OURLITTLE NEWS



SUMMER 2025





Summer is in full swing at Our Little Haven, and with it comes new stories, fresh milestones, and continued growth across our programs - Community Family Services, Our Little Academy Day Treatment, and Keystone Mental Health Services. As the days get longer and brighter, so does our commitment to providing early intervention and compassionate care for children and families. In this edition, we're excited to share highlights from the past few months and a glimpse of the impactful work happening every day thanks to your support and our dedicated team.

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ON THE COVER

Bubbles, sunshine, and connection - these joyful moments reflect the spirit of healing at Our Little Haven. With care and compassion, we walk alongside families every step of the way. For privacy, the children shown in our cover photo are not actual clients of Our Little Haven - they are pictured with permission to represent the work we do.

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Visit ourlittlehaven.org homepage and click to join our newsletter!



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Text ourlittlehaven-donate to (833) 504-7815 to make a donation.

THE HAVEN COMMUNITY

We believe that when we're born, God gives us a **Cookie Jar** and with each positive experience – every hug, each lesson learned, every positive interaction – we get a cookie in our Cookie Jar.

At about ten years old, the ending of our formative years, what we have in our Jar is what nurtures us for the rest of our lives.

The Haven Kids Jars are empty. Through our services – we provide the support, tools, and care to fill them, as well as give them the recipe to make their own cookies for the rest of their lives.

Thank you for helping us fill these Cookie Jars.



OUR MISSION

Our Little Haven is relentlessly committed to providing early intervention services for children and families. Our community of professional caregivers create a safe, secure, and healing environment for those impacted by abuse, neglect, and mental or behavioral health needs. We make the hurting stop, the healing begin, and the love last, one family at a time.

OUR LEADERSHIP

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Kathleen Hummel, MSW, PhD (HON)

Therapeutic Director Emerita

Michael P. Bahlinger

Director of Finance & Operations

Dr. Lizette Smith, PhD

Director of Clinical Programs

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Together, We've Built Something Beautiful

As the summer sun warms the days and fills Our Little Haven with light, we're taking a moment to reflect on the year so far - and to thank you for helping make it all possible.

At Our Little Haven, we believe that every child deserves a safe, healthy, and loving start. That mission comes to life daily through the work of our three core programs: Keystone Mental Health Services, Our Little Academy Day Treatment, and Community Family Services at the Taylor Family Care Center. And thanks to your generosity and encouragement, that work continues to grow and deepen.



So far this year, we've expanded our team, welcomed new families into our programs, and launched improvements to better serve our community - like enhanced client reminders at Keystone and expanded foster care support at Community Family Services. We also celebrated a joyful and impactful spring Gala, Under

the Big Top: Our Little Haven's Greatest Show, where hundreds of friends and supporters came together to raise critical funds for our programs.

Across every department, one thing is clear: the heart of Our Little Haven is in motion. It beats in the laughter of a child who finally feels safe enough to play. It echoes in the quiet confidence of a caregiver being told they're not alone. And it lives in the determination of our staff, who show up every day with compassion, skill, and an unwavering belief in the power of early intervention.

And you - our supporters, donors, and champions - are with us every step of the way. From all of us at Our Little Haven: thank you. Your partnership keeps our mission moving forward - one child, one family, one future at a time.



Supporter Shoutouts





Lawn
Systems Inc.
Landscaping
services at no cost



Gift card
donations
Donors sent gift
cards for client
tornado relief



STLIA Golf
Tournament
Association event
benefiting OLH



Garden Heights Nursery

ent In-kind donations
H for our campus



SAVE THE DATE: OLH GOLF TOURNAMENT Monday, August 18, 2025

New date, same great tradition – this year only!

Due to renovations at Sunset Country Club, our annual Golf Tournament will be held earlier than usual - on August 18. We're excited to continue this cherished event at Sunset, and we hope you'll join us for a day of great golf to support the children and families we serve. Gather your foursome or sign up as a sponsor today!



REGISTER ONLINE AT:
OURLITTLEHAVEN.ORG/
2025-GOLF-TOURNAMENT/



20 Lessons We've Learned at OLAWhat 20 Years of Growing Together Has Taught Us



For 20 years, Our Little Academy Day Treatment has provided a lifeline for young children struggling with mental and behavioral health challenges. Designed for children ages 3–5 who are unable to succeed in traditional preschool settings,

Our Little Academy offers individualized clinical care, therapeutic support, and a nurturing environment that helps each child build the skills they need for kindergarten – and for life.

Since opening in 2005, Our Little Academy has impacted hundreds of children and their families through its high therapist-to-child ratio, year-round structure, and focus on emotional regulation, social development, and family support. The ripple effects of these early interventions are felt for years to come – in classrooms, in families, and in our community.

This year, we honor 20 years of healing, growth, and resilience. Thank you to every caregiver, donor, partner, and advocate who has helped make this journey possible. As we celebrate this milestone, we're also reflecting on two decades of shared experience with children and families. Join us in celebrating the people, practices, and principles that have shaped Our Little Academy into the haven it is today – one little lesson at a time.

- Start your day with a little protein and some good conversation. Share with others what's on your mind so you can be present the whole day. Our staff does this every morning with just the adults and then again with the children.
- A warm welcome on arrival sets a happy tone for the day. Saying "good morning" increases endorphins. Morning hugs pay positive dividends.
- People thrive with predictable structure in their schedules. Kids feel safest when they know what to expect from each moment of the day.
- Clear expectations and simple directions work best. Too many words/too much talking to an upset child can prolong angry moods.

Young children have minimal ability to comprehend time. Setting a timer helps children better understand the concept. We recommend a timer that quacks like a duck. At OLA when "The Duck" quacks everyone listens!

- A 3,2,1 count often brings a positive result when a child is reluctant to do what you've asked.
- Parenting is hard! Parents and caregivers need and appreciate support.
- Create a bedtime routine and stick with it. Good sleep hygiene is a crucial part of mental health.
- Figure out what works best for you and don't compare yourself to others. At OLA we say, "everyone has their own plan". Some of us need headphones to focus. Some of us need a weighted blanket to sleep. Everyone is different and that's okay.
- Play is connected to intelligence.
 Play makes brains grow. Playing with toys, completing puzzles, digging in the dirt, and coloring pictures will always be better than watching a screen.
- Relationships create positive change.
 We build relationships by being curious about one another, listening carefully, and demonstrating trust.
- Having a garden and watching things grow is good for kids and grown-ups.

It's easy to get stuck in a bad pattern.
When that happens you've got to do whatever you can to mix it up – even if it's something weird. Bad patterns won't just go away. You have to do something different.

- Even though we're tackling serious problems, not every moment needs to be serious. Silliness and playfulness can be very effective interventions.
- Using manners is how we show respect for others and ourselves. Say "please" and "thank you" often!
- Get outside every day. Nature is healing.
- Teamwork makes the dream work! OLA is a team-based program. For us, getting to know each other has built a bond that makes the program possible. Our love and trust for one another keeps us coming back after hard days.
- Rituals and traditions create community and foster closeness. OLA has so many traditions we cherish from tie dyeing shirts every summer to creating gingerbread houses every winter.
 - Everyone deserves a break. Taking time for yourself is mandatory. Our therapists benefit greatly from time away from the program. You can't provide expert mental health care unless you first take care of your own mental health.
 - It takes a village. The magic that happens at OLA wouldn't be possible without the support we receive from the whole agency and our donor community.

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Community Family Services at the Taylor Family Care Center



Diligent Ongoing Relative Search

The Diligent Ongoing Relative Search service has been steadily receiving referrals for children in foster care looking for relatives. Along with finding relatives and discussing opportunities for children to meet their relatives, possibly have visits and potentially be safely placed with their relatives, DORS staff develop a genogram for each case.



The genogram is a tool used to visually represent a family tree. Using basic shapes and

lines, DORS staff are able to provide the child with the names and the relationships of their relatives. Genograms also allow for visual symbols to show family dynamics, emotional connections, significant life events and much more. Many of the final genograms can include anywhere from 20 to 100 relatives. Genograms can be very powerful in helping children in foster care understand where and who they came from, whether they live with a relative or not.

Recently, DORS staff successfully created a genogram for a 10 yr old female that included 41 relatives. During the search, a distant relative was identified and contacted as a potential visiting resource. Unfortunately, the child has been through several different placements and is currently living in a home for children with

higher needs. She is now visiting with this relative, and they have even begun discussing the possibility of her being placed with her newly found family member.

In another ongoing DORS case, two brothers under 5 years old have a genogram including 58 relatives. The genogram not only includes names and relationships but also familial information about their relatives, such as hobbies, occupations and some medical history that could affect the boys as they age.

Children in foster care benefit greatly from being connected with their family. Not all relatives found are able to take the children into their home, but they can provide details about their family. They can share small pieces of insight the children can take with them no matter where they go. DORS staff work relentlessly to provide these children with any and all the information they can gather to offer them some answers about their

family. Our hope is get children in foster care with their relatives as quickly and safely as possible, but also to let them



know they have family out there who cares. Every child deserves to know their family. One caring relative can change a foster child's life and give them the chance they deserve.

Accelerated Permanency Support

Accelerated Permanency Support has been assisting case managers in connecting the dots to guardianship or adoption for kids in foster care. APS service targets the end of a child's journey in foster care by assisting with completion of the final permanency paperwork needed by the court to get a final court date on the docket. APS staff get to be part of the excitement and joy of providing a child with closure and permanency. Recently, APS staff were given a referral for a sibling group of 3 waiting for a final court date to close their foster care chapter and start their next adventure. APS staff worked relentlessly following up with case members, including the case manager and the permanency attorney, to assure all needed documents were available for the attorney to file a petition. As a result, these 3 children will exit foster care much sooner and celebrate their forever home.

"Foster care is a traumatic event in a child's life. A child's soon to be forever home has embraced them for who they are and what they have experienced, and they all can't wait to celebrate their future together. We want to get them there faster."







"I get the opportunity to be a part of the child's last months in care so that they are able to live their lives with their forever family without being reminded of the system. I feel like I'm making a difference in a child's life by giving the reassurance that their time in care is coming to an end."

-Moriah Schollman Community Family Services Associate Director

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OLH PROGRAMS

Professional Collaboration, Relationships, and Teamwork Enhance Mental Health Care at Our Little Haven

By OLH's Director of Clinical Programs, Lizette J. Smith, PhD, Licensed Psychologist



Mental health care is the work of Keystone Mental Health Services at Our Little Haven. We assess and treat a broad range of mental and behavioral health difficulties in children and

families. We do not shy away from the more complex conditions faced by those we serve. The conditions of our clients often include several facets at once: emotional, behavioral, physical/medical, and social challenges, as well as delayed resources. As a client-centered program, we value the ability to tailor assessment, evaluation, and treatment to the individual needs of persons in our care.

To embrace this value, we are fortunate to be able to utilize a multidisciplinary approach to mental health care. This means that we incorporate more than one professional discipline or specialty in addressing the difficulties faced by our clients. Our team members with different areas of expertise contribute from their own knowledge base and skills to render comprehensive and individualized mental health care. Similarly, we also benefit from establishing relationships with professionals outside of our team. The benefits of this approach are especially important in addressing complex conditions. It fosters a thorough understanding of issues involved, promotes effective problem-solving, and facilitates communication between experts; which together, can lead to favorable outcomes for our clients.

An example of a multidisciplinary approach is for a client who may encounter symptoms that

interfere with concentrating on school work, making friends, hopefulness, and energy. The family may be impacted and want to understand ways to help the client while strengthening the whole unit. In this example, Keystone's point of first contact, our trained Intake Coordinator, will discuss and help the family determine appropriate services to address the needs expressed. Our Biller/Receptionist may research and help alleviate practical concerns, making a smooth transition into the start of services.

With entry into services, different practitioners and specialists can be involved. One of our Psychologists may complete a comprehensive psychological evaluation. Using a "bio-psychosocial" method, the evaluation can clarify the diagnosis and symptoms, assess for physical patterns of the concerns, identify corresponding family, social, and school functioning, measure reactions to stressors that affect the condition, acknowledge other helping professionals serving the client, and highlight assets and strengths that can be capitalized upon in alleviating symptoms. One of our Clinical Social Workers may provide psychotherapy (treatment) for the client and family based on the evaluated needs and the progress shown during the course of treatment. As treatment continues, the psychotherapist will re-assess needs, and adjust treatment focus and methods in an individualized, tailored treatment plan. The psychotherapist may reach outside of our team to bring in other specialists. This may include collaboration with the classroom teacher to establish behavior interventions that support the client during their regular school day and

communication pathways with the family. On the other hand, school personnel may request of us the results of the psychological evaluation to plan educational resources. Our Psychiatrist may address both the psychological and biological basis of behavior and symptoms by incorporating psychotherapy with medication management and account for other physical/medical needs; while our Registered Nurse may provide support through medication education, scheduling, being a liaison who responds to urgent matters, medication reactions and needs, and coordinating medical records with external medical professionals. In the case of a child who is 3-5 years old, the symptoms and needs may indicate a higher level of care, and the Keystone practitioner may consult and refer the family to Our Little Academy Day Treatment Program of Our Little Haven. This is also a specialty program that incorporates layers of multidisciplinary care.

Beyond this example, there are countless other ways in which the multidisciplinary approach benefits our clients and the work we do. It is one of the critical features of our Keystone practice. It helps us to help our clients. Thanks to those inside and outside of our team who are dedicated to offering their expertise and skills in providing mental health care to our clients!



Our Little Haven's multidisciplinary team at Keystone Mental Health Services

BRINGING OUR STORY TO LIFE: A NEW VIDEO OVERVIEW OF OUR LITTLE HAVEN



This year, we had the opportunity to partner with Jesse Adam Creative to bring our story to life through a new video production project that captures the heart of our mission.

Jesse and his team worked closely with us to film, edit, and produce a series of videos that highlight the care, connection, and commitment behind each of our three programs: Keystone Mental Health Services, Our Little Academy Day Treatment, and Community Family Services. From therapy sessions and team meetings to moments of play and powerful parent reflections, the footage offers a glimpse into what makes Our Little Haven such a special place.

The results are moving and meaningful video pieces that help viewers understand not just what we do, but why we do it.

Special thanks to the incredible children and parents who volunteered to stand in as clients for filming. Their participation allowed us to protect the privacy and comfort of the families we serve while still sharing the spirit and impact of our work.

We are also deeply grateful to Jesse Adam Creative for their vision, professionalism, and heart in helping us tell our story in such a beautiful and authentic way.

Scan the QR code to watch our Overview Video!





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Visit ourlittlehaven.org to donate, sign up for monthly giving, and subscribe to our e-newsletter!



UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 18TH, 2025 OLH Golf Tournament

Sunset Country Club

OCTOBER 3RD, 2025 ICON MECHANICAL CLAY DAY

St. Louis Skeet & Trap

NOVEMBER 22ND, 2025 CHIC BOUTIQUES

St. Nicholas Family Life Center

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2025 Holiday Hugs for the Haven

Our Little Haven









