

Specialized Education for Abused, Neglected and Traumatized Children

Tennyson Center for Children

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**National
Benevolent
Association**
CALLED TOGETHER | CALLED TO CARE



My name is Emmie Perry and I am a therapist at the Tennyson Center. I am so grateful for the opportunity to stand before you tonight and share the story through my eyes of my beloved client, Kyle, who I am going to try really hard to refer to as throughout the story. It is his story that I am going to share with you because he really paints the picture of the impact that Tennyson can have on our children in Colorado. I'll start by telling you of a day when Kyle's life literally flashed before

my eyes. It was Valentine's Day last year and Kyle had been in crisis for almost three hours. He was dissociated, attacking staff, banging his head against the wall - all indicators of the deep pain he felt inside as a result of his experiences with significant abuse and neglect, which I'll get to later in the story. At around noon that day, Kyle seemed to be settling down. I asked for staff to switch-me out so that I could step outside and collect myself. I walked across the street to get a quick cup of coffee and when I was walking back toward Tennyson, I suddenly saw Kyle bolt out of our main doors. He ran straight to the street, waited a couple seconds until a car was about 15 feet away, and jumped into the street and braced himself for impact. I had never felt sheer panic like I did in this moment. Here was this little boy, six years old at the time, who was so traumatized and terrified that he wanted to take his own life. Luckily, the driver saw Kyle running into the street and slammed on her breaks before the car could hit Kyle. However, I know it was an experience that left an imprint on her because it could have had a far more tragic ending.

To understand how Kyle got to the point of wanting to jump in front of a car, I'll take you back to October of 2015 when police found him wandering Colfax. He was traced back to a run-down motel for homeless families where he lived, with his mother and two young siblings. When police met the mother, she was heavily intoxicated, and the motel room was covered in trash, food, alcohol bottles - you name it. After Kyle and his siblings were removed from their mother's care and placed in a foster home, the Department of Human Services learned that Kyle had experienced five years of significant neglect and abuse. He had bravely endured

physical abuse and witnessed extensive sexual abuse, drug abuse, criminal activity, domestic violence... the list goes on. He had also never received proper medical care, was malnourished, wasn't toilet trained, had never been to school - all experiences that cause extensive damage to the minds and bodies of children. The Department also learned that Kyle's mother herself had survived chronic homelessness since her teenage years, as well as physical and sexual abuse throughout her life. Her challenges as a young and ill-equipped mother are evidence of the systemic entrenchment that affects generation after generation. Kyle then moved through various foster homes and psychiatric hospitalizations before coming to Tennyson. So, Kyle, like his mother, was experiencing chronic instability, disrupted attachments, he was spiraling further into the system - again - all experiences that are detrimental to his mind and body.

Flash forward about two years and I am incredibly happy to share that Kyle has blossomed into the little Tennyson mayor. He has opened his heart and responded with incredible success to treatment at Tennyson and reintegration into his community. It is evident that he feels safe for the very first time at Tennyson. His worldview has shifted to one where adults can be trusted to be safe rather than abusive, where children can run around with shrieks of laughter rather than of terror, where his body can be a being for growing and exploring rather than hiding and harming. Kyle is the definition of "it takes a village." He loves to be the teacher's helper in class, to dance around the room to "Call Me Maybe," to get chicken wings with our CEO, to practice backflips at swim lessons with his mentor. My favorite thing about Kyle is that he wants to be a police officer when he grows up and he says it's because he wants to help people - that's how I know his journey to healing has been full-circle, he knows firsthand the impact of treatment at Tennyson, so much so that he wants to go out and share it with the world.

And this little Tennyson mayor's term is now coming to an end. About a month ago, Kyle's attorney and I got to introduce him to an incredible family that is embarking on the journey of adopting him. It was the moment that everything clicked - that we remembered that supporting kids like Kyle really works, that we can make a difference, and that there really is hope for these kids and their futures.

It has been an honor to be a part of Kyle's team and to guide him through his journey to healing. I have had the privilege to be Kyle's therapist throughout his entire time at Tennyson. I would have to say that the things that have been the most helpful when working with Kyle are the basics of a reciprocal relationship - I am safe with him, I am consistent, I show him that he matters, I don't always rush to make him feel better, but

rather I hold space for him so he can learn that it's okay to feel. I have been able to support him through all the ups and downs, from when he learned he would no longer have contact with his mom to when he learned that there was finally a home for him with his forever family. It is a profound experience to walk with a child through life, to witness firsthand the magnitude of their innate potential. Never underestimate the strength of a child. Kids are resilient and they are capable. They are our children and we must take care of them.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Kyle's story with you. If you have any questions or want to know more about the work that we do at Tennyson, please do not hesitate to come talk with me.

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.