

Our Little Haven Seeks to Fill 'Cookie Jars'

By Marie Donnelly Villa Duchesne | Posted: Thursday, November 19, 2015

Our Little Haven, an organization that aims to provide early intervention services for families and children, is best explained by a metaphor.

When we are born we are given a cookie jar, and each positive experience places a cookie in the jar. After 10 years the jar closes, along with the child's formative years, and what is in the jar is what sustains us for the entirety of our lives. The kids who come to Our Little Haven do not have full jars, and the organization's goal is to fill the jars of those who are in need.

Our Little Haven began operating in 1992, and was the brainchild of Scott and Kathleen Hummel, who both saw the need for a community program to help children. Over the course of 22 years, the organization has seen much change.

While initially the organization provided on-site housing for children, it has morphed into a tri-faceted nonprofit that offers an early childhood academy, foster care management and mental health services.

Since its inception, Our Little Haven has aided thousands of children and their families. The organization aims not only to help the children who are impacted by neglect, abuse, and mental or behavioral health needs but also to provide a place of health and healing for the entire family.

"When a child comes here for help, not only are they going to get the help that they need, but we also know that family is very important, their friends, their school, their church, their neighborhood, these are all what we would call 'players' that act on a child's environment and have a lot to do with their growth," said Chris Munoz, a certified fundraising executive of Our Little Haven. "We are there to help the entire family."

One of the most utilized facets of the organization is Keystone Mental Health Services, which provides assessments and counseling to the children and their families.

"Keystone Mental Health Services is valuable because many of the clients we see receive services from Keystone. We can make sure that you are safe, but our goal is make sure, not only are you safe, but that you are happy, you are healthy and that you are emotionally strong," Munoz said.

Receiving this service during children's formative years enables the treatment to be more effective, and the child or family member to use fewer resources in the future. As stated by the organization, you can fix the foundation now, when the structure is still being built, or you can wait and try to "restore the damaged building."

Our Little Haven plans on using the funds received from Old Newsboys Day for their foster care case management services. The money will help provide needed resources, including clothing for foster children.

Throughout the year there are many events to help get the word out about the organization and build connections with members of the community. Every fall the organization hosts a two-day golf match, and not only does everyone enjoy a round on the green, but members of the nonprofit have the opportunity to share the mission with all who attend.

Annually, in November, there is also a "chic boutique," which is a fashion show and artisan fair combined.

At other points throughout the year there are events that include a dinner auction, trivia night, and a home brew fest where Our Little Haven invites home brewers to bring their best brew, have a table and show it off. The attendees of the event take their event glass around to each of the tables, taste the beer and, after all have been tried, cast their vote on the best brew around.

For those who are interested in getting involved, Our Little Haven is always looking for volunteers to assist with maintaining their grounds and special events. And, as the holiday season is fast approaching, members of the community are invited to adopt a family and purchase a gift for a child. By doing this, one can alleviate some of the financial strain of these families.

And, finally, spread the word.

"We love word of mouth," Munoz said. "It is important that people can find us online, people can find us when they are at their doctor's office or their counselor's office, but also hearing about us from different people. You never know who you are talking to, and the issues that they may be going through that you can help out with."

Going forward, Our Little Haven plans on seeking out those who are in the greatest need.

"We want to be able to serve those that need us most," Munoz said.

Through the funds raised through Old Newsboys Day, the organization is better equipped to do this; one child and cookie jar at a time.

- *Marie Donnelly is a junior at Villa Duchesne.*