoped and prayed for up to that point."

The family experienced culture shock as they adjusted, mostly because their new home "was so quiet. There was a strange sense of isolation too, which is part of the process of learning independence and how to drop bad habits." Erika's children's biggest worry was being separated through the Foster Care system, so they were grateful to stay together but struggled with the new house rules in the early days.

After a few months Erika and her children moved into the next phase of Family Care, which included starting her college education, completing a driver's training course, and obtaining her license. Her children caught up on their medical and dental care and received help getting their birth certificates. One of the hardest rules the family had to get used to was not having access to electronics, with the exception of a landline house phone.

Erika had a pivotal conversation with Connie Maxwell President Dr. Danny Nicholson during the summer of 2024, during which she confessed her struggles with rules and making headway in

“

We bring these families in right where they are and tell them that we'll love them until they can love themselves, and then we'll love them some more.”

the program. She knew what had to change but something about that conversation finally made it click.

"I felt defeated when Dr. Nicholson said, 'Why don't you try not standing in your own way and see how it happens.'" Erika recalls. "When I started to actually do this, everything got better really quickly. Dr. Nicholson is spectacular and has such a sweet soul. He said the right thing at the right time, and I realized that maybe it really was me that was creating the problems for myself."

"What we get to do here is amazing, but it's not us. What God is allowing the Connie Maxwell family to do blows my mind sometimes," says Family Care Director Diana Johnson. "We bring these families in right where they are and tell them that we'll love them until they can love themselves, and then we'll love them some more."

THE TURNAROUND

Erika began to notice her progress and behaviors changing, and she knew that God had her family at Connie Maxwell for a reason. She started the first of her degrees in business administration and accounting and, despite taking five classes during her first and second semesters of college, she earned a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

"When you go to school when you're older you just want it so much more. You understand it's to better your life and it's your choice. Plus being good at it really motivates me," Erika says before admitting "I never thought I was intelligent enough for college, and here they make you feel like you can do anything if you just try hard enough. It is achievable."

As she focused on her own growth Erika's children also flourished in Family Care. Horseback riding was an important outlet for her daughter and the entire family will always remember Christmastime at Connie Maxwell, especially the horsedrawn

carriage ride through campus to see the lights and decorations. Summertime experiences at Lake Greenwood have also provided life-long memories for her family.

"Amazing things have happened to my kids here. Seeing me calm down, be present with them, and control my emotions has given them the ability to do similar things for themselves. They have all requested to attend therapy," Erika reports. "Today they are confident, comfortable, doing well in school – just everything you could have hoped for and nothing more I could have asked for them."

GRADUATION SURPRISES

Connie Maxwell and Family Care staff recognized Erika with two special awards during her graduation ceremony. The Proverbs 31 Award is given to an individual or family who has shown a willingness to grow spiritually, a recognition Erika felt surprised and grateful to have received. She admits having a casual, nonchalant relationship with God through the years. She was never active in church but



says she was always praying and communicating with God.

"I follow God with abiding faith, so it felt really good to be recognized for something that I consider to be a basic but still important part of me," Erika says. "My children can now see and partake in this award, too, by showing them they can hold on to God and achieve things through His power."

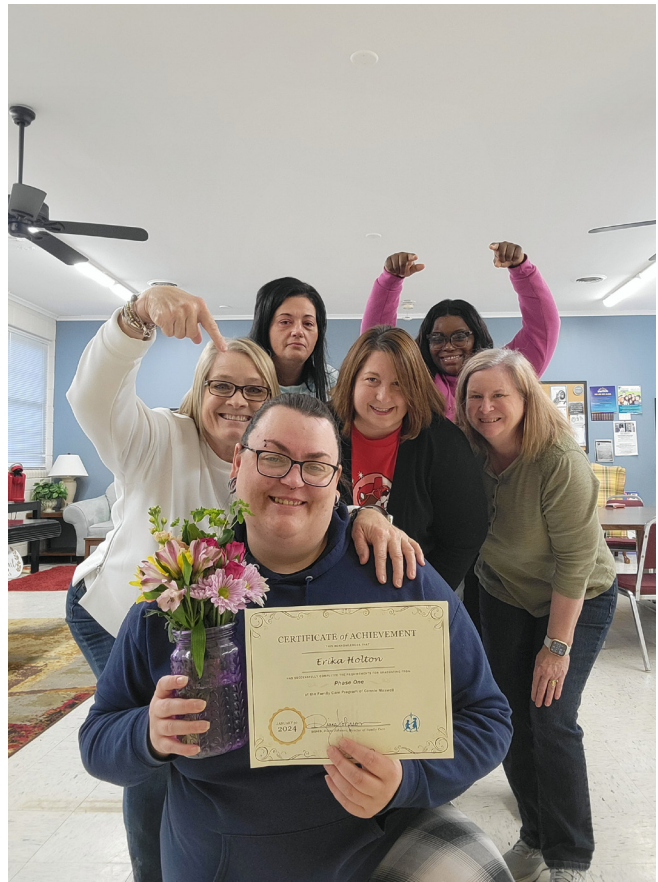
Erika also received the Faulkenberry Way Maker Award, considered to be Family Care's most prestigious distinction, that recognizes a program graduate's positive attitude to "never give up." The struggling mother who moved to Greenwood two years ago with temporary custody of four of her children and who had no education and nothing to her name, now has a future and hope because of the commitment she had to embrace and complete a life-changing program.

"Family Care is not for the faint of heart, it's for people who really want to change. It felt good to be recognized for all of the obvious struggles I'd had throughout the program," Erika says of the recognition of her accomplishments. "This is a testimony to how this program works if you sign up to complete it. It is truly the grace of God, because my life before felt impossible."

A PROMISING NEW FUTURE

If Erika could time travel and speak with her former self as she began her journey through Family Care, she would advise embracing the experience with open arms. She says the former Erika had bad habits, sought all the wrong types of attention, and saw no possible future. She'd want her to know that "people here are not the enemy, they're helping you. Family Care is going to surpass expectations and be exactly what you need."

Erika has secured a promising job in Colorado, which is just one of the ways this experience has





surpassed expectations. She will get to use her accounting degrees in her new role with a financial investment firm, and will be living with a family member in a new apartment that has plenty of space for her children. The family will also receive after-care in the coming year.

For her part, Johnson says seeing Erika and her family move on is bittersweet, but she is “awesomely proud” of them. “Once Erika responded to the structure of the program, it was like watching a butterfly go from a cocoon to being fully evolved and ready to fly away. When you walk beside someone for two years it takes space in your heart. In Family Care we pray that God continues to build up our hearts to have more and more room to do what He is calling us to do.”

As her time in Greenwood comes to an end, Erika admits feeling surprisingly emotional as she and her family prepare for their move. She is grateful for the personal impacts made by Nicolson and his wife Deborah, and for Pastor Ed’s special way of creating a church community that has included her children. She also searches for how to express her gratitude for Family Care and its staff, who have guided her through what she calls a time of “amazing blessing.”

“I am a better person for having participated in the Family Care program, and for having them in my life. It’s something that should be treasured and supported. It’s doing great work for people who feel helpless and lost, and don’t know how to be a normal person again after all the things they’ve gone through,” Erika says, before adding “I am really going to miss these people. And I wouldn’t change a thing about this journey.”





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LET'S GET **FIT** **AT THE** **FARM**

Fit at the Farm began three years ago as an exciting partnership between Maxwell Farms and MaxFit and has become an annual tradition we look forward to each year. This high-energy event unites staff, students, and volunteers in an outdoor challenge, with teams of runners, walkers, and horseback riders joining forces to conquer a collective 10K distance across the farm!

Afterward, the day concludes with a community lunch at the cabins and a medal ceremony, honoring every step and hoofprint. This event inspires our kids to stay active, allows them to engage with their community, and encourages them to reach for their goals!

Lauren Boyd, Fitness and Wellness Specialist says, "Fit at the Farm is one of the highlights of my year! It's such a blessing to collaborate with our farm through this event to combine fitness and the outdoors. I love watching our staff and students come alive together through movement, teamwork, laughter, and encouragement."





FROM FOSTER CARE

TO A FOREVER HOME:

Jacob's Adoption Story

During the summer of 2019, four-year-old Jacob and his three older brothers stood on the sidewalk with nowhere else to go.

After hopping around hotels and overstaying their welcome at a local Greenwood nonprofit, they had exhausted all their options. That was, until Connie Maxwell received a call about their situation.

With just one trash bag of their few belongings in hand, the kids were welcomed at Connie Maxwell. The older boys were eventually moved to a long-term residential cottage, but Jacob stayed at Cooper Nixon, Connie Maxwell's crisis cottage, where he could get more support at his young age.

"He ended up with us for a year," said Emily Kimberly, one of Jacob's house parents. Although kids are usually placed in the emergency shelter cottage for just 90 days, in some circumstances, they stay longer if it's better for the child.

"Of course, it didn't take very long for him to wrap his little self right around our hearts and fall in love with him," Kimberly said, noting that Jacob has the best smile.

Over the next several months, Jacob struggled to adjust to kindergarten. But with his cottage parents' dedication and his own hard work, he overcame most of his disruptive outbursts.



"Those became not an everyday occurrence. They were less often just getting him out on the farm and letting him kick a soccer ball or taking him fishing and taking him to the beach and letting him run around," said Dawn Callahan, another one of Jacob's house parents.

In fact, he was excelling so much that he was able to move to a long-term cottage at Connie Maxwell. But just a few weeks later, his world shifted once again.

Amid challenging circumstances and unsafe living conditions with his biological family, the Department of Social Services (DSS) decided to place Jacob and his brothers into foster care.

That's when Danielle Pete received a phone call that would change her life. Jacob, now 6 years old, needed a home.

She said yes knowing very little about him—just that he wears glasses and wouldn't be bringing any items with him.

That night, her husband Daniel picked up pepperoni pizza on the way home, ready to meet their first ever foster placement. For years after having their daughter, the couple had wanted another child but experienced secondary infertility.

"I walked in the door and came around the corner and he jumped out from the living room into the hallway wearing that little yellow tie dye shirt," Daniel recalled. "He had a big ole' smile on his face and was just happy to see somebody and got real excited for pizza."

At first, Jacob was very well-behaved in the Petes' home during what Danielle calls a "honeymoon period." But after a few months, Jacob started having behavioral issues.

"He had a lot of aggression," Danielle explained. "I'm a therapist by profession so I knew what to watch for, what to look for, and what services to ask

for. So, a lot of it was advocating, because I knew what was going on and I knew why it was going on, but we just had to get the right help."

The Petes recognized Jacob's behaviors were a result of the trauma he had experienced and the lack of attachment from a caregiver.

"His brothers were at Connie Maxwell, but they were all at different cottages and then taken away from Connie Maxwell, where he loved and then taken away from mom, which, although an unsafe, chaotic situation, it's still another displacement," Danielle said. "So, a lot of those factors, and then the specific trauma that he experienced, I'm sure, fed into his fight or flight, which resulted in more fight than flight."



Jacob got kicked out of the YMCA, and schools called Danielle constantly about his behavioral issues.

"It was a struggle, but I knew he was worth fighting for—and somebody needed to fight the good fight," Danielle said.

Yet, even with the challenges, the Petes loved seeing Jacob exude joy in everyday moments and have first-time experiences, like throwing the football back and forth in the yard and celebrating his soccer team championship win.

Around a year-and-a-half after Jacob went to live with the Petes, he asked if they planned to adopt him.

The Petes had been committed to do so from the very beginning, but there were some unforeseen obstacles. Reunification was still the goal of Jacob's case plan.

"Behaviorally, he had gotten so much better. He had worked through his trauma," said Danielle, referring to Jacob's behavior after living two-and-a-half years with them. "He had just made leaps

and bounds, and it was like he was a part of the family unit."

In August 2021, DSS called Danielle to tell her that one of Jacob's relatives had passed qualifications to have Jacob move in with her. He would be moving to his relative's home in New York in a month.

The news rocked the Petes.

After consulting with friends and praying over their situation, the Petes decided to take legal action to fight to keep Jacob in their home. Under South Carolina law, Jacob's plan for reunification shouldn't have been extended beyond 18 months after he was placed in foster care.

"God just provided each step of the way," said Danielle, explaining how a local businessman felt called to pay for the tens of thousands of dollars in legal bills.

On March 13, 2024, the Petes were about to walk into the courthouse in Anderson when they noticed something unusual happening outside. A local Christian school had taken kids on a field trip to



encourage people like the Petes who were going into court.

"There were tons of kids who were writing messages all over the ground that said stuff like, 'Jesus loves you.' 'God's got this.' 'It'll be okay.' And it was just obviously really encouraging to see as we're going into fight to keep our son," Danielle said.

But that wasn't the Pete's only support that day.

"We had tons of people who came to advocate for us," Danielle said, including staff members from Connie Maxwell.

After another day in court, the Petes won their case, and the judge announced they could legally adopt Jacob. The following month, on April 11—after 1,592 days in foster care—Jacob was adopted into his forever home with the Petes.

"God placed him with the perfect family for him. And we could not be happier. It could have gone a lot of different ways," Kimberly said. "He could have been shuffled around from family to family to family, but just to see that he found a family that

was willing to put in the time and put in the effort and to put in the hard days and really, really love him. It's nothing less than he deserved. It's just thrilling."

CONNIE MAXWELL'S FOSTER PARENTS 'OPEN THEIR HOMES AND THEIR HEARTS'

Over the last year and a half, Connie Maxwell has experienced a record number of adoptions. In 2024 alone, Connie Maxwell helped with a dozen adoptions.

"The goal of foster care is reunification, but that just doesn't always happen," said Paula Reed, Connie Maxwell's Director of Foster Care. "But we have such good foster parents, people who are willing to open their homes and their hearts to adopt these kids that can't go home."

Reed hopes that many more children will find homes with their forever families like the Petes through Connie Maxwell.

"We want the kids to go home if that's possible, but we're thankful to have good adoptive families when that needs to be the case," Reed said.





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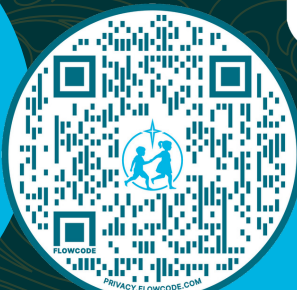
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DECADE OF DREAMS

Connie Maxwell Hires Leadership to Carry Out *Decade of Dreams*

This spring, Connie Maxwell onboarded three key leaders to support the Decade of Dreams, a 10-year strategic plan that involves the building of a 40,000 square foot healing and trauma center. The new hires include Dr. Michelle Geiser, Vice President for Programs & Services; Angelina Mojica, Associate Vice President for Programs & Services; and Mike Blackwood, Director of Church Engagement.

In their new roles, Dr. Geiser and Mojica will help shape a healing and trauma center that provides holistic, Christ-centered trauma care to children and families while Blackwood will focus on connecting churches with foster and adoption opportunities.

"The healing center is a cornerstone of Connie Maxwell's Decade of Dreams, and I see my work as

helping to build both the physical structure and the spiritual, emotional, and clinical framework needed to offer transformative healing," Dr. Geiser said. "We want every child who walks through our doors to encounter not just safety, but the redeeming love of Jesus."

Dr. Geiser came to Connie Maxwell from Hendersonville, North Carolina, where she served as Co-founder and Program Director for a nonprofit called the Hope Coalition Corp. Through this work, she had the opportunity to play a significant role in developing several cornerstone programs in her region, including Hendersonville's first Adult Recovery Court, the Recovery Community Center, the Youth Connections Center, and Teen Court.

"My nonprofit background and experience in trauma psychology, combined with a lifelong passion for children's health and wholeness, fall into direct alignment with Connie Maxwell's mission,"

Dr. Geiser said. “God has faithfully prepared me through years of working with vulnerable populations, and I believe those experiences have equipped me to serve with empathy, vision, and a trauma-informed lens that is anchored in grace.”

Dr. Geiser has spoken at numerous national and state conferences, including presentations with Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) at both the National Leadership Forum and Mid-Year Training Institute for five consecutive years. She holds a Doctorate of Education in Community Care and Counseling Traumatology from Liberty University. She also has several licenses and certifications in non-profit management and trauma studies from Duke University and Florida State University. Dr. Geiser is a Certified Clinical Supervisor, a licensed Clinical Mental Health Counseling Associate, a Certified Trauma Professional, and a licensed school counselor.

“My prayer is to help create a space where children feel seen, valued, and safe—and where they can begin to heal in the presence of God’s love. I hope to equip our staff and community partners with the tools and support they need to serve from a place of resilience and compassion,” Dr. Geiser said. “But more than anything, I want this work to be a testimony that no matter how hard someone’s beginning, their story can be redeemed.”

Working alongside Dr. Geiser, Mojica will help lead the vision and development of the healing and trauma center by designing trauma-informed programs, supporting staff and caregivers, and creating a safe space for children to recover, grow, and dream again.

“I want to create systems that outlast me—programs and spaces that reflect God’s love and restore hope in children who’ve been through more than most of us could imagine. I want to build partnerships, empower staff, and ensure that every child who walks through our doors feels seen, safe, and supported,” Mojica said.

“Ultimately, I want to help Connie Maxwell become the standard of what healing and restoration can look like in child welfare—faithful, intentional, and transformational.”

Mojica has spent the past decade walking alongside children and families through their hardest seasons. Most recently, she served as the Foster Care Director of Saint Francis Ministries in Lubbock, Texas. She spent seven years at Buckner Children and Family Services and became the Program Director of Buckner’s Family Hope Center. She has served on several boards, including as the President of Building Strong Families Coalition and Vice President of the Optimist Club of Lubbock.

Mojica holds a Masters of Human Services with studies in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Lubbock Christian University. In addition, Mojica is a Certified Family and Life Educator through the National Council on Family Relations.

“

Ultimately, I want to help Connie Maxwell become the standard of what healing and restoration can look like in child welfare—faithful, intentional, and transformational.”

Connie Maxwell Retirees

Two staff members recently retired—director of crisis care, Dee Miller, and family service worker, Dan Thorpe. Dee served for 23 years and retired in May. Dan retired in June with 29 years served at Connie Maxwell. We are grateful for the difference they have made in the lives of children at Connie Maxwell and pray they have a wonderful retirement!



DAN THORPE



DEE MILLER

For Mojica, the calling to serve at Connie Maxwell is personal.

"I come from a background that mirrors some of the stories we see in the children we serve—stories of hardship, resilience, and eventually, redemption," Mojica said. "I was drawn to this work because I know what it's like to need someone to believe in you, to walk beside you. I believe every child deserves to be seen, heard, and loved. This calling has never been just a job; it's a purpose."

Mojica and Dr. Geiser will collaborate with President Danny Nicholson and Michelle Maikoetter, Director of Special Projects at The Neurosequential Network, to organizationally structure Connie Maxwell's Programs & Services department to align with the building of the healing and trauma center, which will be an avenue for life-changing research.

"Michelle and Angelina will be instrumental in helping us implement the programming and models of care to help children and families on the highest levels," said President Danny Nicholson. "They possess the heart, mind, and spirit to elevate our programs so that we can become a national leader in healing and ministry for vulnerable children and families."

LEADING CHURCH ENGAGEMENT

In his new position as Director of Church Engagement, Blackwood will mobilize South Carolina churches to give, serve, and support children and families from hard places.

"Connie Maxwell knows that local churches are the lifeblood of our mission, and this has been true for over 133 years!" said Jay Boyd, Connie Maxwell's Senior Vice President of Strategy and Engagement.

Blackwood's role will serve as a bridge that connects churches to a healthy, transformational partnership as they seek to care for the fatherless, support foster care efforts, and mobilize their

people into missional opportunities with Connie Maxwell.

"I cannot think of anyone more fitting than Mike Blackwood for this important role," said President Danny Nicholson. "His heart for the Lord, love for local churches, and wealth of experience working with South Carolina ministries makes him the perfect person to help us advance our 10-year strategic plan, A Decade of Dreams!"

Blackwood brings over 30 years of ministry experience, having served as a worship pastor and music evangelist. He recently worked as the South Carolina Director of Development for Christian Adoption Services.

"Over the last five years, I've developed a deep passion for foster care, adoption, and mission opportunities that serve vulnerable children and families," said Blackwood, whose passion grew

out of his work with the local church. "I saw firsthand how powerful it is when congregations step up to meet these needs. This role allows me to help churches do just that—turning compassion into action."

As Blackwood meets with churches in the days ahead, he realizes church partnerships are a vital part of growing Connie Maxwell's impact over the next decade to fulfill the Decade of Dreams.

"I want to see churches across the state become fully engaged partners in the mission—opening their hands, hearts, and homes to children who need them," Blackwood said. "My hope is that together, we'll build a movement that changes lives for generations."

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