Day School Makes a Difference for Teen

Life for Levi certainly hasn’t been easy. Born with brain damage to abusive and neglectful parents, he spent most of his early years being shuffled around to nearly a dozen different foster homes, residential treatment facilities and even a mental institution. Years of disappointment led to good fortune, though, when in 2009, Levi came to live with Barry Sullivan and his partner of more than 20 years, Bill Lloyd.

Living in an urban area of Pittsburgh, Levi began to fall in with the wrong crowd, experimenting with drugs and getting into trouble. Around this same time, Levi was involved in a severe accident while riding his bike, which resulted in further damage to his brain. Following the accident, Barry and Bill made Levi an official member of their family by adopting him in 2012.

The family relocated to Hidden Valley in hopes of a quieter life. Committed to providing Levi with a good education, Barry began searching for a school that would give them much-needed support for Levi’s multiple diagnoses (including ADHD, Reactive Attachment Disorder and several others). Now, after nearly two years at Pressley Ridge Day School in Johnstown, he knows that they have made the right choice for their son’s education.

The Pressley Ridge Day School Johnstown opened in 2009 with just five students. The school has grown as more school districts have been added, and in the past year, the student roster has more than doubled from 30 students to 70. Senior Coordinator Andrea Roberts credits the school’s success to the dedicated staff who provide the students with structure and authority. “The kids know that we genuinely care. They feel like they finally belong.”

I don’t get bullied here...they won’t put up with it.

And Levi, now 18, agrees. For him, the best thing about the Day School compared to others he has attended is that there is “no drama. I don’t get bullied here, and if I do, they won’t put up with it. When a boy called me names, I was going to fight, but I turned around and walked away.”

Joel Erwin, Behavioral Supports Coordinator at the Day School, has seen remarkable growth from Levi. When he first enrolled, Levi easily became highly escalated and aggressive. In the time since, the staff has worked to teach him coping skills, and now he knows to take a walk or hug his teacher rather than punching a wall.

Levi will be the first to tell you that he is spoiled rotten. After everything he has been through, Barry wants him to feel good about himself. Levi appreciates nice clothes and keeps his Nike Air Jordans impeccably clean. He loves the outdoors, and comes home after school each day to fish in the ponds near their house. He also enjoys spending time on the family’s boat on the Youghiogheny River and often brings along his best friend Will, who also attends the Day School, and his brothers. Recently, Levi began working at a local convenience store, where he rides his Vespa to work and is saving his money for a four-wheeler.

Levi will attend the Pressley Ridge Day School until he turns 21. After that, his fathers hope to find a program that will further educate him on the life skills necessary for independence. In the meantime, the staff of Pressley Ridge will continue to do whatever it takes to help Levi and his family succeed.
Letter from the CEO

With the holidays just around the corner, I want to give my sincerest thanks to you, the Pressley Ridge community, for your unwavering support of our children and families. This newsletter highlights just a few of the great successes that our kids have achieved — such as Levi, who, despite the adversity he has faced, is now thriving at our Day School in Johnstown. Or our Career Development Center students who have the opportunity to learn the skills to design and build projects, like this year’s storage shed, from the experts at Walsh Construction. Then there are the 400 foster families who give a second chance to kids like Noah, who suffered severe abuse and was near death prior to being placed into his foster home with loving parents who are committed to helping him heal physically and emotionally.

There are thousands more success stories just like these, and that’s all because of you. The support of our community has made it possible for Pressley Ridge to create success for children and families for nearly 185 years. Each one of us has the power to be the difference in someone’s life, and I want to thank you for choosing to make a difference in the lives of the families whom we serve at Pressley Ridge.

Sincerely,

Susanne L. Cole, M.A, M.B.A
President and CEO

Pressley Ridge School for the Deaf Celebrates 20 Years

For the past two decades, Pressley Ridge School for the Deaf (PRSD) has educated Deaf and hard-of-hearing children with significant emotional or behavioral disorders. Here, students receive daily, specialized instruction focused on expanding their communication and language skills, improving academic achievement, developing and maintaining positive relationships and reducing disruptive behaviors.

“For 20 years Pressley Ridge School for the Deaf has diligently served Deaf children and their families. The immeasurable successes are counted by the daily small steps taken by the students with our staff on an amazing journey to recovery, wholeness and overall wellness. Congratulations are in order to all PRSD alumni, families and staff on this milestone anniversary,” said Program Director Steve Kozak.

More than 100 current and former staff, students and their families enjoyed refreshments and activities at a celebration held on October 8th at the Marshall Ave. Campus.

Events That Make a Difference

We are grateful to the sponsors and attendees of each of our special events, which raise more than $130,000 in support of Pressley Ridge programs and services each year.

Raise Their Spirits
June 23 - Terrace on 5th

Ice Cream Fundae VIP Tailgate
July 14 - Hotel Monaco

Summer Fade Away Party
August 4 - Southpointe
**Fostering Care in West Virginia**

As an infant, Noah was beaten nearly to death by his biological parents, leaving him with severe brain trauma and multiple broken bones. The Harpers, certified Treatment Foster Parents, stayed by his side at the hospital, and along with Pressley Ridge staff, have worked tirelessly to rehabilitate him over the past two years. Though he is immobile and non-verbal, Noah can now laugh out loud and smile at the Harpers, who recently made him a permanent member of their family.

Pressley Ridge pioneered the Treatment Foster Care model, in which children are treated in a family setting rather than residential facilities, and it has since been replicated all across the U.S. In 2014, the state of West Virginia identified a need for care for youth whose severe emotional and behavioral issues, as well as other disabilities, put them at high risk for placement out-of-state, at high-end residential treatment facilities or in longer-term care. The Department of Health and Human Services tapped Pressley Ridge to pilot our Treatment Foster Care model in the state.

Treatment foster parents must undergo extensive training to ensure they have the skills necessary to care for a child with severe issues. This type of treatment actively engages all adults connected to the child — foster and biological families, as well as teachers — to strengthen relationships and ensure there is a shared goal for the child’s well-being. Since the pilot program began in West Virginia just over two years ago, 15 of the 34 enrolled children have returned to their existing families or have been adopted.

Treatment Foster Care is making a meaningful difference in the lives of many other families just like Noah’s. As Treatment Foster Care continues to expand in West Virginia, as well as the other areas we serve, more foster parents are needed to care for these children with special needs. While all foster parents are reimbursed for their services, treatment foster parents receive a higher rate due to the intensive work involved. If you have it in your heart to help one of the thousands of children and families in need, please contact Pressley Ridge at (888)777-0820.

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**In Memoriam- Lillian Hall Fisher (1918-2016)**

Pressley Ridge mourns the loss of longtime supporter Lillian Hall Fisher who joined the board of Pressley House in 1950 and recognized then that the needs of troubled children are ever changing. Her passion for the organization and friendship with Protestant Home president Agnes Buchanan eventually led to a merger between the two agencies to create Pressley Ridge. Mrs. Fisher left behind a legacy of commitment and investment in Pressley Ridge and the children we serve.

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**You Have the Power to Be the Difference**

There are many ways to impact the lives of the children and families of Pressley Ridge.

**Community Service**

Many of our program centers are in need of improvements such as painting, landscaping and gardening. Corporate volunteers, service groups or individuals can give just a few hours of their time to make a visible difference.

**Backpack Giveback**

Many of our families are unable to provide the most basic necessities for their children. You can host a collection drive for non-perishable foods, toiletries, school supplies, coats or other essential items.

**Donate**

Your gift of any amount will give more than 5,400 children a chance to succeed. Please use the enclosed envelope, call (412) 872-9433 or visit PressleyRidge.org.

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**Events That Make a Difference**

We are grateful to the sponsors and attendees of each of our special events, which raise more than $130,000 in support of Pressley Ridge programs and services each year.

- **Ice Cream Fundae - Pittsburgh**
  - August 7 - Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium

- **Ice Cream Fundae - Central PA**
  - July 23 - Indian Echo Caverns

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Party Town Center
Since 1832, Pressley Ridge has done whatever it takes to create success for children and families. From therapy and treatment to foster care services and education for children with special needs, including autism and deafness, Pressley Ridge empowers kids and families with the ability and confidence to succeed.

Pressley Ridge serves communities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia and Delaware.

To get involved or find out more information, visit PressleyRidge.org.

Constructing Futures
Pressley Ridge is proud of our three-year partnership with Walsh Construction in which our students have the opportunity to work alongside their skilled employees. Each year, select students from the Career Development Center (CDC) in Pittsburgh participate in an eleven-week interactive course learning about work site safety, large machinery and how to estimate and read blue prints. The last six weeks are spent on a project at the CDC campus. In 2016, Walsh employees worked with the students—from design to ground-up construction—to build a 12’ x 10’ storage shed.

This collaboration resulted in much more than just a new shed. While the students learned basic construction skills, they also acquired skills that will help them to construct their own futures.

If you or your company would like to partner with us to help our children learn vocational skills, please contact our Development Department at (412) 872-9433 or info@pressleyridge.org.