Unlocking Paul’s Unlimited Potential

From nearly the moment he was born, Paul was dealt a losing hand. His mother, barely in her teens, was living with her dad, had dropped out of school, and lacked effective parenting skills. After her father passed away, Paul’s mother was too overwhelmed to care for her young child, so the three-year-old was taken in by his maternal aunt.

Over the next several years, Paul bounced from home to home as custody disputes resulted in constant upheaval. Paul experienced the chaos and turmoil of different households; shifting expectations; and the uncertainty of people moving in and out of his home with children, dogs and babies in tow. Chronic instability was his norm.

Receiving little adult guidance and with no one to model himself after, Paul’s behaviors became unmanageable.

Paul entered Mount Saint Vincent’s K–8 Day Treatment program with a long list of prior school violations, including property destruction, inappropriate language, and frequent physical and verbal aggression toward peers and adults. He was just eight years old.

“He had experienced chaos and turmoil ... instability was his norm.”

Mount Saint Vincent’s approach to helping children like Paul casts off the punitive model that punishes children for unwanted behavior. Instead, the agency uses a highly relational and respectful approach. “Instead of asking ‘What’s wrong with this child?’ we ask, ‘What happened to this child and how can we help?’” explains Executive Director Kirk Ward, LCSW. The difference in outcomes is astounding.

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A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friend,

It’s not uncommon for organizations to spend time crafting a thoughtfully prepared mission statement, only to have it engraved on a plaque that employees eventually fail to notice. But here at Mount Saint Vincent, we live our mission of making life better for children and families every single day. It’s deeply embedded in everything we do.

More than a decade ago we adopted NMT, the groundbreaking, trauma-informed approach to child trauma treatment. That began our quest to broaden, enhance and expand our service offerings, and we haven’t stopped since.

Our residential and day treatment programs serve children who need our help the most. But we realized there’s a need for programs that support vulnerable children no matter where they are in their recovery journey. That’s why we took the next step and began offering community-based programs: in-home, foster care, and training.

Our NMT-certified in-home therapists and behavior coaches create individualized treatment plans for each family, using developmentally appropriate interventions that are strengths-based and solutions-focused. They help strengthen the inner workings of the family, setting both the child and their family up for success.

Our foster care team certifies and supports foster families as they care for their foster children. They provide individualized guidance and training to support the placement of foster children ages newborn to eighteen until permanency is achieved.

Last, because children who have experienced trauma often have special needs, it’s important for us to share our knowledge and train people — teachers, parents, and other caregivers — on the most effective ways to support those children.

We developed these community-based programs not just because they’re good for children. It’s also because a continuum of care supports our overarching goal of permanent placement into a home where children can become productive members of the community.

Thank you for your support in that effort — for helping us help kids.

Gratefully yours,

Kirk Ward, LCSW
In our K–8 school, there is a daily class called “Specials” that incorporates different elective activities such as art, health, physical activity and recreation.

Maeve O’Connor-Bethune, the educational mental health worker in charge of Specials, had an idea. By helping the kiddos train in the gym and the swimming pool, maybe they could paddle a canoe on a lake.

Canoeing is a great activity for children because it helps them build their confidence, enhances social and communication abilities, and improves gross motor skills.

Maeve taught water safety, proper rowing techniques, how to paddle in a straight line, and a vitally important canoeing skill — how to walk across the boat and not tip it over.

Finally the day arrived. With plenty of teachers and staff to help out, our little waterbugs headed over to Aloha Beach, a nearby private lake. After a quick review of water safety and being fitted with life vests, they pushed off.

With one adult in the back and two young rowers in front of each canoe, they circled “Bird Island” to get a close-up of the white cranes nesting there, and then paddled around the perimeter of the lake. Each trip took approximately 15 minutes.

Upon hearing the command, “At the ready!” the children raise their oars overhead.

“Our canoeing outing was awesome,” Maeve said. “All the kids were really brave and did a great job on the water.

One young water enthusiast could barely contain his excitement. “I love Specials,” he shouted. “This class is all about exploration and trying new things!”

Thank You, Volunteers!

Each year, an amazing 1,000-plus individuals volunteer their time at Mount Saint Vincent, providing much-needed services all around our 16-acre campus. These activities include helping out in our K–8 school, improving our grounds, playing with the children, organizing fundraising events, and much more.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to these generous, caring volunteers. Thank you all so much!
Over the next two weeks, Paul’s care team of school staff, therapists, and educational mental health workers reviewed his case, observed his behaviors, and came up with a treatment plan. Their goals as an agency were to raise his self-esteem, help him with emotional regulation, and teach him healthy coping skills.

“When I first asked him to name some emotions, he could only come up with two: happy and sad,” said Child and Family Therapist Courtney Hadjeasgari, MA, LPP. “We worked on identifying various emotions and what they feel like in our bodies.”

School presented its own challenges. At first, when Paul struggled with academic work, he refused to ask for help; he would give up and run out of the classroom, nearly in tears. “He was extremely frustrated,” said Special Education Teacher Alex McCall. “It took some time, but we eventually identified several tools that helped him stay regulated enough for him to focus on his school work.”

Animal-assisted therapy helped Paul build relationships. Learning to interact safely with an animal often translates into the ability to form human friendships. But it was art therapy that helped Paul turn a corner. “It’s 100 percent his platform, where he is the most comfortable and himself,” said Courtney.

Paul recently completed a past-present-future art activity with his art therapist, Christine Ratcliffe, MA. The extensive project detailed what his life had been like and what he wanted it to look like moving forward. “It’s both artistic and incredibly self-aware,” Courtney said.

Six months later, Paul is a different boy. In school, he raises his hand and asks, “I’m stuck, can you help me?” He participates in classroom discussions, offering insightful thoughts and ideas. He was elected to student council and was named “Student of the Week” not once, but twice.

“We’re so proud of him and all the incredibly hard work he has done,” said Alex. “But best of all, Paul is proud of himself.” And that is exactly as it should be. ❤️

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Preschool Now Enrolling!

One of Mount Saint Vincent’s best-kept secrets is that we have a four-star Colorado Shines preschool right here in the Highlands area. Children aged three to five experience a rich environment that encourages exploration, creativity, and growth in all aspects of child development.

The program features tuition credits through the Denver Preschool Program; Creative Curriculum and Zoo-phonics learning strategies; breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack; and much more.

Visit MSVhome.org/preschool for complete details.

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Be Social With Us!

Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram and join in the conversation.

MSVhome @MtSaintVincent mtsaintvincent Mount Saint Vincent

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Colorado has one toll-free number to report suspected child abuse and neglect.

1-844-CO-4-KIDS

Help keep children safe and secure. Your call is confidential.
Silver Bell Ball: Bigger and Better Than Ever

From the food to the décor to the auction items, we are leaving no stone unturned in revamping our annual Silver Bell Ball, Mount Saint Vincent’s biggest fundraising event. Planning began last fall and staff and volunteers are pulling out all the stops. The event will feature a reception with two signature cocktails, live and silent auctions, a wine and spirit pull, dinner, a live band, and dancing.

The gala takes place on Saturday, November 16, 2019, at the Grand Hyatt Denver, located at 1750 Welton St., Denver, CO 80202. Mark your calendars!

A Generous Sponsor
Mount Saint Vincent is fortunate to have nearly a dozen individual and corporate sponsors for the event, including our Presenting Sponsor, CoBank.

“CoBank is proud to once again sponsor the Silver Bell Ball,” said CoBank’s Senior Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility, Sherry Johnson. “Mount Saint Vincent does tremendous work to help kids in need and it is an honor for us to support them.”

Reggie said. “These kids need so much love and support, and Mount Saint Vincent is doing work that is transforming their lives.”

The VIP Treatment
New this year is a VIP level giving guests admittance to a private reception hosted by Reggie, the opportunity to bid early on silent auction items, and free valet parking passes.

“The excitement for this year’s Silver Bell Ball is already building, and it’s shaping up to be a fantastic event,” said Director of Development Cindy Liverance. “But the best part is, it’s all for the children.”

Tickets for the Silver Bell Ball start at $135 and are available online at MSVhome.org/SBB.

Spoiler Alert: Reggie Rivers to Host!
We are excited to announce that former Denver Bronco Reggie Rivers is this year’s emcee and auctioneer. Anyone familiar with Reggie’s larger-than-life personality knows that the audience is in for a treat.

Reggie has a long history of giving back, a family value that was instilled in him as a child. “As part of the community, we all have a responsibility to help out and make an impact,”

Gala guests enjoy dinner prior to the start of the live auction at the 2017 Silver Bell Ball.
Thank You to Our 2018 Donors!
We Appreciate Your Support.

Our mission at Mount Saint Vincent is to provide clinical treatment and essential services for children suffering from the effects of trauma, mental illness, abuse, or neglect. But this important work would not be possible without the incredible generosity of our faithful donors. Through their selfless giving, they help heal young children who are in desperate need of love and support. The 200-plus individuals and organizations listed here donated $1,000 or more in 2018 to help our children.

Our hearts are full of gratitude and we are grateful beyond words. Thank you.
Like Ripples on a Pond

Mount Saint Vincent heals the lives of children who suffer from trauma, mental illness, abuse or neglect. But we also touch the hearts of hundreds of other people every year. Below are the stories of two individuals impacted by the work being done at Mount Saint Vincent.

Gratefully Yours
Angela Macho was frustrated with the lack of help her adopted son was receiving in school. Jamie, who suffered severe trauma in his past, exhibited destructive behaviors in the classroom and his teachers seemed unable to control him. School staff repeatedly called Angela and asked her to come pick up her son. “I felt like Jamie wasn’t receiving the support he needed to succeed,” Angela said. So, based on two referrals, Angela enrolled him in Mount Saint Vincent’s K–8 school.

In addition to academic instruction, the children in our school receive therapeutic care. Jamie’s therapist, Laura Woodward, LPC, encouraged him to participate in activities that interested him, which typically involved arts and crafts. As they worked on projects together during their weekly therapy sessions, Jamie began to open up to Laura. “For the first time, Jamie had someone truly listening to him,” Angela said. “In her gentle way, she developed a very strong rapport with him.”

As Laura worked with Jamie, his ability to communicate improved dramatically. Now when he is feeling unhappy, he can label it. Instead of hitting or kicking when angry or frustrated, says, “Mom, I’m really upset.” According to Angela, that’s something Jamie was never able to do before. She states that the shift in his behavior has been transformative.

“Jamie’s life trajectory has changed,” Angela said, “because of Mount Saint Vincent.”

Sharing the Caring
Because we are a 24/7/365 facility, Mount Saint Vincent requires a staff of nearly 120 full- and part-time employees to care for all the children we serve. Our kiddos often exhibit challenging behaviors, in turn making challenging work for the staff. But a nurturing environment, caring individuals, and a strong commitment to the health and wellbeing of children goes a long way toward helping our staff find meaning and satisfaction in their work.

Intervention Supervisor/Certified TCI Trainer Omar Cooper is one such individual. “For me, it’s not a job where I’m coming to work a certain amount of hours,” Omar said. “It’s really good to come into a place where you feel like it’s a second home.” Over time, he has come to realize that the staff not only care deeply for the children, they care for each other as well. “For me, that means a lot,” he states.

The six-year veteran has always had a passion for serving others, especially children. “I’ve been through some things in my life,” Omar said. “There have been people who have helped me along the way, and I want to pay that forward.”

Omar likens his work at Mount Saint Vincent to being a gear in a grandfather clock: one of many essential elements that keeps everything moving. Every day, he looks forward to having fun and meaningful interactions with children and being able to make a positive change. “It may not be immediate,” Omar said, “but if I just keep at it, I know that the change will happen.”

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Upcoming Events

Join us for one or both of the events below that help raise funds for children in need. Call 303-458-7220 or visit MSVhome.org for complete details.

Dining Out for Kids Day
Tuesday, September 17, 2019
Various locations throughout the Denver metro area

What's a fun and easy way to help out children in need? Take part in the eighth annual Dining Out for Kids restaurant day! Just choose from any of the participating restaurants, and they’ll donate up to 25% of their day’s sales to help our kids. Visit MSVhome.org for a complete list of restaurants.

Silver Bell Ball
Saturday, November 16, 2019
Grand Hyatt Denver

The much-anticipated Silver Bell Ball is the unofficial kickoff to the holiday season. Festivities will include a delicious dinner, wine and spirit pull, entertainment, live and silent auctions, and dancing. Former Denver Bronco Reggie Rivers will be our host. Don’t miss the gala of the year! Tickets at MSVhome.org/SBB.

How You Can Help Our Special Children

You can make a difference in the life of a child. Here’s how.

Make a donation
While we accept donations of many types, our most urgent need is for financial support. Funds are needed to help pay for therapy, food, clothing, and more. You can donate securely online at MSVhome.org.

Volunteer your time
There are many opportunities available, from reading to the kids to helping in a classroom. For information on volunteering, call Caleigh Isaacks at 303-964-1122.

Give clothing or supplies
Donations of clothing for children aged 5 to 12 are always appreciated (new only, please). Toys and therapeutic tools are on our Amazon wish list.

Donate securely online at MSVhome.org