

WINTER 2021

Beech Leaves



Parenting: A lifelong journey

Even after raising multiple children, these parents found there was still much to learn and room to grow.

Blending a family can present challenges, even under the best circumstances. No surprise there. But some situations are tougher than others.

Tony was done with his active parenting years before he and Ellen married. It wasn't easy to start over. But he was the first real father figure his new stepkids had ever had, and he took that responsibility seriously.

Compared to many Beech Brook families, Tony and Ellen are in a better place to provide a stable environment for the kids still at home. Each has a steady job, and they were able to buy a home together.

But both had also grown up in homes where there was a lot of physical discipline. Ellen also had experienced domestic violence in her previous relationships. Despite

that, they were doing their best to be good parents.

As is often the case, however, it was just a little thing that precipitated a family crisis. A minor argument between Tony and his teenage stepson Jimmy had escalated. His patience exhausted, Tony went to give his stepson a push, but the boy

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A Message from Tom Royer, President/CEO



REFLECTING ON 170 YEARS OF SERVICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

A pandemic that never seemed to end, racial tensions and a war that started with a conflict in Crimea. It all sounds so familiar.

From the Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum's twenty-seventh Annual Report, September 30, 1879.

Sometimes people ask where all our children come from. They come from hunger, from cold, from nakedness, from neglect and abuse. Their poverty is not of their own misdeeds....

The 1850s was a pivotal decade. In the United States, tensions over the institution of slavery became prominent and dramatic events hastened the nation's movement towards civil war. In Europe, great powers fought the Crimean War. In Cleveland and the rest of the United States, we faced the third of seven major cholera epidemics.

On January 22, 1852, the ladies of the Martha Washington and Dorcas Societies, led by social reformer Rebecca Rouse, met at the Old Stone Church in Downtown Cleveland to lay the groundwork for an orphanage, following the cholera epidemic. By April, the fledgling Cleveland Orphan Asylum had opened its doors to 11 children in a house at the corner of Erie (now E. 9th) and Ohio Streets, briefly receiving public funds for sheltering children from the City Infirmary.

In the 17 decades since, Beech Brook has been serving children and families who have often been disproportionately impacted by epidemics, pandemics, poverty, abuse, neglect, drugs, gangs and social change.

This is still true today. I have been thinking a lot about social justice recently and how our work is connected.

Sometimes people ask where all our children come from. They come from hunger, from cold, from nakedness, from neglect and abuse. Their poverty is not of their own misdeeds....

—Abraham Shunk, 1879

Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities.

The first sentence in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence speaks to this: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..."

And Americans overwhelmingly believe in the concept of equal opportunity. Surveys consistently find 90% of the public agreeing that "Our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed."

But when we mistreat groups of people, we are betraying one of our founding values. Most of us recognize that when we mistreat certain racial minorities, religious groups, ethnic groups, women, etc., we are not keeping our promise of social justice. These grievances are all legitimate and need to be continually addressed.

“The foundations of the Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum (Beech Brook) have been laid broad and deep. It is not a thing of today, yesterday or tomorrow. It has done good work in years past and will do good work in days to come.”
—Abraham Shunk, 1876

But children, the most innocent group among us, have been persistently mistreated throughout history.

Often, they have the smallest voice.

They suffer the most at times of war and during pandemics. They take the brunt of the consequences when social policy allows them to languish in poor schools because we fail to fund them, and when we refuse to do anything about gun violence, even as our children are being gunned down in school and on the street. They feel the disproportionate burden of abuse, neglect and poverty.

The children who bear the biggest burdens don't really have an equal opportunity in life. They often experience social and emotional problems which may persist into adulthood and then we act surprised

when they do not succeed. And then we punish them for their misdeeds and failure.

This is not social justice. And in many ways, through the services we provide at Beech Brook, we are trying to prevent or remediate these injustices, so all children and families realize that equal opportunity we have all been promised.

Throughout our history, we have been “moving upstream” to address these issues. And while reflecting on our history of good deeds, it became evident that this was the thinking from the beginning.

I think Superintendent Abraham Shunk said it best in 1876:

We must keep in line of sympathy and thought with the young. We need more wisdom, more cheerfulness, more fruitfulness.

These are elements that every man should seek for in his daily experience. The good farmer, with whom we like to place our boys, knows full well the value of trenching and enriching the soil. Success in agriculture and horticulture is in exact proportion to the amount of labor and stimulus given. Let us have less of the pruning knife and more root culture; less repression and more encouragement.

There are few things to which we need to train ourselves more diligently and conscientiously than the habit of giving cheer and encouragement.

Happy 170th Birthday, Beech Brook! There will be many more to come. And as Superintendent Shunk would say, “The foundations of the Cleveland Protestant Orphan Asylum (Beech Brook) have been laid broad and deep. It is not a thing of today, yesterday or tomorrow. It has done good work in years past and will do good work in days to come.”



Happy 170th Birthday, Beech Brook!

We're excited to be celebrating our 170th year, and we can tell our founder, Rebecca Rouse, is feeling festive, too!

It's clear we were in good hands from the very start. Mrs. Rouse was one impressive woman. Born in 1799 in Salem, Massachusetts, she was well educated in religion and the classics and had traveled abroad extensively

as a young woman. In 1830, she and her husband Benjamin Rouse moved to Cleveland where she founded or took an active role in every social cause of the times, including the Cleveland Orphan Asylum.

We hope we made her proud! And if she is still watching over us, we're sure to be here for at least another 170 years!

PARENTING: A LIFELONG JOURNEY continued from cover

ducked, and the blow landed on his face. Jimmy's grandmother, on the phone at the time, heard the uproar, and understandably alarmed, called the police.

Children's services workers determined that this family's history made them a good candidate for the Alternatives for Families: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT) model, and they called on Beech Brook to manage this case. Emily Slusarz, one of just two Beech Brook therapists trained in AF-CBT, got the assignment.

"I really don't believe that it was the father's intention to hurt the child," she said, "but Jimmy has a long history of witnessing domestic violence from his mother's previous partners. This incident felt like a big violation of trust for him, and his stepdad was going to have a long way to go to regain his trust."

Fortunately, the family was open to this therapy and committed to repairing the trauma brought on by this incident and building a stronger relationship.

Emily has been working with the family over several months. As part of the AF-CBT model, the



parents were asked to write a letter to Jimmy – but not just a quick note. The questions posed required some serious reflections, discussed over multiple sessions.

Among the topics they were asked to address:

- describing what happened and accepting responsibility
- absolving the child from blame and praising him for talking about it
- identifying traits and accomplishments they admire in him
- taking responsibility for the impact of their actions on the family
- apologizing
- telling the child what they had learned and expressing willingness to talk more about it
- committing to nonviolent parenting and making plans to keep the family safe.

In a family session, they will read the letter to the boy as a starting point for further discussion.

"It was a very meaningful experience for the parents and for me as a therapist," Emily says of the letter. After several months with the family, she's seen some real change. "The parents have gained insights into other ways to discipline. They talk about their parenting styles now, something they didn't realize they needed to discuss previously. The stepdad sees the importance of using different techniques, depending on the age and needs of the child. They talk about things now as a family. There's more negotiating and use of techniques, such as setting up contracts to outline expectations."

Jimmy is much more open now, and he's able to verbalize and process his feelings much better. And, most importantly, he's not worried that this will happen again.

Everyone feels safer, and the family came through this process with a firm foundation on which to move forward.

The art and the science of healing

From the outside, it may look like therapy is just about talking with clients about their feelings and experiences. That's certainly a critical element. But there's much more than meets the eye when it comes to developing the right treatment plans and techniques for families in different situations.

Beech Brook's licensed social workers and counselors have many

tools in their arsenals when it comes to doing what's best for a particular child and family. Among those tools are evidence-based and promising practices which have research supporting their effectiveness.

One promising model, highlighted in this issue, is called Alternatives for Families: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, or AF-CBT.

AF-CBT is a family-focused intervention that targets the clinical problems associated with exposure to excessive conflict, aggression or use of physical force. AF-CBT emphasizes family strengths and teaches parents and children skills to promote safety in their home.

Fairport Wealth chooses Beech Brook as 2022 Community Beacon!

Last month we announced that Fairport Wealth had chosen Beech Brook as its 2022 Community Beacon. This is an honor they bestow on one nonprofit organization each year.

Being a Community Beacon means that staff from Fairport will provide financial and volunteer support for many of our events throughout the year. Fairport has been a loyal supporter of Beech Brook's special events over the years, thanks to the efforts of Tom Seifert, a Fairport partner and long-time Beech Brook board member and generous supporter.

Tom joined the Beech Brook Board of Directors in 2009.

"I've been in various leadership roles over the years and have seen the organization pivot through many changes and challenges; however, the dedicated and caring staff have been a constant through it all," he says.

"It is truly rewarding to see the positive impact that Beech Brook has on our community and those they serve. I'm proud to be a small part of that long legacy and honored to have Fairport Wealth name Beech Brook as this year's Beacon of Hope."

In addition to his board leadership, Tom and his wife, Tracy, have been faithful supporters of every special event, including serving as chairs of both the Beech Ball and the 5K Race/Walk over the years. In fact, Tom was the driving force behind the creation of the 5K event, now heading into its 12th year.

We are so grateful to Tom and Tracy for their commitment and to the good people at Fairport Wealth for bestowing this special honor on Beech Brook in 2022.



Tracy and Tom as co-chairs of the 2018 Beech Ball



The Seiferts made it a family affair as chairs of the 2015 5K.



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Join Us On:



Beech Brook's Mission

Helping children and families thrive by promoting healthy child development, strengthening the ability to overcome adversity and enhancing family health and stability.

Beech Brook presents Bash! FOR THE BROOK

Let the Games Begin!

Friday, June 10, 2022 | 6:30-10:30 p.m.

Sapphire Creek Winery and Gardens

Chagrin Falls, Ohio

Something for everyone! That's what you'll find at this casual summer event filled with games and other festivities.

Whether you spectate or participate, you'll find your own kind of fun! And whatever you decide, you'll be scoring a big win for the children and families served by Beech Brook.

Watch for your invitation and lots more details soon! Visit www.beechbrook.org for updates and ticket information.

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