



A cake version of the
Little Blue House made
by Stephanie's Mom

Summer 2014

The LBH News

Changing lives with college!

by Carl Foster, Executive Director

Every year for the past six summers LBH has conducted a summer camp for the kids in the families in our F2F program. We always offer our summer staff (usually college students) a chance to write about the kids they have met while asking them to compare their expectations to the reality they found during the summer. We usually do this early in the summer but this year I wanted to wait until just this moment. Until the day when our middle and high school kids were away on our annual "week-away-from-the-city" and the younger kids are at the LBH under the care of the college staff without direct daily supervision from me. For the second straight year the older kids are spending a week in the mountains of West Virginia. When we arrived at our luxury cabin, I was thinking, "Niiiiiiiiice!" When one of 15 year old girls came up to me and said "We're staying here?" with a great big smile on her face, I said, "Yes" and she said, "Oh my God!" and walked away. That same 15 year old went outside and walked around the outside upper deck and just kept saying, "I'm in the mountains! I'm in the mountains!" I went outside and told the kids to look up as I pointed out the Big Dipper. She took a picture, while I stood there wishing I had my camera out so I could take a picture of her face when she saw the Big Dipper! Within minutes a whole bunch of city kids were standing on the back porch staring up at the sky, pointing, and I almost cried.

Right now I am sitting in the only coffee house in the area, listening to the locals talk about fishing and buying and selling homes and making fun of the tourists. But for my part I was just sitting here feeling proud. I just dropped off the boys at a place called Smilie's. Smilie's has laser tag, two different go-cart tracks, batting cages, mini-golf, and an arcade. I bought them a pass that allows them to play and ride anything they



want - unlimited. The girls are on a guided nature walk. Yes, they are wearing skirts and city shoes (just in case they see any cute guys), but my city kids are walking through the woods in West Virginia. A hundred and fifty miles away, the little kids are watching pig races at the Montgomery County Fair. Me? I am sipping my latte, listening to the locals admire my Escalade with my "BILIKEN" (St. Louis

University mascot) plates and thinking to myself, "Wow, look what we can do for a bunch of city kids from the Shaw neighborhood!"

This is an interesting time for LBH because once again we are transforming. This agency began with a few suburban moms showing the world they are not afraid to drive to the inner city and hold babies born to drug addicted moms who might be HIV positive. From there to abused and neglected infants to foster care to drug treatment to working with families with special needs kids to our welfare to work services, to hosting summer camps and after school programs and matching our TANF-eligible moms with middle class moms from upper Northwest DC. Coming soon to our website: *The History of the Little Blue House*. We passed the 'nine-lives immortality test' a long time ago.



The next incarnation of the LBH is college. Several of our middle and high school kids have been with this agency since elementary school and one has been a continuous LBH client since she was a baby. Four years ago we called together all of our moms with kids in the fifth grade and suggested we send them all to the same charter school to help get them ready for college. The reaction of some of our moms surprised even us, but we did convince half-a-dozen moms to work with us. The original six kids are beginning 10th grade this school year. Not only has that original "dare to imagine college" group of six stayed together, but the number has grown to 14. The maturity level varies as does the academic standing but you should see the kids eyes light up when we talk about going to college. This summer we visited the campuses of all of our summer staff including the one going to school in West Virginia. The moms range from "Wow, thanks for offering to help my kid pay for college!" to a complete lack of appreciation for our efforts. Beginning this fall the LBH will work solely with our current clients in high school and middle school to get them ready for and help pay for college. From drug addicted babies to college scholarships.

For pictures and more information from this summer please visit the [Little Blue House](#) on Facebook. Watch our site www.littlebluehouse.org for changes in LBH program services.

As we do every year, we asked our summer associates to write about their experiences, and here is some of what they said.

Donna

To say this summer has been unique, unexpected, challenging, yet rewarding, and eye opening are only some of the first things that come to mind, yet they don't nearly do it justice. If someone would have told me a year ago that I would have been exploring the city, driving a fifteen passenger van, and doing endless activities with a bunch of kids, not to mention learning about all the various tricks in FIFA and 2K14 video games, I probably would have laughed.

Having worked with children for the majority of my life, as a former camp counselor, a teacher's aide and at a grief counseling center, I was confident in thinking I knew what to expect and how to interact with them going into it. When I was first interviewed by a few of the girls in the spring, I remember



thinking how polite and shy they were, and prompting them through the interview assuming they needed help. The boys I met upstairs seemed like your typical rowdy teenagers and I

figured they would be no different from the ones I had worked with in the past. Yet it was only after arriving at LBH that it became evident that these kids had experienced and been through more than any of the previous kids I had worked with combined. Hearing their challenges and also triumphs, both of the incoming high school and middle school group and also the younger elementary aged kids, I have realized just what a sheltered life I was living at their age and the experience has been eye opening. When I now see the girls and boys I met on that first interview, they no longer fall under the category of "typical" to me and instead I now picture their neighbors and doorsteps I drop them off at, their classmates or friends we pass on the streets and the experiences they have relayed to us about their home life and the way people perceive them. I don't see them in the blur of kids from my past but instead I see ones that, despite extreme adversity, have prevailed. I knew the experience would be

rewarding, but what I never expected was just how much of an impact each and every one of the kids would have on me.

On two separate occasions, I was asked to bring a group of boys and a group of girls to my university's campus to show them around and get lunch. Both times, we ran into countless people I knew, be it fellow students, friends or faculty, and each time I introduced the group as "my kids". I didn't think anything of this or even realize I was doing it for that matter, until my roommate pointed it out to me. By the end of the second week of camp, I had been relaying my days to her with that reference and it dawned on me that in less than 14 days I had already developed an attachment and sense of concern over my group. This naturally only continued to increase, and I find now that I rarely fall asleep at night and wake up not thinking about them.

To say a typical day is easy would be a lie; I am challenged and pushed each and every day. While initially I found kids disobedience extremely frustrating, I have learned to instead realize that it was and still is often times a test. We were told that so many people in the past had given up on them, that they are going to challenge us to see if we will do the same. My main goal for the summer became to prove to each and every kid that I am not going anywhere. I find now that a simple private conversation, asking what might be bothering them, can be all that's needed. Perhaps one of the most valuable lessons I learned is this: *It all depends on who is in the room.* The reaction I get when I'm interacting with any one of the kids is vastly different and more effective one-on-one than it would be in front of the group.

All I've ever wanted to do with my life was be able to support and positively impact the lives of people who are in need. I just never thought that was possible or that I would even have a true opportunity until I had finished numerous years of schooling and had a certifiable degree. Yet this summer has proved me wrong. The people most in need might be the ones right in front of you and I only hope I can have the same impact on the LBH kids that they have had on me. They have changed my life, and [this has been the most fulfilling summer I've ever had.](#)

~ Donna is a Junior at Catholic University

"I never expected just how much of an impact each and every one of the kids would have on me."

Davon

Just five year years ago I was attending the **LBH**, now I am a lucky staff member working at the **LBH**. Coming back to the **LBH** was the best opportunity I've taken thus far. It's great being able to see the young faces of some children this summer that I knew back then.

At first I was comfortable with some of the kids, but not all. I knew working with soon-to-be freshmen in high school would be good for me because I can help them better prepare for their new journey. Being a familiar face and a high school grad helps me prepare them. I know this task will take time and patience. One boy, Carlos, began to



grow an attachment to me right away, he wanted to show me things, he wanted to play games with me, give me nick names, and all the other kids were more nonchalant. Carlos could be faltering, in an annoying way; by the way he tries to sweet talk me constantly to get what he wants. I am happy to see his

willingness to read when he is not distracted. Going to Barnes and Noble and the local libraries I have witnessed his enthusiasm to pick up a book and read.

As the summer comes to an end for me, I see what Carl had taught us in training: impulse control, having structure, responsibility and independency. I'm realizing these things play into my life now. I feel like I was unknowingly prepared for life thanks to the **LBH**. I have been helping give advice from these lessons from a younger, same background point of view. I hope they took in the information, realized these lessons and the reason for the lesson.

~ Davon is a sophomore at Potomac College of WVU

This summer we had a mom working at the LBH, helping make meals for the kids and helping out during outings around town. Director Carl Foster asked her to offer her thoughts on her summer experience at the LBH.

Rosalba

This summer I'm enjoying working at the Little Blue House because I love cooking for all the kids. I like talking to the little kids about what they like. A lot of times they ask me questions they want to know. Sometimes they tell me a lot of

things that they like and don't like about the **LBH**



staff and I like that they trust me enough to tell me those things. Another thing I enjoy is when we go out, because I enjoy watching them be happy. Thank you, Mr. Carl for giving me an opportunity to work at the **LBH**.

~Rosalba is staff member at the LBH

Kelly

Entering the **LBH**, I was yearning for an experience where I could personally influence children for the better. I knew I naturally gravitated towards and had experience with kids, but I did not have the in-depth experiences to make me feel confident in my abilities to do so. Having the opportunity to work with the middle and high school kids this summer gave me a better skill set for working with kids and boosted my confidence for the future.

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My first assignment at the LBH was helping a past staff person create a summer curriculum for the middle and high school group. I couldn't believe that I, a new employee, could have a say in how the summer camp was run. This planning helped me to understand what the kids needed and the best method in which to do so, while being able to contribute ideas myself. When I started working with the kids, I was also pleasantly surprised in the autonomy I had right away in handling disciplinary matters.

The first week of work, I was able to individually talk to each middle and high school kid about following directions, which they responded to very well. Early on, I felt that I was making a connection with the kids, and that they were being influenced in a positive manner.

Having the ability to work so closely with the kids, gave me insight into the most effective ways of



communicating and understanding them. The most important lesson I have learned, is if you are having difficulties working with a child, changing the environment and talking to them individually is the key. For example, during

summer camp, one of the middle school boys was not responding well to an activity. He was being extremely loud and lacked focus. When I took him to another, empty room, he became quiet and contemplative, and began to explain the family situation that was making him so frustrated. When talking to him one-on-one, I was able to address the real issue with him, completing the assignment, which was not the assignment itself. Once we were on the same page, I was able to frame the assignment in a way that minimized his frustrations.

When working with kids in the past, I would see supervisors respond to disciplinary matters by yelling at the child in front of the other children, when in my experience, starting an individual conversation can help address the real problem at hand. Experiences like this have made working at LBH enlightening, and I have learned vital lessons that

will help me continue to work with children to the best of my ability, both at the LBH and in the future.

~ Kelly is a Junior at American University

Lillie

When I came to LBH this summer I thought I was prepared. I knew I was going to be one of the youngest staff members working with the youngest and sometimes extremely challenging kids, but it didn't scare me. I have been working with kids my entire life and thought I had all of the skills that I would need to get through the summer. I was wrong. I was very wrong. I was challenged in a lot of ways that I wasn't prepared for mentally and emotionally. One of the greatest obstacles for me this summer was Ivy.

Ivy, just like me, was new this summer. Prior to her attendance

at LBH I was told that although she was supposed to be in summer school, she



would be with us instead. I later found out that this was because Ivy's mother refused to enroll her because it was not convenient for her. LBH made numerous attempts to help facilitate her attendance, but her mother continued to make excuses and miss meetings until it was too late. Although I was extremely frustrated with the fact that she wasn't in school, I decided to try and give her the most fantastic and meaningful summer possible.

During our first day of camp together I was struck by just how quiet and reserved Ivy was. While she was able to fit in with the other girls her age she never spoke out and let the other girls guide her actions, both good and bad. She continually let them speak for her and did the tasks that they didn't want to do simply because they asked her to. It sincerely worried me.

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I knew if she wasn't going to be in school working on academics, she needed to be at LBH working on her confidence and ability to assert herself.

It wasn't until we got a bracelet-making kit that I got to see a side of her that I was not expecting. For the first time all summer she was breaking away from the group and thinking for herself. As we were making the bracelets she was attentive and focused. She listened to instructions and worked hard to make sure they were perfect. I finally got to know the extremely funny girl that loves to smile and dance randomly.

I have watched Ivy go from a girl that would barely answer a yes or no question by herself, to one that pulled my arm to watch her feed a goat at Mary's Farm. I got watch with a huge smile as she jumped off a diving board and swim to me. While she still doesn't have all of the confidence in world, there has been clear improvement and I couldn't be more proud.

“These kids have captured a place in my heart that I was not expecting.”

As someone who plans on entering the education field after graduation I cannot count the number of times I have heard the statement, “Wow! Not everyone can do that.” It's always hard for me to formulate a response because while it is true that not everyone has the patience for working with kids, it is the most rewarding thing I could have chosen to do with my summer. These kids have captured a place in my heart that I was not expecting.

They have made it beyond challenging at times and pushed me to limits that I didn't even know I had, but they have taught me so much and made me smile and laugh along the way.

~ Lillie is a Junior at American University

Summer Adventures for the LBH kids!



An LBH outing to Baltimore



Shopping with Donna on Friends and Family Day, and Hanging at Funland in WV.



More Summer Adventures for the LBH kids!



Montgomery
County Fair
Fun and
lunch with
non-profit
lawyer Peter
Wolk



A visit to the
campus of
Potomac College
in West Virginia
and the deck
where everyone
got to see the
stars.

