

Connie Maxwell

MAGAZINE

Finding Healing After Loss:
**One Family's
Unusual Path to
Connie Maxwell**

IN THIS ISSUE

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MEMBER HIGHLIGHT:
EDDY THOMAS



FOR FAMILY CARE MOM,
CONNIE MAXWELL IS
"BETTER THAN I EVER
IMAGINED"



"FOR THE DREAMS OF
CHILDREN CAMPAIGN"
ENTERS FINAL YEAR

Connie Maxwell

MAGAZINE

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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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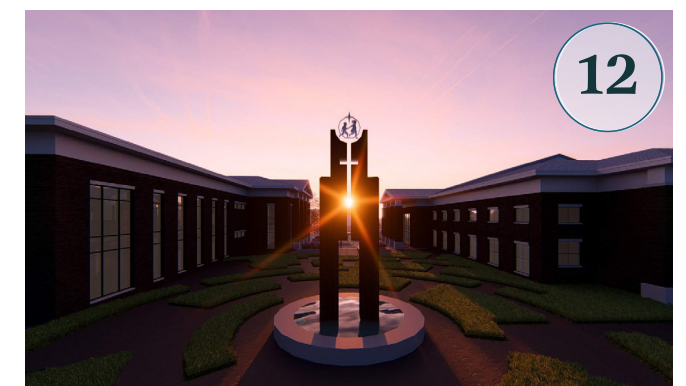
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“Flowers are red, young man,
Green leaves are green.
There’s no need to see flowers any
other way,
Than the way they have always been
seen.”

Harry Chapin, “Flowers are Red”

*Fellow Connie Maxwell
Dreamers,*

I remember the first time I heard the song “Flowers
Are Red.”

It resonated with me.

It inspired me.

It encouraged me to see things in a different way!

The front cover of this edition of the Connie

Maxwell is an example of “Coloring Outside the
Lines.” The lead article talks about an “Unusual
Path.” As you read this story, understand that this
is not regular compassion. A better word might be
radical, and the reason we chose this path is really
rather simple.

A family needed more than what was expected.

A family needed to stay together.

They needed each other to heal.

They needed Connie Maxwell.

So, we “colored outside the lines” and made it
happen!

I’d like to believe that “coloring outside the lines”
is commonplace at Connie Maxwell.

In this issue, you will read an update on another
“Unusual Path” toward healing. The mantelpiece
project for “A Decade of Dreams,” the Healing
Center at Connie Maxwell, is a new creation,
outside the lines, that continues our quest for
excellence—our “Unusual Path” to a deeper way of
ministry.

Of course, being different creates a lot of
questions. That’s because human beings are
comfortable with things staying the way they are.

“Flowers are Red.”

But let me take a moment to remind you of
something very important.

Jesus was different.

God always chose the Unusual Path.

The Master Artist consistently “colored outside the
lines.”

The woman at the well...

Touching the untouchable...

Redefining the Sabbath...

Embracing the Enemy...

As you mingle through the parade of stories
and pictures in this edition of Connie Maxwell,
remember the ending chorus of Harry Chapin’s
song,

“There are so many colors in the rainbow,

So many colors in the morning sun,



So many colors in the flowers,

And I love everyone.”

“Jesus loves the little children,

All the children of the world,

Red and yellow, black and white,

They are precious in His sight,

Jesus loves the little children of the world.”

As always, thanks for your prayers and support.
Come join us on the Unusual Path—to color
“outside the lines” with radical compassion and
commitment in Jesus’ name.

For the Dreams of Children and the Glory of God,



WILLIAM D. NICHOLSON II, PH.D.
PRESIDENT



Finding Healing After Loss: One Family's Unusual Path to Connie Maxwell

In just seven months, the Pacheco family endured more loss than most families face in years.

First, the family's trailer caught fire and burned down. Then, the seven kids lost their father. Soon after, the kids were separated from their mother and one another.

"We just felt like the year was going super bad," said Yanci, the oldest sibling.

On June 20, 2023, Yanci and her family returned home after celebrating her brother's twelfth birthday to find police and DSS waiting outside. The older five children were placed in a crisis cottage at Connie Maxwell, and the two youngest—just 11 months and two-and-a-half-years old—were placed in a separate foster home.

Yanci remembers the fear and uncertainty of that night.

"I knew nothing," she said. "They were both still using Pampers and milk. They only spoke and understood Spanish. So, it was very difficult."

That rainy summer night, Yanci and four of her siblings arrived at Connie Maxwell, unsure of their future. There, they met their cottage parents, Dawn and Pat Callahan, who immediately tried to make the children feel safe and welcomed. The next day, they celebrated Yanci's brother's belated birthday with his favorite meal.

LEARNING TO HOPE AGAIN

Over the next 18 months, the Pacheco siblings attended school, participated in activities, and slowly began opening up to others at Connie

Maxwell. While still grieving the loss of their father, they emotionally bonded with the Callahans, who had each recently lost a parent, too.

For Yanci, returning to school was difficult. After the house fire, she had largely stopped attending classes in order to help her mother work multiple jobs—including remodeling, cleaning homes, and selling food—to support the family.

"I would go one day, miss three weeks and come back whenever [the school] called me," said Yanci.

However, at Connie Maxwell, Yanci found consistency and support. Dawn and Pat regularly sat with her for hours helping her complete her homework and catch up academically.

"Anything that I didn't understand, I'd ask," Yanci said. "They sat there for hours and helped me."

Dawn remembers Yanci's steady determination, especially during her first two semesters back at school.

"She would come home from school and sit at the table, and she wouldn't leave until she couldn't lift her head," Dawn recalled. "She spent hours every night on her work."

"Connie Maxwell just wrapped their arms around us and the children. [They] surrounded us with what we needed to raise them."

Though the schoolwork was challenging, Yanci persevered. In December 2025, she graduated from high school and hopes to eventually join the military.

But Yanci isn't the only child who's grown in the Pacheco family. The Callahans have also watched

the other children learn new skills and sports, while becoming more confident along the way.

KEEPING SEVEN SIBLINGS TOGETHER

Typically, children are placed in Connie Maxwell's crisis home for about 90 days before returning home, transitioning to foster care or to another family member's home, or moving into longer-term residential care.

But the Pacheco's family situation was unique.

"There were seven of them, and we took the older five," Dawn explained. "That was the first time the children have been separated from one another. They missed each other terribly."

The younger two children remained in a foster home in another town, and the siblings only saw them during occasional visits. Although DSS repeatedly searched for a foster placement willing to take all seven children together, every option fell through.

As months passed, it seemed the siblings might remain separated indefinitely. But by then, Dawn and Pat had grown deeply attached to all the children.

"The Lord just really pressed it on my heart and my husband's heart," Dawn said, "There's not a lot of people out there that can take on seven children, but we had the experience and ability to care for them."

Even so, the idea felt overwhelming and the logistics were complicated. The Callahans didn't have a large home, and they served as cottage parents at Connie Maxwell every other week.

"We were like, 'How are we going to do this?'" Dawn recalled. "But over and over, God kept showing us through different signs and things people were saying that we needed to step out on faith."



One day, the couple prayed, “Okay, God, if You want us to do this, we’re willing, but You’re going to have to show up big, because we don’t know how this is going to work.”

Soon afterward, during devotions at Connie Maxwell, a speaker said, “If you can do it on your strength and finances and abilities, then it’s probably not God. But if you can’t do it all, then this is probably God, because He’s going to have to be the One to do it.”



Dawn and Pat looked at each other and started crying. They believed they had their answer.

CONNIE MAXWELL STEPS OUTSIDE THE BOX

The Callahans informed DSS they were willing to become kinship foster parents for all seven children. They also approached Connie Maxwell leadership, even though the arrangement did not fit neatly into any existing program.



Still, Dawn said that everyone at Connie Maxwell responded with a heart of “we don’t know what it’s going to take, but we want to do what we can to keep this family together.”

With a creative mindset and resources, ministry leaders identified a cottage where the entire family could live together and furnished it for the Callahans and all seven children.

“Connie Maxwell just wrapped their arms around us and the children,” Dawn said. “[They] surrounded us with what we needed to raise them.”

At the time, the Callahans had no idea how long the arrangement would last. Even so, they promised the children, “We will be here for you as long as you need us.”

Despite the challenges—including 24/7 care for toddlers near retirement age—the Callahans say God continually provided what they needed.



“Through this whole process, my faith grew so much,” Dawn said. “God anticipated our needs before I even knew the need was there.”

When others said they didn’t know how the couple was managing such a responsibility, Dawn had a simple answer: “We’re only doing it on God’s strength.”

A FAMILY REUNITED

Within 18 months, the children’s mother completed the necessary steps for reunification. Today, she’s getting back on her feet while living in a Connie Maxwell cottage with her seven children, next door to the Callahans.

The families remain closely connected, celebrating birthdays and holidays together, while Dawn and Pat continue helping care for the children.

“My mom always said, ‘Always put God first and trust that whatever we’re going through; if it’s hard right now, there’s going to be better days coming,’” Yanci said.

Thanks to God, those better days are here for Yanci and her family. Without the Lord and Connie Maxwell, Dawn believes the outcome may have been very different.

“Had Connie Maxwell not wrapped their arms around them, I don’t think that we would be seeing this family together today,” she said, thinking they probably would’ve ended up in multiple foster homes. “They’re a beautiful family, and we’re blessed to be a part of their family.”

For Dawn, one of the best outcomes has been watching the children recognize they have an entire community supporting them.

“Being here at Connie Maxwell, they already had a big family,” Dawn said. “But now they have an even bigger family because they have so many adults

and kids who love and care about them.”

A VISION FOR DEEPER HEALING

Connie Maxwell’s President Danny Nicholson says the Pacheco family’s story is a glimpse of the ministry’s vision for the future.

“Overall, in every situation, we want to play outside the sandbox and go as far as we can to try to mend and heal and take care of families and children,” Nicholson said.

Although Connie Maxwell may not encounter this exact situation again, Nicholson believes the experience demonstrates the importance of flexible, trauma-informed ministry to families in crisis.

“That’s what our future is about,” Nicholson said. One way Connie Maxwell plans to pursue that mission is through building a Healing Center to enhance the ministry’s understanding of trauma and its impact on child development, while expanding trauma-informed services throughout its programs.

Through the Healing Center, the ministry will focus on “on going the extra mile, learning more about brokenness and trauma, and discovering how we can minister to kids and families in a deeper way,” Nicholson explained.

To Nicholson, the Pacheco family sets the course for how Connie Maxwell will heal more families.

“It’s in our DNA at this place, for 133 years, to try to find a deeper place to heal and love,” he said. “Stepping out of the box for this family is just a small example of the bigger picture of us stepping out to be a national leader in healing and ministry for children and families through the Healing Center in the future.”



Board of Trustees Highlight: Eddy Thomas

When Eddy Thomas first met his wife, Angie, on a blind date in 1986, he had no idea that her story would inspire him to become a champion for vulnerable children.

Today, the retired couple lives in Mt. Pleasant, where they spend their days as full-time grandparents to two grandchildren. Since 2023, Thomas has also been serving Connie Maxwell in various capacities. As a member of the Board of Trustees, Eddy has served on both fundraising and finance committees.

With a background in financial services, the work has been a natural fit for Thomas, who graduated from The Citadel in 1981. He spent nearly a decade in insurance before transitioning into investment planning, where he built a career spanning more than 20 years.

But his experience stewarding resources isn't the real reason he dedicates time to spreadsheets and budgets at Connie Maxwell. For Thomas, Connie Maxwell's mission is personal.

"I've got a five-year term [serving as a Connie Maxwell trustee]," Thomas said. "I'm hoping that they'll let me rotate off and then come back on, because this is a lifetime thing for me."

To understand the heart behind his commitment, you first have to know Angie's story.

'I'M NOT GOING WITH YOU'

Growing up, Angie had a loving mother but an abusive father. When she was just 12 years old, her mother was diagnosed with terminal cervical cancer.

During her illness, Angie overheard her mother share a final request with family members: she did not want her husband to take the girls back to New Orleans, where he had grown up in a dysfunctional environment.

After her mother passed away, Angie returned home from the funeral with her father and sister to find the house completely empty. Everything had been packed into a U-Haul truck.

Her father instructed the girls to get in, but Angie refused.

"I'm not going with you," she told him.

Still, her father tried to force her into submission. Finally, he gave up, threw her suitcase into the front yard, and said, "Fine, stay here."

Then he and Angie's sister climbed into the truck and drove away, leaving 13-year-old Angie sitting alone on her suitcase, wondering what to do next.

A short time later, a woman who owned the local skating rink drove by the house. She had attended

the funeral earlier in the day and recognized Angie sitting in the yard.

Pulling over, she rolled down her window and asked, "What are you doing?"

Through tears, Angie explained that her dad had left her behind. She told the woman she refused to go to New Orleans because her mother had not wanted her to go there.

The woman told Angie to get in the car, and Angie ended up living with her for the next year.

FINDING STABILITY

Eventually, the state became involved and attempted to place Angie and her sister with relatives. However, their family members were unwilling to take in Angie's sister, who struggled with behavioral challenges.



Rather than separate the girls, DSS determined residential care would be the best option, which ultimately led them to Thornwell near Greenwood.

As soon as Angie arrived on campus, she realized this was the place she needed to be.

The sisters were placed in a residential home with caring house parents who loved them. The ministry provided for their needs and sent them to a private school.

Most importantly, the children's home gave them the opportunity to experience family.

"At that point, my wife realized that what she'd been wanting all her life is a stable family situation," Thomas explained.

A few years after their mother died, the girls' father passed away, leaving them orphaned. Miraculously, Angie was eventually adopted into a loving Christian family.

Without the intervention of residential care, their futures could have been very different.

A LIFETIME COMMITMENT

For Thomas, his wife's story isn't just part of her past. It shapes how he chooses to serve today.

"I realized [Connie Maxwell] will be a great place for me to get involved because it made a great impact on my wife at a time when she needed it," Thomas said.

Thomas believes that children's homes provide a safe environment, spiritual guidance, and the opportunity for children in unstable situations to know they are loved by Jesus.

"That gospel influence in their lives can make the difference between success and failure in life," Thomas said. "It's a rescue situation."

For Thomas, supporting vulnerable children is an act of gratitude for the people who supported his wife when she had nowhere else to turn.

"We're just so thankful that God stepped in and provided a way for my wife to have that children's home experience," Thomas said.

Today, Thomas hopes his service at Connie Maxwell will help provide hope and stability for more children who need someone to stand in the gap and change their story.

“For the Dreams of Children” Campaign Enters Final Year

As Connie Maxwell enters the final year of the “For the Dreams of Children” campaign, key benchmarks are noted in its journey to become a national leader in trauma-informed ministries and healing services to children and families. Strategic hires have positioned staff to begin using new interventions with children ahead of the planned construction of the McCall Healing Center. Several generous gifts have recently been given toward the campaign’s ambitious goal.

“Our campaign has raised significant funding and has wonderful momentum, but we still have a ways to go. We have just one year left, which means we’ll need everyone to come together to push this across the threshold,” says President Danny Nicholson. “There is a place for others to join us in this race to the finish line in 2027.”

STAFF DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES INCLUDE TRAINING, TEAM BUILDING

Strategic additions to Connie Maxwell’s leadership and staff are creating cultural shifts on campus. Michelle Maikoetter is the Director of Special Projects at The Neurosequential Network and consults with Connie Maxwell’s executive team to customize staff training experiences. She is incorporating her expertise into the organizational structure for the Healing Center and has introduced

staff team building exercises and workshops that are already benefitting children and families.

“Connie Maxwell has a strong foundation of trainings in existence, so we are enhancing therapeutic care and adding the neurosequential model as a way to galvanize how staff looks at issues like challenging behaviors and children’s learning styles,” Maikoetter explains.

The trainings gather staff members, from administration to those directly serving children, in the same room to work from a common place and with the same language. Maikoetter praises staff for the curiosity and engagement they’ve already shown through detailed presentations she’s given on topics like therapeutic disciplines and identifying child sexual abuse.

In her role as Vice President of Programs and Services, Michelle Geiser sees the training translating well to staff from the areas she oversees which includes residential care, foster care, family care, and crisis care. Geiser likes that team building exercises are improving communication, as “we are training people to be leaders and to trust themselves, their teams, and the mission.”

Geiser is also tasked with representing Connie Maxwell in wider circles through participation in national organizations and conferences. Showing up in these spaces to build intentional relationships

also opens the door for ministry. “We are moving forward in educating on this, appreciating science, and utilizing it in the best ways possible without losing sight of our original mission and values, which includes continuing to grow and strengthen the spiritual formation and faith in Christ,” Geiser says.

Both leaders are excited that the Healing Center’s Kauffmann auditorium and training center will provide places for trauma-informed training to one day be offered to community partners, too. There is a collective sense of welcoming in the center’s training process, where greater knowledge and understanding can meet discovery so that more hurting families can have access to healing.

For her part, Geiser is passionate about loving and serving families and children, especially children who lack the support they desperately need. “I believe that the programs we’re using and embedding with the eventual treatment side of our services will have long-lasting impacts and break cycles in the future,” she says.

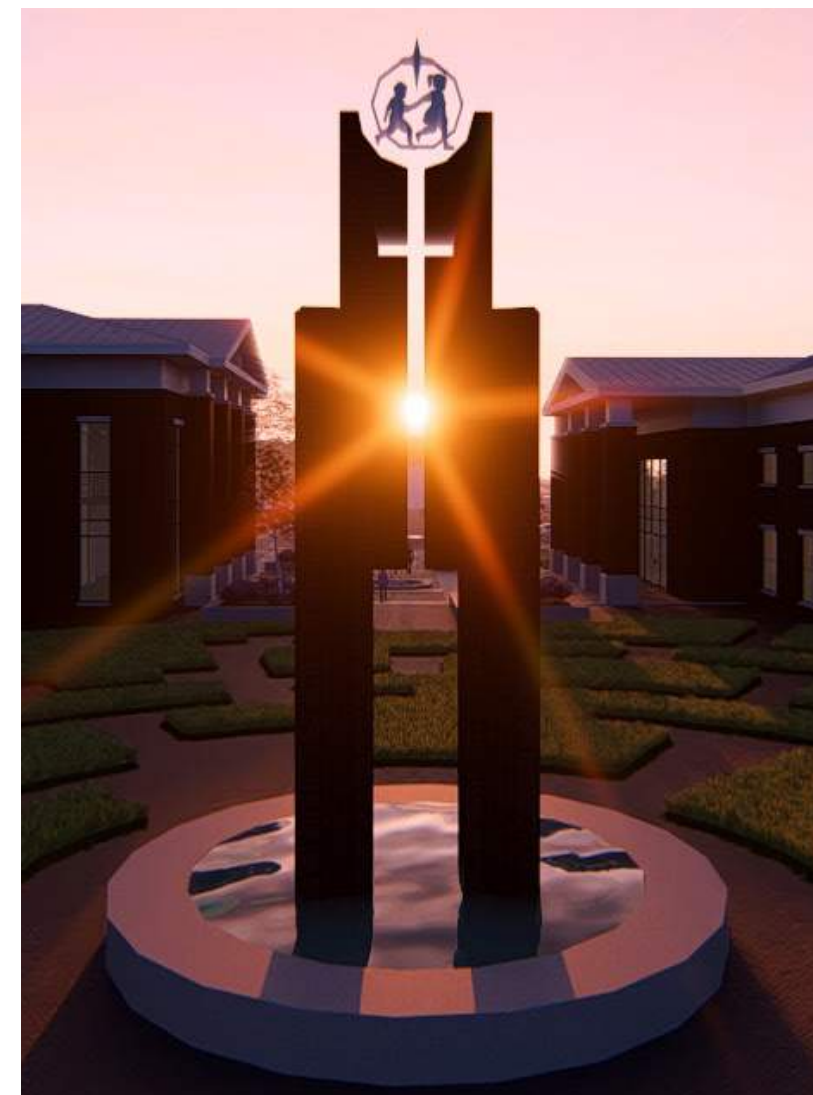
Nicholson is grateful for the team of specialists assembled by Connie Maxwell who bring with them unrivaled experience with the foremost leaders in trauma research. “We can’t build a building and have an intervention program and not have talented, gifted Christ-followers here to implement it all. They have worked in places we could never reach, so to have them be a part of what we’re doing is amazing,” he says.

“For 134 years Connie Maxwell has helped children and families, and the Healing Center is a way to bring the things that we know are best practices in the field and then push these things forward in our programs so that families and individuals can have their needs met in one place,” Maikoetter says. “The only thing that would hold us back now is funding. As we look to the close of the “For the Dreams of Children” campaign, we want to be ready and as strong as we can be for the next steps.”

CELEBRATING NEW CAMPAIGN GIFTS

Rosemary Keller contacted Nicholson about giving to Connie Maxwell at “just the right time within this magnificent plan.” She’d grown up sharing part of her allowance for a special annual offering to Connie Maxwell through her church, while her family’s business, Parker’s Furniture, supplied furnishings to the cottages. Her grandfather was a lifetime supporter who shared crops he’d grown with residents during the Depression Era. Through the years Rosemary and her husband included Connie Maxwell in their charitable giving and then, since his death, she has chosen to focus her giving there.

During a campus visit with Nicholson, Rosemary asked to visit Connie Maxwell’s gravesite. “It was important to me because a child was lost in our family. It’s a heartache that never goes away – it just grows a patina,” she says.



Out of this powerful connection, Rosemary chose to contribute \$250,000 on behalf of her family for the statue of young Connie Maxwell that will greet visitors to the Healing Center complex. The gift is in memory of a 15-year-old niece, whose faith and love for her church impressed Rosemary to this day. She calls it “providential” to be a part of helping to show hurting children that there is hope for them in this life.

“I am one of so many that feel an attachment to Connie Maxwell. I can empathize with her family’s grief back in 1892, because we all want those we’ve lost to be remembered,” Rosemary says. “I feel privileged to share this with my family and to be a part of the ministries of Connie Maxwell. It’s like a dream come true for me.”



Michelle Parker, niece to Rosemary Keller

Doug Kauffmann and his family previously gifted \$1 million to the For the Dreams of Children campaign. Recently the Campaign Steering Committee Chair and former Connie Maxwell pastor gave another \$100,000 gift in memory of his wife, Sally, who was an early champion for greater trauma-informed resourcing for Connie Maxwell children. Sally’s name will appear on the President’s Suite in the Healing Center as a nod to the passionate conversations she always enjoyed with the Connie Maxwell presidents she served under.

“Sally Kauffman never wanted to be president, but always wanted access to the president,” Doug said with a laugh. “She’d love to have her name on the president’s office, because the one thing she loved about Connie Maxwell that was different from church life was that there was just one supervisor – the president. She loved talking with them and writing notes about her thoughts on how to improve things.”

When the couple arrived to serve Connie Maxwell Baptist in the mid-1990’s, Doug recalls Sally saying she’d “lived her entire life learning about, praying for, and giving to Connie Maxwell that she couldn’t believe she was actually serving here.” She immersed herself in ministry to children by spending one-on-one time with them, leading them in music, and coordinating Connie Maxwell Christmas for 16 years.

“Sally knew the value of having a loving community of adults trained in trauma. She recognized we should not label a child with bad behavior as ‘bad,’ but instead see that they are struggling and have a story of experiences,” Doug says. “Her contribution was to identify the need to bring healing to children within the campus environment, and she knew we could do more to address what’s going on inside of them.”



Sally Kauffmann, Minister of Music and Education at Connie Maxwell for 20 years and wife of Doug Kauffmann

Lakelands Baptist Association and **Parkland Baptist Church** in Greenwood recently gifted Connie Maxwell with \$77,500, which was a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the church’s property. Lakeland Director of Missions David Little presented Nicholson with the check that will go toward the construction of the Healing Center.

“It’s overwhelming to see how God has used the personal narratives of countless individuals, families, and churches who love Connie Maxwell, and to see them woven into the stories of these significant gifts. Each will have generational impacts for healing children in Jesus’ name,” Nicholson says.

HELPING DREAMS BECOME REALITY

These organizational updates and gift stories are exciting mile markers, reflecting some of the ways God has been working through Connie

Maxwell’s leadership, staff, and partners to see the greater vision of the For the Dreams of Children campaign become a reality. The original stated goals of constructing the Healing Center, building a Charleston campus, and reimagining Maxwell Farms remain front and center as the campaign enters its final year.

According to Nicholson, Connie Maxwell can become a national leader in providing trauma-informed healing services to children and families with the right people, donors, and experts collaborating in research, education, and ministry. Joining Connie Maxwell’s campaign is an act of worship, he says. “It’s not just human hands interchanging monetary values, the act of giving is the sacred spirit of God working through people to do what’s needed to redeem children.”

To learn more about the campaign and to contribute, —visit www.forthedreamsofchildren.com.





RESIDENTIAL CARE/MISSIONARY HOUSEPARENT

Meet *Bob and Terri Metze:* An Inside Look as a Connie Maxwell House Parent

O At Connie Maxwell, house parents do far more than coordinate schedules and supervise a household. They create a loving home for vulnerable children and teens in need.

From morning devotions to late-night conversations, our house parents walk alongside kids who need stability, care, and encouragement. They provide consistent, Christ-centered support during the crucial developing years of childhood. With a unique seven days on, seven days off schedule, they fully invest in the children in their care while maintaining time for rest and their personal life.

For nearly a decade, Bob and Terri Metze have served as house parents. They have been at Connie Maxwell for almost four years and are currently caring for five high school girls. Throughout this time, the couple has navigated challenges,

celebrated milestones, and even taken the girls on road trips to the mountains and waterfalls of the Carolinas.

While the Metzses have remained dedicated to helping the young women in their home heal, thrive, and prepare for independent life after graduation, there's a growing need at Connie Maxwell for more compassionate house parents like them.

In the following Q&A, the Metzses share a glimpse of their lives as house parents, including the challenges, rewards, and lasting impact of opening your life to children who need a place to belong.

Q: WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE FOR A HOUSE PARENT?

A: "It's going to be different for every house parent. We have high school girls in transition to the independent living program. At 7 a.m., we start

with devotions, and then they finish getting ready for the day. They leave for school around 8:05 or 8:10.

By 3:45 or 3:50, many of them are heading out the door to work or sports. We have three girls who work, and two involved in sports, so there's a lot of transportation throughout the day and evening. For the girls who are home, bedtime is usually 9:30, and for those working later, it's around 10:30.

Transportation times give us opportunities to interact with the girls on an individual basis, so I don't look at it as a burden. It's an opportunity to check in with them."

Q: WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT AND TRAINING DO HOUSE PARENTS RECEIVE FROM CONNIE MAXWELL?

A: "The training happens on different levels. There's practical training, but there's also a big focus on unity and encouragement because we're all here for the same reason. Once a month, there's usually a worship service with a visiting pastor, and once a quarter there's a larger staff meeting where leadership shares updates about Connie Maxwell and answers questions openly and transparently.

Every new employee goes through CARE training, which focuses on the philosophy of house parenting and residential care. We also receive Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training, first aid training, and ongoing training in areas like child development and trauma-informed care. Neurosequential Model Training helps us to see beyond surface behavior to better understand and help others.

There's a big focus on understanding the needs of children who have experienced trauma, and it's exciting to see them become overcomers. We also have excellent supervisors who we can call whenever we face a difficult situation. They're very caring and supportive, and we appreciate them a lot."

Q: WHAT QUALITIES MAKE SOMEONE A GOOD HOUSE PARENT?

A: "Patience is important. Sometimes kids want a reaction, and so I have to make sure I'm regulated before I try to help someone else.

Empathy is also important. We have no control over their backgrounds or the unhealthy coping mechanisms they've learned, so we have to be understanding, loving, and patient while helping them move forward.

You also need to be organized to a degree, especially with the older kids and busy schedules. Consistency helps them feel comfortable because they know what's expected and they're not surprised by sudden changes. We want it to feel like home.

They need to feel loved by us. We're never going to replace their parents, and we don't try to, but as a married couple of almost 43 years, they get to see a healthy husband-and-wife relationship modeled for them. We want to model a Christ-centered relationship, and for some of them, that's completely new."

Q: WHAT ARE THE MOST REWARDING PARTS OF BEING A HOUSE PARENT?

A: "Seeing growth and change is rewarding. We try to teach the girls about goal setting and purpose in life, and while they may not be where we'd want them to be yet, we can see growth emotionally, academically, spiritually, and even physically. It's rewarding to know that God has used us to influence that.

Seeing them learn healthier coping skills is also rewarding. They may not always handle things perfectly, but we can see growth in how they process stress and problems. The real joy is seeing them thrive after they leave us."

Q: WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT HOUSE PARENTS FACE?

A: "With some kids, you never know what might trigger a memory or difficult emotion. Something at school may cause them to come in already upset, and it can be difficult to not react.

Sometimes they receive difficult phone calls from family or deal with bullying at school. We try to look at these moments as teaching opportunities. Not when they're at the height of their emotion, but later, when they've calmed down, and we can talk through what happened. We teach them, "What does God say? You are loved, precious, and valued."

Q: HOW DO HOUSE PARENTS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE?

A: "With the younger ones, it's a lot of spending time with them—playing, reading, going to the gym, and just doing things together. With our age group, we have to be more intentional because they stay so busy.



Sometimes it's one-on-one time taking them out clothes shopping or driving them to work. In past years, when our girls were less busy, we tried to create memories by hiking, chasing waterfalls over North Carolina or upstate South Carolina, and taking them to downtown Greenville."

Q: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MAIN ROLE AS HOUSE PARENTS?

A: "I think to be an example many of them haven't had before. They only know what they've experienced, so we want to show them that there's a better way to live life, especially with God at the center of it."

Q: HOW HAS THE EXPERIENCE TRANSFORMED YOU PERSONALLY?

A: "It's a good reminder of what really matters in life. Stuff isn't going with us, and relationships matter. Helping people understand who Jesus is matters. Loving people who are struggling matters, even when it's difficult. It's rewarding because we know that we're doing what God has for us in this season of life, too."

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE MEMORIES OF BEING A HOUSE PARENT?

A: "Some of the best memories are the different trips we've taken with the girls. We've gone to the ocean and mountains and cities. Seeing the wonder on their face is precious. Some of them have never gotten out of the upstate before Connie Maxwell. It's fun to see them have a great time and build a bond with them."

Q: WHY WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE SOMEONE ELSE TO BE A HOUSE PARENT?

A: "It has to be a calling. Someone has to want to make an impact and see it as a ministry. But if they're looking for something that's rewarding and want to pour their life into kids and make a difference, it's definitely something they should consider."

Interesting in becoming a houseparent at Connie Maxwell? —**Contact Amie Shuman at ashuman@conniemaxwell.com.**

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CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES



For Family Care Mom, Connie Maxwell “Better Than I Ever Imagined”

At 31 years old Caitlyn is experiencing new life. The single mother of three was raised in a single-parent household and survived childhood abuse. While she had a loving relationship with her mom and attended church growing up, Caitlyn’s introduction to fentanyl and methamphetamine as a teenager would drastically change her life. Her addiction eventually robbed

her of work, transportation, housing, and custody of her two oldest children.

During this time, Caitlyn experienced the death of her mother and kept “falling further away from God and my family. Rehab didn’t work for me. I had my youngest child in 2022, then lost custody of him when I was arrested for drug charges in June 2024.” Sitting alone in a county jail, Caitlyn finally chose to address the destructive behaviors and addictions that had been controlling her.

“I didn’t know how to navigate the world anymore. I was lost,” Caitlyn says of that time in her life. “My lawyer got me into drug court, and that was the hard push that I needed from the Lord to stop me from getting away with anything else that I was doing.”

South Carolina drug courts provide structured, court-supervised programming that leads non-violent offenders through substance abuse recovery without incarceration. Caitlyn’s court-appointed liaison helped to place her in an eight-month ministry program where she was “loved while people poured into me, and I found my way back to Christ.” Caitlyn embraced sobriety and began the hard work of regaining custody of her youngest son.

Connie Maxwell’s Family Care Program Director Diana Johnson met Caitlyn during this time and recalls being impressed with the work and commitment the young mom was putting toward reunification with her children and changing the trajectory of her life. In March 2025, Caitlyn moved to Connie Maxwell and into Family Care. Since then, Johnson has seen Caitlyn meet all drug court requirements, pay off a significant amount of related fees, and complete the Safe Baby Court child welfare program.

“Caitlyn’s willingness to step out of addiction and turn to God for her sobriety has been a beautiful thing to watch,” Johnson says. “She wants to repair things that have happened in her life as she is walking this journey with Christ. Part of this is confronting the painful reality that she didn’t live with her two oldest children, now aged 10 and 12, during their early years.”

“In my life I have had a lot of people leave, and it was scary being by myself at certain points. But here I have support and know that I am loved unconditionally,” Caitlyn says, adding she’s “excited to introduce my children to God and to church, because knowing who I am in Christ has completely changed my life.”

The Family Care program provides a variety of services to resident mothers and children that address therapeutic, emotional, and spiritual needs. Program staff are also available to help with things specific to the family, such as catching up on missed childhood immunizations or dental care. For Caitlyn, Family Care is helping to make her professional dream become a reality.

“I want to become a peer support specialist because I want to help other women who’ve been where I’ve been. I want to help them navigate the world of becoming clean and guide them to the Lord, because I believe the only way to do that is through God. One day I’d like to work at Connie Maxwell, or somewhere like this,” Caitlyn says, before adding that her dreams also include having her family reunited one day in her own permanent home.

“Caitlyn’s willingness to step out of addiction and turn to God for her sobriety has been a beautiful thing to watch.”

Caitlyn is one step closer to achieving those dreams through the progress and success she’s had in her college coursework. She’s earned a 4.0 grade point average, been invited to join the school’s honor society, and awarded during a Human Services pinning ceremony this semester. She is on track to graduate in Spring 2027.

“Caitlyn wants to take her life experience and use it for God’s glory which, in my opinion, is what a peer support specialist does. She strives to be successful in everything she touches now. Whether it’s being hyper-focused on being a good parent, school, Bible study, or daily life, she’s trying to be positive. Caitlyn builds other people up, so becoming a peer support specialist is natural to her,” Johnson says.



Within Family Care programming, Caitlyn is very open about her past struggles and loves to have faith conversations with other mothers. She attends Connie Maxwell's Wednesday night dinner and Bible study, where she engages Pastor Ed Gidewell with some of her biggest questions about scripture. "We recently talked about the new heaven and new earth and about the book of Revelation. If someone is curious about something Pastor Ed always studies up on it, and we talk about it the following week."

As Caitlyn begins phase three of the Family Care program, she is quick to celebrate how far she's come. In addition to completing the court's requirements and related certifications, she has been awarded several educational scholarships. She was recently invited to speak at the First Steps conference, where she and her son were named Family of the Quarter. She's working toward having her driver's license reinstated, too.

The two greatest things Caitlyn loves to talk about are her relationship with God and a bright future that will include reuniting with her children. She begins weekend visits with her two oldest children soon and, one day, she hopes to become a homeowner. "I can't express how much I love my life now, and how great God has made it. I have almost died a few times over the years due to my addiction, but He saved me from myself. I love it here at Connie Maxwell, it's been amazing and better than I ever imagined," she says.

According to Johnson, "there's nothing Caitlyn can't do as long as she puts God first. During this past year she's blossoming into the beautiful lady Christ has made her to be."



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

Middle School Teacher Introduces Students to Service at Connie Maxwell

Luke Slice has been teaching math at Brewer Middle School in Greenwood for the past five years. About three years ago the Lander University graduate revived a boys' leadership group, Against the Grain, that had lapsed after the program creator's departure. Under the motto "Strength, Honor, and Leadership," the after-school program's mission is to instill servant leadership by offering these students opportunities to serve others locally.

"I truly enjoy what I do. My students bring so much joy into my life each day, and I feel incredibly blessed that God has given me the opportunity to be their teacher," Slice says of his calling and influence.

After being introduced to Connie Maxwell through his own church youth group as a teenager, Slice wanted these middle schoolers to learn about the ministry through projects performed there during this school year. Their first trip to campus was last

fall to help with Connie Maxwell's Serve Day.

Once Volunteer Coordinator Vilette Uhl saw the boys in action, she invited them back to help clean up decorations after Christmas. She was shocked when Slice showed up with 25 middle school boys to work that day and, since then, the group has returned for several other service projects like clearing out attic spaces.

According to Slice, "the boys have done an outstanding job with these tasks, and I am extremely proud of their effort, attitude, and willingness to serve."

Uhl notes the power of Slice's own example of servant leadership for his students who, she says, have such a liking for him. During one project, Uhl noticed Slice fed the boys food that he had personally provided. "He goes above and beyond for these young men, while instilling leadership traits through being such a good male role model in their lives," she says.

Slice organizes monthly Against the Grain volunteer opportunities through Uhl. Depending on the project, he coordinates drop-offs at Connie Maxwell with the boys' parents or schedules a school bus to provide transportation. Slice is already seeing personal growth in his students as a result of their service.

"It has been powerful to watch these young men step up and serve others with humility and



purpose. One of my main goals for Against the Grain is for the boys to learn to ‘see a need, and fill a need.’ These young men truly desire to help others, and they continue to show that through their actions,” he says.

Slice recently talked with his students about the meaning of volunteering and why it’s important for Against the Grain to help local organizations like Connie Maxwell. Zaylen, a seventh grader, told Slice he wants to “be kind and help people” and volunteering in his community “helps us be better men.” Christopher recognized that it’s important to help others and treat them well because “you never know what the future holds,” and Chance told Slice that volunteering is important because “if someone needs help, we should help them.”

Slice says his students’ words reflect the heart of what he’s trying to build within the group. It’s been fulfilling to see his students discover how special Connie Maxwell is and learn about different ways

that a community partner is serving local children and families. He’s also struck by how consistently the boys are exceeding his expectations through their service.

“Volunteering is important to me because God calls us to have a servant’s heart. Serving others and helping those in need is one way we live that out and reflect the heart of Jesus - not just in words, but through our actions,” Slice says. “As a kid, I was given many opportunities to serve, and those experiences helped shape the man I am today. I want the same for these young men, to give them opportunities to grow, lead, and become the men they are meant to be.”

For her part, Uhl says Slice’s impact “goes way deeper than volunteering. He’s pouring in so much of himself into young men trying to help them and be a good example. He is helping them develop leadership skills and good qualities that we just need more of in this world.”

FOSTER CARE

From Surviving to THRIVING

Foster families focus on healing and long-term well-being at this year’s THRIVE events.

In March, Connie Maxwell Children’s Ministries (CMCM) hosted a series of three THRIVE events across South Carolina at Taylors First Baptist Church in Taylors, S.C., Shandon Baptist Church in Columbia, S.C., and Church at Cane Bay in Summerville, S.C.

For the nearly 100 attendees, which consisted of foster parents, prospective foster parents, and other community partners in foster care, THRIVE was an evening of encouragement. The events included training hours, a meal, various door prizes and thoughtful giveaways, and opportunities for fellowship.

THRIVE is one of the ways that Connie Maxwell aims to partner with local churches and come alongside foster families to support them in their foster care journey.

Michelle Geiser, Vice President of Programs and Services, said, “THRIVE created space for honest

conversation, practical learning, and spiritual encouragement, while reinforcing the role of the church in supporting foster care and reunification efforts across South Carolina.”

Paula Reed, Director of Foster Care, described the purpose of the event as serving to “refresh, encourage, and restore foster families and their advocates through Christ-centered fellowship, honoring the sacred work of caring for children from hard places.”

The event featured Kim Botto as a guest speaker, whose message centered on building resilience and having faith. As an adoptive mother herself, Kim was able to bring lived insight to her message, and she reminded attendees that community support in their foster care journey is a critical component.

Kim Botto is a nationally recognized speaker, the author of Boundless Hope for Every Child and the host of the Every Child Belongs podcast. Kim is a mother of 5 and an advocate for children and teens with neurodivergence or disabilities. She is passionate about creating safe, welcoming environments in which all kids can thrive and provides trainings to help equip church leaders and organizations, volunteers, parents, and other childcare providers to do so.

New to the THRIVE event this year was a panel that featured parents who have been in the trenches of foster care and adoption. Members of





VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

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the panel, the Zapata family and Lyndsay Marie Followell, were able to share their experience, and then participate in a question and answer session with attendees, moderated by Kim Botto. Topics addressed in the panel discussion included the role of faith in foster care, the importance of trauma informed care, and some practical advice for new or prospective foster parents.

Sandi Hutchinson, who attended the event in Summerville, particularly appreciated a story shared by speaker Kim Botto about a distressing school moment for one of her foster children, in which the teacher did not understand the child's emotional reaction to being picked up late, seeing it as overblown. Sandi recalled, "What the teacher did not know was that (the child) had been previously abandoned. It reminded me that it is important to know and understand the 'why' behind the behavior. With every reaction there's also a story."

Thank you to our host churches, Taylors First Baptist, Shandon Baptist, and Church at Cane Bay, not only for providing the space for these events but for the wonderful meals, childcare, and volunteers to help make it all happen.

Thank you also to the South Carolina Baptist Convention, whose sponsorship makes THRIVE possible.

Thank you to our panel members, the Zapata family and Lyndsay Marie Followell, for helping uplift our foster families by sharing your experiences.

Lastly, a huge thank you to our Connie Maxwell foster families for taking a leap of faith for the dreams of all children.

To sum up the series of events, Michelle Geiser said, "THRIVE served as a powerful reminder that foster care is a community effort. When churches, families, and organizations come together, we create environments where children and families are not only supported—but given the opportunity to truly thrive."

FRIDAY NIGHT BASKETBALL

Friday night basketball at Connie Maxwell Children's Ministries has just wrapped up, marking another successful season of intramural basketball for the kids!

This program allows our students, including staff kids, to compete against one another in a fun and encouraging environment. Teams practice twice a week and take the court on Friday nights for games that bring our entire community together. Teachers, houseparents, guardians, and family members fill the stands, cheering loudly and celebrating every effort.

A concession stand operates during the games,

with all proceeds supporting missionaries, giving our kids a tangible way to see how even their fun can help further God's work beyond our campus.

Beyond the wins and losses, this season taught our children valuable life lessons. They learned discipline through practice, perseverance when the game was tough, humility in victory, and grace in defeat. They experienced what it means to encourage teammates and respect coaches and referees. Most importantly, they saw firsthand that teamwork really does make the dream work — and that success is sweeter when we work together toward a common goal.





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LEARN MORE *at*
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