

See inside for ways you can support families.

# Buckner Today

The magazine of Buckner International | Fall 2018

## Difference makers:

How determination and perseverance  
change families | Page 12



# Buckner

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# ner Today



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# When does forever start?

**M**y good friend Raymond Harris joined Buckner leaders recently for our annual leadership retreat. Raymond was in Africa, so he joined us via video to share his heart about leadership and what it means to serve others wherever God places you.

One of the points Raymond made to our team is “We are living in eternity now. Eternity doesn’t start when you die,” Raymond said.

His point is so true. What we do here on earth counts for eternity because eternity has already started.

But for thousands of boys and girls, forever is hard to grasp. All they have ever known is temporary. They’ve been shuffled from home to home. They are caught up in “the system” and they live with constant uncertainty. It’s hard to imagine eternity when tomorrow is always unknown.

Nearly 430,000 children in America today live in foster care, with nearly 30,000 of those boys and girls in Texas. For these children, life is temporary.

While many of these children will eventually (hopefully) return to their biological families, many will not. There are nearly 112,000 children in the United States waiting to be adopted and more than 7,000 children in Texas are looking for a family.

We have a crisis on our hands. In a society like ours, for that many boys and girls to be without families is a crisis.

That’s why we have increased our efforts over the past five years to help these children find permanency – forever families. November is “National Adoption Month,” so let me first thank you for your support of these children. But let me also encourage you to consider ways we can help them.

## You and your church can support foster children and children waiting for adoption

Thinking about foster care and adoption can be overwhelming. Perhaps you’ve never considered foster care or adoption of a child in Texas, or you don’t know what’s involved to help overcome this crisis. We have some ways you can help and/or get your church involved to solve the orphan crisis. Check out our resources at [buckner.org/nationaladoptionmonth](http://buckner.org/nationaladoptionmonth).

## Texas foster care

Children in the Texas foster care system didn’t choose to be there. They need stability and permanency, a safe place to call home and for a family to meet them where they are emotionally. Some of these children just need time for their biological families to

become stable so they can return home. Some of these children will not be able to return to their families and will need a loving family to adopt them. The greatest need is for families to provide foster care for children age 12 and up or sibling groups.

## Texas domestic adoption

Never considered adopting a child? The crisis isn’t improving because everyone assumes someone else will fix the problem. If you feel led to adopt, consider foster-to-adopt, a Texas waiting child, an older child (12 - 18), or a sibling group. If you feel called to open your heart to adoption, we’d love to pray for you and be the organization that helps your family throughout the process.

## Respite care for foster and adoption families

Once a child is adopted, the family isn’t immediately seeing rainbows and roses. Adoption is hard. It’s an adjustment. If you don’t feel called to be a foster or adoptive family but you want to help one who is, providing much-needed and much-appreciated respite care to those families who answer the call is in great need.

## Financial support for foster care and adoption

While the love of a family is what children need most, financial support helps provide services to those who answer the call and go through the adoption process. Let me ask you to consider a gift to help these vulnerable children.

Right now, you have an extraordinary opportunity to double your gift to support these children. James Avery Jewelry has generously provided a \$50,000 matching grant to help boys and girls served by Buckner through our foster care and adoption ministries. But the challenge must be met by Nov. 30, so please don’t wait. These children need your help today.

Raymond Harris is right. We are living in eternity now. Please join me in making sure the children in our generation know we are here for them and that life isn’t as temporary as it seems.



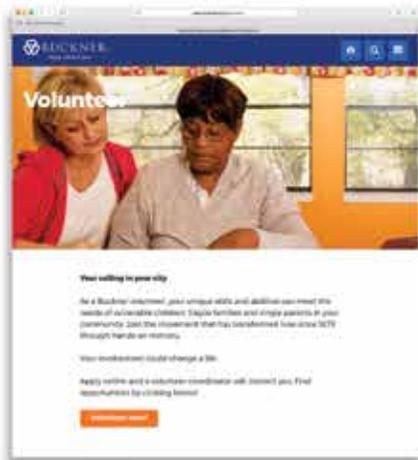
**Albert L. Reyes, President and CEO**  
Buckner International

Visit my blog at [www.bucknerprez.com](http://www.bucknerprez.com)



Families served through Buckner Family Pathways and Buckner Family Hope Center received free oil changes, check-ups and additional maintenance for their vehicles thanks to Cummins Sales and Service in Dallas. Because of Cummins, these families are ensured they have safe and reliable transportation as they drive to work, school and church. **Learn more at [buckner.org/BucknerToday](http://buckner.org/BucknerToday).**

Visit [buckner.org/volunteer](http://buckner.org/volunteer) to find volunteer opportunities in the United States and around the world. Help organize fun activities for foster children, prepare boxes of aid or deliver shoes to vulnerable children around the world!



## Letters to the Editor

If you have any questions or comments about the articles you've read in *Buckner Today*, e-mail us at [communications@buckner.org](mailto:communications@buckner.org)

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## Ribbons and shovels

Take a breath. It's been that kind of fall at Buckner. Or should I say "around" Buckner, because we've been going nonstop every day.

There are a lot of ways to measure growth and admittedly, how many shovels you use and how much ribbon probably don't make the usual lists for measuring growth. But when you think about it, it's not a bad idea.

Symbolically, shovels represent the beginning of a project and ribbon represents the culmination or completion. Groundbreakings and grand openings are an important key indicator of what's going on.

Now let's be honest. For Buckner, the true indicator is the number of people we serve through our ministries. But we have to have places to serve those children, families and seniors. That's why when we break ground or cut a ribbon, we know we're going to serve even more people.

This year has been filled with lots of shovels and ribbon, from Dallas to Houston to Austin, and Lubbock too. Glad we've got a few miles of that blue ribbon around. And let's hope Lowe's doesn't run out of shovels, because 2019 is shaping up to be busy too.

There is nothing quite like the excitement of a groundbreaking or ribbon cutting. Both represent the future. A groundbreaking points to the thrill of a new building to come. And it sure is fun to roll out the ribbon and grab a pair of scissors to officially open and dedicate a new building. As excited as all of us Buckner folks get, it's fun to watch the people who will be served by a new building. They show up in droves and lead the cheers. Throw in some mariachi music and a confetti cannon and you really have a party.

So as you look through this issue of *Buckner Today*, don't miss those photos and stories about some of our most recent groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings. And remember that without you, we couldn't do it.



Scott Collins is Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.

# 3 Reasons we're excited at Buckner!

## **Buckner Villas in Austin expands to meet needs**



Buckner Villas, one of Austin's largest providers of senior living, hosted a ribbon cutting recently on a \$29 million expansion of its GreenRidge independent living residences.

The ceremony officially opened the new 122,331-square-foot expansion and celebrated a 16,010-square-foot remodeling project.

"This expansion was necessary to meet the growing demand from seniors in the Austin area," said Doyle Antle, executive director of the community. "This is our second major expansion project in less than seven years and we continue seeing more and more seniors wanting to live at Buckner. Our vision is to inspire residents to live full and happy lives."

The expansion and renovation project adds 69 one- and two-bedroom apartment homes and 70 underground parking spaces. In addition, it includes an overhaul of the common areas by enlarging the dining room, extending the bistro, adding a theater, broadening the salon and the spa, building a new, larger meeting space, as well as refreshing décor and interior design throughout.



## Aramark makes sure Buckner families are healthy families



Over 150 residents of South Dallas attended the Aramark Building Community Day, a free food and wellness expo. The event was sponsored by Aramark, the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood and Dallas Park and Recreation.



The event included live chefs and dietitians giving demonstrations and teaching about practical ways people can make healthy changes to their diet and lifestyle. There were also multiple exercise stations for children, adults and seniors.

Every attendee left with a free grocery bag of fresh produce from the farmer's market.

Many of those in attendance at the South Dallas event are clients of the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood, which serves the community by strengthening families, so their children can stay where they belong – in a strong, loving home. The ministry provides programs designed to engage, equip and elevate families. Programs include family coaching, GED, ESL, computer literacy, job training, an after-school program and summer programs for children.

## Buckner Peru steps up to meet needs of impoverished Venezuelan migrants



Buckner Peru sent nearly 11,000 meals to the Peruvian border shared with Ecuador and more than 1,000 new pairs of shoes to help children and families who have walked more than 15 hours to flee Venezuela.

A private Peruvian business also donated \$5,000 of food for Buckner Peru to distribute to families served locally by the Buckner Family Hope Center in Pamplona, Peru.

According to Reuters, Peru has accepted



hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans this year fleeing an economic meltdown, increased poverty and food and medical shortages.

About 2.3 million Venezuelans have left the country in one of the largest mass migrations in Latin American history, according to the United Nations. As many as 4,000 Venezuelans are going to neighboring nations daily. The mass exodus is straining the support systems of Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia. **BT**

# Buckner celebrates groundbreaking of new Buckner Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake in Dallas

**B**uckner International hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for its Buckner Family Hope Center in the Bachman Lake community of Dallas on Sept. 27.

Buckner leaders, government officials, partners and families served by the Family Hope Center gathered for a ceremonial groundbreaking on the proposed 21,795-square-foot effort on approximately two acres at the corner of Lombardy Avenue and Geraldine Drive that will be home to the two-story Family Hope Center.

It will sit strategically between apartment complexes and single-family homes in one of Dallas' most economically-challenged areas.

This tract of land is the first property purchased in Dallas by Buckner to serve children and families since 1880, when founder R.C. Buckner purchased land in East Dallas for the original orphans home that is still being used today to serve children and families.

"R.C. Buckner was motivated by the New Testament admonition that 'Pure religion that the Father accepts is to visit orphans and widows in their distress.' That biblical mandate drives us even today, 139 years later," said Albert Reyes, president and CEO of

Buckner International. "We have never wavered from that vision and mission. Today, vulnerable children and orphans remain at the core of what we do."

In the Bachman community, the teen pregnancy rate is three times the national average. The child removal rate by Child Protective Services is twice the average rate of the rest of Dallas County and 96 percent of their students are economically disadvantaged.

Buckner operates 26 similar Family Hope Centers in Texas and six countries. Buckner Family Hope Centers equip children and strengthen families for life. They are child-centered, family-focused places where families go to find hope, support, and empowerment in their community to reach their fullest potential.

"While many people think of Buckner as the place where children go to live, we want to be known as an organization that helps children stay where they belong – with their own families, safe and protected," Reyes said. "This new Buckner Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake will be a beacon of opportunity; a place where hope is seen and where dreams become a reality." **BT**





More than 300 people, including area families, donors and officials, gathered to celebrate the start of the construction for a Buckner Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake in Dallas. The festive event included mariachis, a virtual reality experience in the future Hope Center as well as confetti.



# Buckner opens Family Hope Center serving South Houston



**S**outh Houston families can now receive vital services like child and youth development, adult education, family coaching, financial empowerment classes and more through Buckner.

The Buckner Family Hope Center of Houston at Reed Road is now open and serving South Houston. Buckner International recently hosted a ceremonial ribbon cutting event for its 27th Family Hope Center, as well as its Buckner Family Pathways program. The ceremony was attended by government officials, religious leaders, Buckner executives and staff, clients, and community and corporate donors.

"Buckner began working in Houston more than 60 years ago when we opened the Buckner Haven retirement community in 1955, now Parkway Place," Buckner President and CEO Albert Reyes said. "Then came our Family Hope Center at Aldine, and today, our footprint gets even bigger, as we celebrate the expansion of our work here at Reed Road in collaboration with

Star of Hope Ministries and New Hope Housing. There is more to come for Buckner in Houston, so stay tuned."

Over 150 people were present for the ribbon cutting. Government officials in attendance included Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, Pasadena Mayor Jeff Wagner and City Councilman Mike Knox. Representatives from Congressman Al Green and State Representative Shawn Thierry were also in attendance, as were community partners Halliburton, the Houston Food Bank and Second Baptist Church.

Lee and Alice Chen, the representative for Congressman Green, each unveiled flags flown over the U.S. Capital in honor of Buckner, as well as commendations. Additional commendations were sent by Sen. Ted Cruz and Gov. Greg Abbott.

The event's speakers included Reyes; Shawna Roy, interim executive director at Buckner Children and Family Services of Houston; Anna Rodriguez, director at Buckner Family Pathways of Houston; Agustina Puente, Buckner Family Hope Center at Aldine

graduate; Chanique Steele, Buckner Family Pathways graduate; and Zach Parrish, Buckner Board of Trustees. The event was hosted by Fox 26 anchor Jonathan Martin.

The Buckner Family Hope Center of Houston at Reed Road is

located on the Cornerstone Community campus, a collaborative nonprofit venture in partnership with Star of Hope, New Hope Housing and WorkFaith Connection. Representatives from all three nonprofits were at the ceremony. **BT**



The Buckner Family Hope Center of Houston at Reed Road officially opened with a gathering of more than 150 people and featured the testimonies of lives that already have been transformed by Buckner ministries. Discover more about Buckner Houston ministries at [Buckner.org/Houston](http://Buckner.org/Houston).



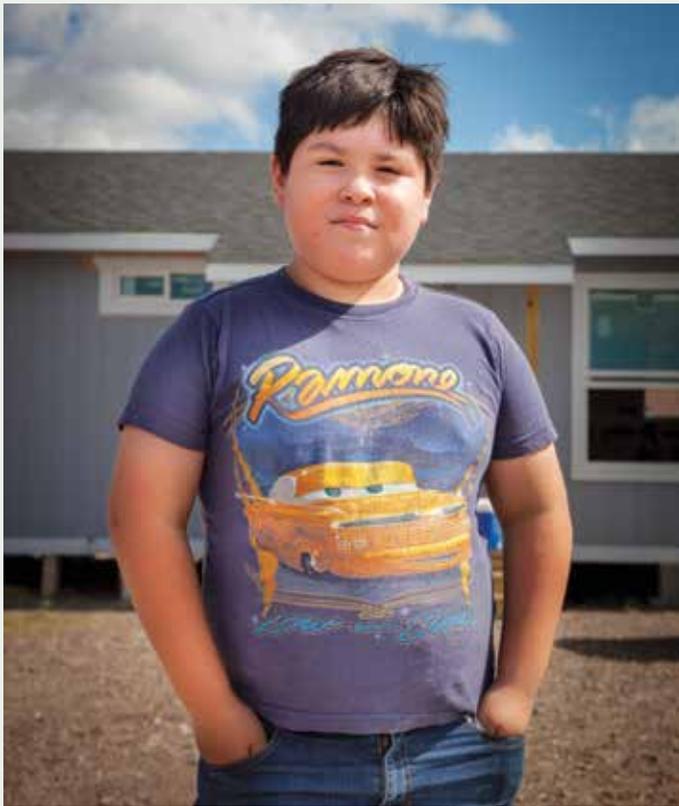
# Difference makers live differently

**T**ransforming a life, be it your own or that of someone else, isn't easy nor does it happen overnight. It requires serving others, being passion-driven and following Christ. It requires living differently.

That's exactly what the people in the following pages have done.

# 'Where the doors of heaven opened'

Family builds confidence and new home through Buckner Family Hope Center | Story and photography by John Hall



everything that has to do with crafts," Maria said. "They told me they would teach me how to make ribbons. They would teach me how to sew. They would teach me how to do crafts. I liked that a lot. It gave me something to do. Then they told me about other benefits that the center offered."

Maria took every class she could, including Faith and Finances, Jobs for Life, Wonderful Mothers, crafts, Coffee of Love, bows, Bible studies and sewing. She listened intently during each class, soaking up every lesson, learning new skills and putting them into practice. It wasn't easy, but Maria had a thirst for knowledge and was enjoying gathering with her neighbors.

"I took classes every day. During the next semester, I took classes and helped with child care. But then I had a car accident. I've always been the type that when I commit to something, I like to fulfill it. Well, I continued to get in my car. I said to my husband, 'Even if I have to go in through the other side of the car, I have to go.' I had to fulfill my responsibility."

She also sensed her life was changing, little by little, day by day over the course of a year. Her spending habits began to shift. The

**P**eñitas, Texas can be a desolate place. Jaime and Maria Garcia know it all too well. It's dry. Hot. Even lonely. Couples and families here are tested daily under the pressure of poverty and isolation.

That's why the outpouring of God's blessings has been so unexpected, and overwhelming to Jaime: "We can say that here is where the doors of heaven were opened."

Those doors led Maria into the local Buckner Family Hope Center. And a lot of work that would pay off in ways that fulfilled the family's wildest dreams.

"First I went to the Hope Center because I really like





## Investing in family

Wells Fargo in the Rio Grande Valley worked alongside the Garcia family to construct a home that will keep the family safe and secure.



family saved more money. She interacted with her family differently. As a result, the family was different. It was healthier. Life was better.

"Before going to the center I think I would describe myself as a mother with very little patience. I would say I was a mom who did not have a limit on what I had to spend, a mom who felt frustrated," Maria admitted.

"But after going to the center, it brought a big change in me. Because apart from teaching you the things of God, they teach you that you can do many things for yourself and you can be useful in many areas. And as a mother, they teach you how to deal with your children so that you can have control over yourself to be able to better lead them. They also teach you how to administer your finances. And how not to waste your money so that you can manage your payments so that you do not have to be struggle with late payments you have in your home."

Maria isn't the only family member who has worked hard at the Family Hope Center. Jaime took the 24/7 Fatherhood class on top of his long hours as a welder.

"You are not just a dad the short time you are at home," Jaime said. "The simple truth is, when I feel very tired at work, when I see a danger in my work, I think a lot about my wife and my children. Sometimes I send her a text. Or when I come home, I say, 'I love you very much.'"

As the couple took classes and volunteered at Buckner events that benefited their community, they earned points they could use at various times throughout the year at Hope Center markets that offered a variety of items. The Garcias' hard work even earned them enough points to qualify for a home through Buckner Missions.

"We have made plans for that house," he said. "The house of our dreams. The house that is for the family. And she earned it. I always say, she earned it. She was the one that gave 100 percent effort. And we were her complement; we were the ones that supported her, that pushed her. We never told her no. I would not have made enough money to build that house. She was the one with the effort. And still, when I go to work on the house, she comes to work too. So getting here, it's a great blessing." **BT**



**J**ames and Vanessa Williams have fostered many children in the past 10 years. Each one, they say, has left a mark on their hearts.

Take their very first placement: three siblings. They still keep in touch on a regular basis, and the oldest sibling is now a dad himself.

And another: A young man who has since been adopted and lives with his family in Houston, where he plays high school football. James and Vanessa still keep in touch with him regularly, and they plan to visit and watch one of his games this fall.

The Williamses are a unique type of foster family. They provide care to children classified as therapeutic, meaning that they might have extra behavioral, emotional, social or physical issues that need to be addressed.

"You know, it's not always easy being a foster parent," Vanessa said. "But I love to minister to the children. The kids come with behavioral problems, learning disabilities. We want to make sure they get the love and support they need. We want them to be strong and independent when they leave our home. Buckner has been a big support and has given us a lot of resources to find places that we can get answers to the questions that we have for our kids' needs."

One of the unique Buckner resources the Williams family always takes advantage of is the annual Buckner Foster Family Camp.

"We instill [a love for] family togetherness and time with our children," James said. "Every year, we attend Foster Family Camp as one big, happy family, staying in a cabin and having a chance to bond together.

It's great. The support they give us there has really been a big help."

The Williamses foster because they want to help the children who come into their home succeed and also so they can share with them the love of Christ.

"We've had three decide to be baptized over the years, and one of our current foster daughters has recently accepted Christ into her life. She is very faithful in working at church."

Today, the Williams have two teenage girls in their home. And just like any of the other children who have found a home with James

and Vanessa, they are focused on getting an education.

"One of the things we instill in all our children is to get a good education and to get in a good school," Vanessa said. "We want them to know that all things are possible."

**To learn more about the need for therapeutic foster parents, visit [buckner.org/therapeutic](http://buckner.org/therapeutic). BT**

## Foster parents give love and support to the most vulnerable in foster care

Story by Emma Brezik  
Photography by Aimee Freston



### Family ties

Alley (left) has lived with James and Vanessa Williams for eight years. Throughout that time, she has formed strong ties with her foster parents, and their 15-month-old granddaughter.



## **A word for you from our friends at James Avery**

James Avery Artisan Jewelry strongly believes in serving the communities where we live and work. We are honored to show our support and it is our hope that we help facilitate the positive impact that Buckner International has on the lives of the many children and families it serves across Texas and the United States.



# Have your gift **doubled**

—and bless even more  
vulnerable children  
in Jesus' name!

**T**his Christmas, you can bless a hurting child with the most incredible gift—a family!

Through your support, you'll help recruit, train and support more foster families so that vulnerable boys and girls can be welcomed into a stable and loving home.

***And today you can make an even greater impact—thanks to a generous \$50,000 Matching Grant offered by James Avery Artisan Jewelry.***

**JAMES AVERY**  
artisan jewelry

**Every gift will be DOUBLED**—bringing security, love and hope to even more vulnerable children.

Any part of the \$50,000 Matching Grant that's not met will be lost—so please respond quickly with this envelope or by visiting **Buckner.org/JamesAveryChallenge**.



**On behalf of the  
precious  
children we  
serve together,  
thank you for your  
generosity!**

# 18 years of lasting impact

**Moody Radio in Chattanooga, Tenn. collects more than 18,000 pairs of shoes for Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®**

**T**he back door to the diesel truck slams shut. Inside, more than 18,000 pairs of shoes and 18,000 pairs of socks are boxed and ready to be shipped to the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid for sorting and distribution around the world through Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls.

The shoe drive with 88.9 Moody Radio in Chattanooga, Tenn., is the largest shoe drive involved with Shoes for Orphan Souls, donating more than 250,000 pairs of shoes in the 18 years they have partnered with Buckner.

"The partnership between 88.9 Moody Radio in Chattanooga and Buckner International is really cool as it offers an opportunity to work among churches, businesses and ministries all for one cause – that's to share and live out the gospel through something as simple as a pair of shoes," said Brent Manion, station manager for 88.9 Moody Radio.

Collecting that many pairs of shoes is a large undertaking, involving more than 175 organizations,

businesses, churches and individuals throughout the Tennessee Valley. For weeks, Moody Radio promoted the shoe drive over the air, encouraging their listeners to donate shoes at one of the many drop off locations around the city or to form their own drop off with their church, business or organization. The results were staggering.

"We are so grateful for our partnership with 88.9 Moody Radio," said Shawn Spurrier, assistant director for Shoes for Orphan Souls. "We know how important every pair of shoes is and to see a community come together like they have here in the Tennessee Valley and collect such a staggering amount of shoes, it really speaks to the heart and compassion they have for vulnerable children all over the world."

The last day of the drive, volunteers flooded the station to unload cars, trucks and busses bringing the shoes collected, some even coming from neighboring states in Alabama and Georgia. Shoes were sorted, stuffed with a note of encouragement, counted, packed in boxes and loaded onto the truck.

The drop off day was a humid summer day, but it didn't hinder

**Story and  
Photography by  
Aimee Freston**



the speed and efficiency of unloading and packing shoes. The joy was visible. Every volunteer was smiling and laughing.



"You never think about the importance a pair of shoes can make," said Linda Morgan. She has been volunteering on drop off day for the Moody Radio shoe drive for the last three years. "We take so much for granted here and a pair of shoes means so much to a child for their health and happiness. I'm so grateful to be here and to help out." **BT**



## From Tennessee to Mexico

### 87-year-old travels with Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® to distribute shoes

**J**uanita Hall lives on a farm in Ooltewah, Tenn. Every day, she wakes up at 5:30 a.m., makes her coffee and sits on a comfy chair and reads her devotions. It's the most still she'll be all day. As soon as it's daylight, she goes outside to feed and care for the cattle. As long as the weather cooperates, she stays outside until it gets dark.

At 87 years old, Juanita definitely doesn't let a thing like age get in the way.

"I do a lot of things that normal people don't do," Juanita said. "My age has never bothered me."

As a retired pediatric nurse, Juanita has been to over 10 countries on countless mission trips. She's provided medical aid for children in Chile, gotten lost in an African desert, and even traveled on a plane that blew an engine and needed to make an emergency landing in Venezuela.

Now, she helps deliver shoes to children in Mexico with Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls. For the last seven years, Juanita has traveled with Moody Radio to Oaxaca, Mexico, to put shoes on children's feet, share Bible stories and teach hygiene classes.

"She's kind of a pioneer," said Shawn Spurrier, assistant director of Shoes for Orphan Souls. "It doesn't feel like we have someone in a different age range because she always keeps up with the team. She's one of our most active and strongest on the team. And she's genuinely one of the sharpest



and funniest people I've ever had go on a trip."

Juanita sits on the floors and giggles with the children as she puts on their new socks and shoes. She stands with the mothers and shows them hygiene practices. With the rest of the team, she laughs, hikes, plays games and even tried out a zip line.

"I figure if I'm going and doing God's work, then he's going to take care of me," Juanita said. "I love going on mission trips. I'm still healthy and I want to continue to do this for as long as I can."

There's at least two things she can't do.

"I can't jump rope," Juanita said. "And I cannot eat a grasshopper. I don't believe that is one of the requirements of going on a mission trip is eating a grasshopper. I think the Lord would say, 'OK Juanita, I'll excuse that.'" **BT**

## Twins incorporate lessons from Buckner Family Hope Center to succeed in life

Story by John Hall • Photography by Aimee Freston

**E**leven years ago, the chairs and tables didn't seem so small. Christian and Christopher slid easily, if not a little timidly, into them.

"I remember the first day we came to the Buckner Family Hope Center [at Wynnewood in Dallas]," Christopher reminisces with a smile. "I'm a pretty shy person, but everyone was so warm and inviting. I had a lot of fun that day."

They came back the next day. And the day after that. And for roughly 3,000 days after that until the twin boys were 18.

"The Family Hope Center has grown me into the person I am right now," Christopher said. "It's matured me as a person. It's helped me grow closer to God, including reading the Bible and praying. That's

a big deal because you can't do anything without God. He's always on your side."

When Christie Young moved her family into the Wynnewood neighborhood of Dallas, she knew what they were getting into. She was raised in Dallas and had rarely left the city for any reason. She knew the struggles of the area. She gained even more intimate knowledge of it when a bullet flew through her daughter's window and lodged itself into the ceiling.

Positive influences were mandatory if Christie's boys were going to have the kind of life she wanted for them. But providing access to those opportunities was a struggle for a single mom with limited income.

"There's a high crime rate here," Christie said. "For people of color, you have little hope. I didn't want my children to experience the street life, drugs and gangs. Buckner was a place of refuge.

"My boys were excited to come here. They'd really never been out of the home before. I really didn't have money to take them all around Dallas. This place did. They met mayors. They went on field trips. They came here from when they were 7 all the way to freshman year of high school and then there were summer programs."

Hour after hour of homework. Moment after moment of reading. Day after day of learning in and out of a classroom. Life lessons.

Development of life skills. All of it led to Christian and Christopher becoming the people they are today: leaders.

"They were awesome," said Cheryl Williams, director of the Family Hope Center. "They were children who would really listen to what you would say.

That was crucial to them then and to them now. They would listen to adults they trusted and internalized what they heard."

The path they started more than a decade ago has taken them to Texas Southern University, with the help of a scholarship from Buckner, where they are sophomores. Christian wants to be a neurosurgeon – "the best neurosurgeon in the world." Christopher is working to become a psychologist. Their future is bright ahead.

"They were always sweet boys," Christie said. "The program made them grow from boys to men. They didn't have a father figure in their household. They are responsible now. Sometimes it's hard to even put in words." **BT**

# Where two boys sat, two men stand





Christie Young has seen her twin boys grow into strong men. Their horizons were expanded through the after-school program at the Buckner Family Hope Center at Wynnewood in Dallas.

# A hobby with purpose

## Buckner Westminster Place member knits caps for local cancer patients

**F**or 20 years Buckner Westminster Place Member Betty Smart has diligently worked to serve the greater community by knitting caps for cancer patients at HOPE Cancer Center in Tyler, Texas.

Smart was inspired while watching a local newscast and hearing the story of a woman making similar hats. She was emotionally moved by the story and was eager to pick up her own knitting needles to help people in need. Once she completes her precious items, she delivers them personally to the cancer center, ensuring each one finds its way into the hands of those who need them most.

"I'll never forget watching that story and realizing I could do something to help," Smart said. "In many ways, it just seemed natural, as knitting was something I already knew how to do, and I loved knowing I would see the fruits of my labor make someone else's life better."

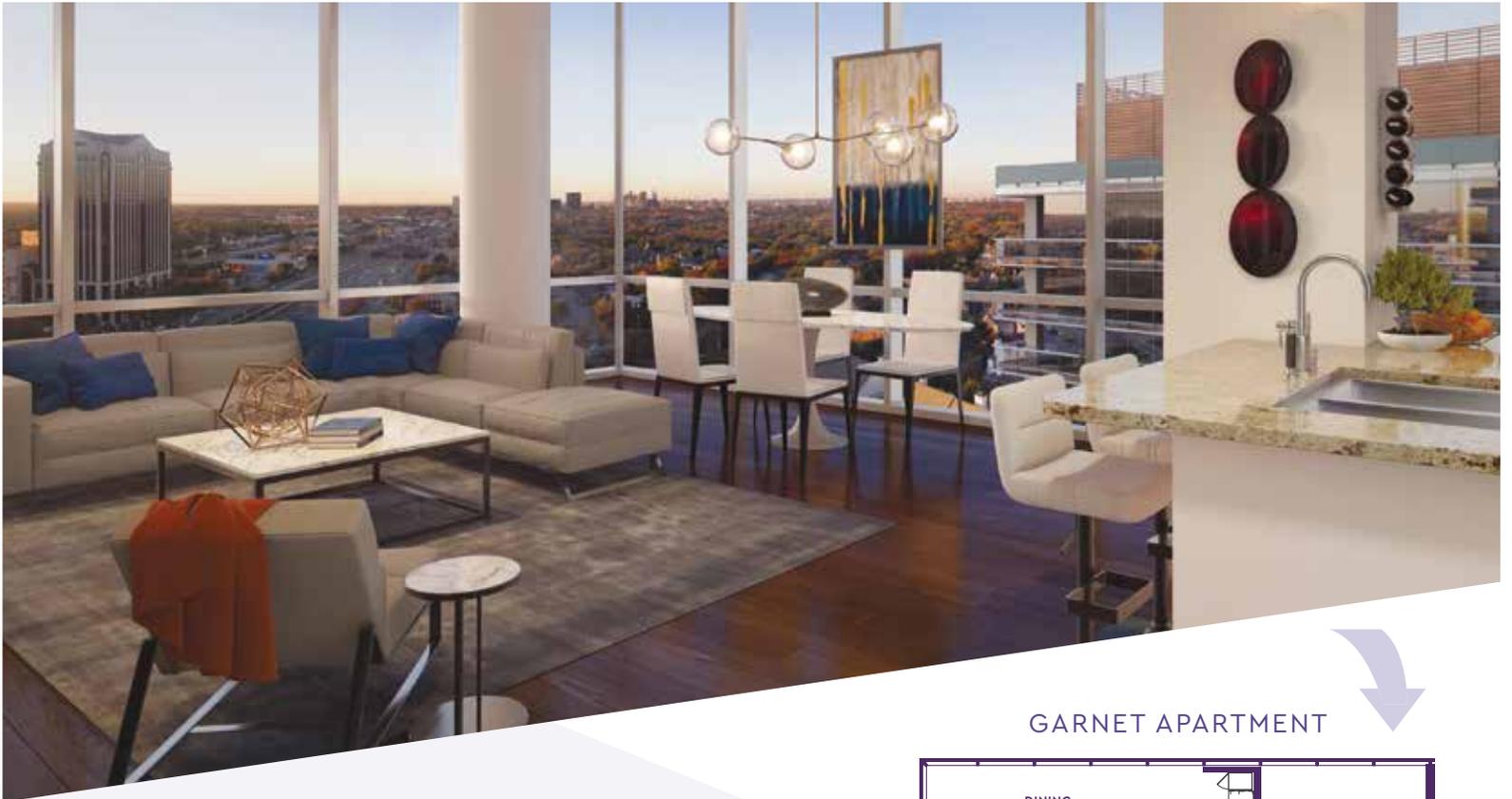
Each cap is knitted to perfection with ultra-soft yarn and a bit of Smart's love and compassion. In her spare time, Smart works on multiple caps at once, moving back and forth between them as she attempts to complete as many as possible. In addition to knitting in her residence, Smart can be found on Monday afternoons working alongside fellow members of the Longview senior living community's Knit Wits knitting group.

"At Buckner Westminster Place, we begin each day with the knowledge that our actions have the ability to make a difference in someone's life," said David Sims, executive director of Buckner Westminster Place. "We're proud to have members of our community, like Betty, who are always looking for ways to help others. Betty is a prime example of what it means to be selfless and to put others first."

Smart hopes that by sharing how knitting has impacted her life – and most importantly the lives of others – that someone will similarly be encouraged to give back.

"Making these caps for the past 20 years has brought only happiness into my life," Smart said. "It would be amazing if people who hear my story are inspired to discover what they can do to help others. Whether it's knitting caps or another act of volunteerism, I hope more people see the benefit in giving back to those in need and look for ways to support one another." **BT**





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# Mission bound

An email fuels the fire for church to serve the vulnerable around the world

Story by Gilbert Montez • Photography by Daniel Larson

**W**hat started as a simple reply to an email has blossomed into a flourishing relationship between Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, and Buckner International.

In early 2016 when Shiloh's youth pastor, Bryan McCray, responded to an email from Buckner President/CEO Albert Reyes, he got a surprise.

"Honestly, I didn't think anyone would respond," McCray said. "But you guys did and that led to a meeting with someone from Buckner, and we took off from there. We had been volunteering at [the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid] sorting shoes before then, and in that meeting, we were made aware of other volunteer opportunities for our youth group."

McCray and his youth ministry leadership team have grabbed every Buckner opportunity that's come before them, including organizing shoe drives for Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®, volunteering at a fall festival for children in foster care and helping out foster parents at Camp Buckner. To cap this growing relationship, they went on an international mission trip this summer.

"Our youth ministry's and Buckner's mission statements go hand-in-hand," McCray said. "Buckner has provided us a place

and opportunities of service for our young people to achieve our mission. We were looking for opportunities for our youth to operate outside of themselves, to think and be global in serving the Lord. I wanted us to move from having church to being the church. I wanted us to be more than just a Sunday-based faith and for us to be missional in all that we do.

"Our experience with Buckner has been more than what we originally thought. It's been a great relationship, and it's only going to grow."

And while one might think the benefit is solely for the Buckner children and families, McCray pointed out that serving others has provided his youth group opportunities to grow spiritually.

"What I've seen from our young people is an increased desire to learn more from the Bible and to apply what they are learning, to actually live it out," he said. "I've seen it more in how they conduct themselves, the way they have expressed selfless love in serving and the way they enjoy what they're doing.

"They look forward to serving, and serving others has now become a part of our culture. I've seen sparks of spiritual maturity in their lives, and I thank the Lord for that."

The first time McCray noticed that was at Camp Buckner in





Shiloh Baptist Church discovered the joy of shining hope overseas during the first mission trip in its more than 100-year history. They served children and placed new shoes on their feet in the Dominican Republic.

the Texas Hill Country when the youth group served foster care parents and children during a retreat Buckner hosts specifically for foster parents, providing them time of rest and recreation.

"Our young people stepped up and led, and they built strong relationships with the children and their foster parents, so much so that some of the parents wanted to take our young people home with them," McCray said. "I saw in them an overwhelming desire to serve others in a Christ-like manner. It doesn't get any better than that for a youth pastor."

A summer mission trip to the Dominican Republic through Buckner served as another opportunity for McCray and his youth to step up. The trip was also the first mission trip Shiloh had taken, and the process of planning, raising money, praying and getting ready proved to be galvanizing for the entire church.

"The trip had a tremendous impact on the entire church," Senior Pastor Isiah Joshua said. "When you see our young people serving children, washing their feet and placing shoes on their feet, well, those are Kleenex moments for us.

"It's an unbelievable joy we felt seeing our young people serving

like that. I kept thinking these are our kids doing this. The things you preach and teach over the years, and they put those things into action. What a great example these young people have set for us all."

The 16 young people and their five adult sponsors held Vacation Bible Schools at two Buckner Family Hope Centers in Santo Domingo over a week's period. They distributed 858 pairs of new shoes to children. The team also painted various rooms at the centers.

"Even weeks later, we're still receiving benefits from the mission trip," McCray said. "It's created in all of us a desire to create an even stronger youth ministry. The trip has challenged all of us to be better at how we serve, how we teach and lead and how we love and serve our God." **BT**

**Does your church want to help vulnerable children?**  
 If your church is interested in working with Buckner to help vulnerable children and families, contact Gilbert Montez, director of the Buckner Church Relations Department at [gmontez@buckner.org](mailto:gmontez@buckner.org) or 214-758-8106.

## Home sweet home

Abigail Tlamasico was unsure about moving to Lufkin at first. Now she can't imagine calling another place home.



# Turning it around

Single mom overcomes the odds with support from Buckner Family Pathways



Story by John Hall • Photography by Aimee Freston

At the end of Abigail Tlamasico's first semester at Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas, all that was left to do was pack her bags and tell Buckner Family Pathways Director Holly Valentine she was leaving. She tried to go to college. It just hadn't worked out. Her 1.0 grade point average was proof enough of that.

"I broke down into tears," Tlamasico remembered. "I asked myself, 'What did I do?' I told Holly, 'I'm going home. I can't do it. I can't get to the level they want me to get to.'"

Valentine refused to let her quit. Tlamasico's potential was clear, even if she herself couldn't quite see it yet.

"I knew Abby could succeed," Valentine said. "I just knew it in my heart. I could see she had so much to offer; it was just a matter of unlocking her potential."

Tlamasico enrolled in her second semester and refocused her efforts. With the help of Buckner, she learned how to study for her courses. Quickly, she realized she could do the work and do it well.

"After that 1.0, let's just say there was no sleep," Tlamasico said. "Before my week started, I'd prepare all my food. I'd go to work, then I'd come home and study day and night. Some nights, I'd only

get one-two hours of sleep."

In a year, her GPA climbed to a 3.0. She became comfortable at school and in Lufkin. The city became home for her and her son, Aaron. They made friends throughout the community who encouraged them along the way.

"Buckner has helped me open up. I was afraid to meet people. I was so insecure. I didn't trust anyone. I didn't have the skill to reach out and create relationships," Tlamasico said.

"It's not just Buckner. It's Lufkin too. Lufkin is an amazing town. The community is great. The people are amazing. The minute I stepped into Lufkin, they made a difference in my life. They worked together to make this happen. I love Lufkin. It's a place where I want to raise my kid. It's a place where I want to have a family.

Valentine beams as she talks about Tlamasico.

"Abby has become everything I thought she could be and more," Valentine said. "She's a tremendous mother. She's incredibly smart. She's just amazing. In the process of a few years, she's really discovered who she is and followed her heart to help children who need help."



Five years later, that first semester was clearly a turning point in Tlamasico's life. She's finishing her bachelor's degree in education at Stephen F. Austin University with a 3.6 GPA as well as her student teaching. She's investing her life into students who once struggled like she did to help them achieve things they once thought impossible.

"I want to help people," Tlamasico said. "I want to help kids. It makes me happy knowing I'm explaining something or doing something that brings them up from where they come from." **BT**

# Stories of **HOPE** after Harvey

**H**urricane Harvey devastated Southeast Texas last fall. It took away people's homes, cars and even lifestyles.

**But it couldn't take away their hope.**

**Buckner staff members, retirement community members and families share how hope still shines a year after the storm.**

## **'I am blessed'**

**I**n late August 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall in southeast Texas, leaving a trail of damage, loss and destruction in its wake. For several days following the storm, flooding overtook much of the area, forcing many to abandon their homes and possessions.

Daniel Madison, a utility worker at Buckner Parkway Place, was one victim of Harvey's wrath. With only the clothes on his back, his wife and a small bag, Madison found refuge somewhere most would never think to look: his place of employment.

"My wife and I stayed at Parkway Place in Houston for two months until we got back on our feet," he said. "Everyone did what they could to make things easier for us and make us comfortable. I was blessed."

The senior living community's hospitality toward Madison was



simply an added benefit. His motivation to be there, however, was not to seek his own comfort. It was to serve others.

"We were short-staffed. I was just trying to get over there to help and do what I could," Madison said. "I knew we were needed."

Touched by the selflessness of staff members like Madison, the Parkway Place community decided to act. They wanted to find a way to give back to the people who had given so generously of themselves during such difficult circumstances. Aaron Mendoza, a member of Parkway Place since 2009, worked with a few others to organize a fundraising effort.

"These employees go all-out to serve us, so we felt that it was our time to help them," Mendoza said.

The task was large and proved to be more challenging than expected.

With determination and a little bit of problem-solving, everything came together. The members of Parkway Place raised over \$20,000 to aid staff members who had lost everything to the storm.

"I've always felt, all my life, that it's better to give than to receive. I try to help people wherever I can," Mendoza said.

A year later, Madison and his wife, recipients of the fund, have a new apartment close to Parkway Place and are doing better than ever. Though the trials of Harvey will not be soon forgotten, the love and servant-heartedness shown among members and employees at Parkway Place is more powerful than any hurricane.

"Parkway Place members are like God's helpers. Without them, I wouldn't be sitting here right now. They took me in and they never looked back," Madison said.

## Hurricane Harvey was strong, but Houston families prove stronger

**M**aricela Guzman still remembers when Hurricane Harvey entered her neighborhood, her street and finally her home.

The rain came with a vengeance, and the floodwaters quickly filled the street in front of her family's brick home. Before they realized it, water was pouring into the structure.

"That afternoon, we left the house with water up to our waist and we walked in the street," she said. "We were sad. We didn't

know how the house would be when we would come back."

Guzman, her husband and her three children worked their way down the street and around the corner with many of their neighbors to a nearby fire station where they were taken on a school bus to a makeshift shelter. It was full, so they crossed the street to another shelter. There, they spent the night on the floor.



The next day, the family went to a friend's house. They stayed there until they could return to their home.

Guzman still fights back emotions as she shares how she found it. Most of their clothes were beyond repair. All of the furniture was soaked, as were the floors, furnishings and drywall. It was a mess. And it was uninsured.

"The water was three feet deep in our house," she said. "The water came through the vents in the bricks."

Just like that, all the family had worked so hard to accomplish was gone. They had worked through the Buckner Family Hope Center at Aldine in Houston to strengthen their family, participating in the Impact program as well taking classes such as Jobs for Life, English as a Second Language and Nurturing Parenting Classes. They even volunteered at various Hope Center events to shine hope into the lives of others.

"We stayed at home because we didn't have anywhere else to go," Guzman said. "The children had to return to school. There were no other options."

Guzman and her husband, Antonio Gutierrez, were determined to push forward. They began making repairs to the home, and Buckner helped the family by providing sheetrock, spackle, baseboards and insulation. Day by day since, they've sought to rebuild their homes

and their lives.

Working as often as they can, the couple has repaired the sheetrock and insulation in four of the bedrooms, the living room, the dining room and part of the kitchen. As they've worked on their home, they've sought to help their children as well, including a teenage daughter who suffers from panic attacks each time it rains.

"I try to be strong for them," Guzman said with tears in her eyes. "But it is frustrating. We haven't finished."

Guzman's family is just one of many in the area who were affected by Hurricane Harvey. A significant portion of them continues rebuilding like Guzman and Gutierrez. Each day, life gets better.

"Hurricane Harvey tried to defeat the families we serve," said Shonice Reed, director of the Family Hope Center. "But that's not possible. Our families are determined. Our families are strong. They work hard. They're resilient. Maricela and Antonio are just one example of that. The journey they're on has been a long and difficult one, but they will complete it."

## Beaumont couple finds new hope at Buckner Calder Woods after Hurricane Harvey

**L**iving in Southeast Texas for over 60 years, Ronnie and Sherry Adams thought they had seen it all. Hurricanes were no surprise. The couple had become accustomed to preparing for them. So when Hurricane Harvey hit, the couple didn't expect anything out of the ordinary.

"We thought we'd just put things up high enough that everything would be all right, and it wasn't," Sherry said. "The water came within a foot of our ceiling."

Former volunteer firefighters, Ronnie and Sherry were skilled at handling stressful, and sometimes disastrous, situations, but nothing could have prepared them for this kind of devastation.

"All of my children and grandchildren came to help us. My grandson said, 'Granny, you have got to leave now or you're not going to be able to get out,'" Sherry recalled.





After they evacuated, the couple was forced to wait five days for the water to recede before they could get back into their home. They braced themselves for the worst.

"All my stuff was ruined ... I washed a few clothes and glassware, but Ronnie didn't save anything," Sherry said. "I had some things that meant a lot to me. I wanted to save them. Finally, my son told me 'You've got to turn it loose.'"

Sherry remembers repeatedly asking God "Why?" One evening, however, as she surveyed her damaged belongings, she received a distinct feeling of hope.

"I found my mother and daddy's picture. Then I turned around and there was the most beautiful full moon you've ever seen. God was telling me everything was all right," she said.

After living in temporary accommodations for several weeks, Sherry and Ronnie knew they had to find a permanent home. That's when they came to Buckner Calder Woods in Beaumont. They toured the senior living community's new independent living apartments and immediately were sold.

"We came here and fell in love with it. Everybody was so friendly. This was going to be our home. We never looked anywhere else," Sherry said.

A year later, Sherry and Ronnie are active members of the Calder Woods community, where they regularly participate in community activities and have gotten to know several other members. Sherry is even a community ambassador now and volunteers to help keep the campus beautiful.

"Our kids told us, 'get out and do something. Don't just sit around – get involved.' That's what we did," Sherry said.

Though memories of the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey still cause pain from time to time, the couple likes to remind themselves that the past is behind them, and better days are ahead.

"We've had several full moons lately, and I think about that time. It reminds me that God says everything is going to be OK," Sherry said. **BT**

*Stories by Caitlin Heffley and John Hall.*

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# Hope overcomes hurricane

**W**hat a difference a year makes. The last time we visited with Ruby Rodriguez was days after Hurricane Harvey slammed Southeast Texas, including her home. Even then, she was thinking of others' needs before her own.

In the year since the storm, she's truly felt the support of the Buckner family. "We're good. Buckner helped us. Through the whole ordeal, Buckner was with me – emotionally and more."

Storms still make Ruby nervous. But she's optimistic better days lie ahead.

"There are a few blocks back where I drop soccer kids off that you see stacks of drywall," she said. "People are still pulling it out. It's going to take time to get over it. It's not about the things we lost. It's about the fear. It's not the fear of what would happen to me, it's the thought of what if something happens to my son and his babies? What about the soccer kids? What about my friends, my co-workers?"

Will you continue praying for those affected by Hurricane Harvey? **BT**



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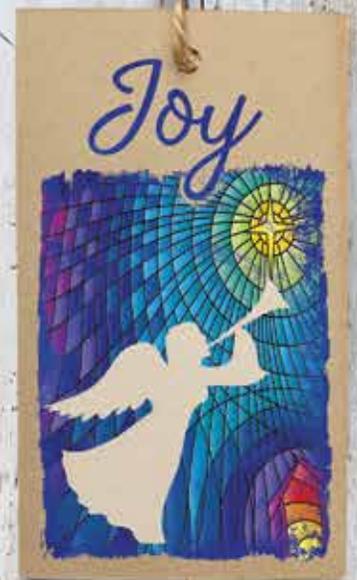
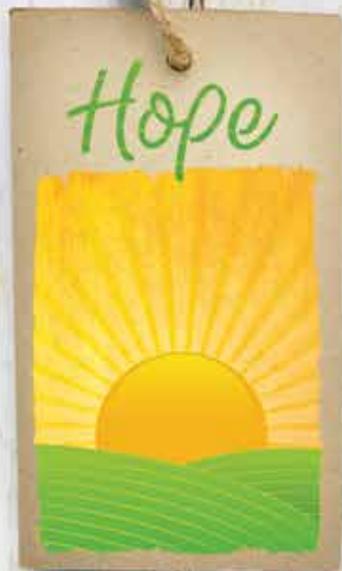
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