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SPECIAL MIDLAND EDITION

Buckner

Today

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Chat with the Executive Director

Impacting Midland lives

My name is Patricia Acosta and I am the new executive director in Midland. I am a Midland native and am very passionate to serve in the community that I grew up in. I have been serving this community for the past eight years in various social services roles. While I am new to my executive director role, I am not new to Buckner. I



Patricia Acosta
Executive Director
Buckner Midland

began with Buckner in 2016 as a case manager and later served as foster care supervisor. During that time, I developed a passion to bridge the gap for families in order to maintain preservation and permanency. I am honored to be given the responsibility and privilege of working not only

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ALSO INSIDE:

- Midland company takes on serving in big ways
- Volunteer opportunities

'The hardest joy you'll ever experience'

Story by Emily Keller

Bill and Celeste Dickinson have found the secret to staying young. Parents of biological children ages 21 and 23, they had an ache to fill their dinner table with chaos and laughter again. For most empty nesters, choosing to foster and adopt young children is not a part of the picture. But the Dickinsons can't imagine it any other way.

"We're like 'Why not?' When you're an empty nester and you have a

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Impacting Midland lives

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with foster care and adoption but also with single mothers and their children through the Family Pathways program. I am excited to bring more awareness of our programs to our community and be a stronger advocate for the children and families that we serve.

In 2019, we impacted 119 lives through foster care and adoption. We licensed 20 new homes and placed 18 children in adoptive forever families. We also met our capacity goal for 2019 for Family Pathways and two moms received certificates in December; one becoming a certified nurse assistant and earning a certificate in phlebotomy, and the other earning a certificate in optical assistant training.

Midland has very strong programs and community support. The connections and relationships we have built will only grow. I look forward to networking and representing Buckner in areas with other agencies as well as working to strengthen and increase our community support. I look forward to leading the wonderful staff we have in Midland and working hard to keep the team strong as we continue to grow! While we may not know what 2020 holds, we know that the God who knows what is best for us is in charge of it all ■



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home that could fulfill a purpose, why not do it? If you have the opportunity to babysit your grandchildren, you would," encouraged Celeste.

Currently, the Dickinsons have five foster placements ranging in ages 1 to 4 years old. They have fostered 18 children in their home and have learned the great waves of ups and downs that come with it.

"The Bible tells us to take care of the orphans and the widows. What you're trying to do is give these kids the love they may have missed out on – and we've been able to build connections with some of the parents that the kids have gone back to, or the other family members that they've gone to," shared Bill.

The couple sees this foster journey as an opportunity to minister to the biological families as well. They seek to bridge the gap between foster care and reunification and give these children something to take with them when they go. Each child that has been reunited with their biological family leaves a special mark on Bill and Celeste's hearts.

They've watched 13 different children come and go – and don't deny the pain that comes with it. When Bill and Celeste speak, it is evident how much they cherish every child that has been in their home.

"It's the hardest joy you'll ever experience.

There are so many days when I want to throw my hands up and be done – and then there are other days where I feel like this is the greatest thing I've been blessed to do," said Celeste.

"When people tell us, 'I don't know how you could do it,' I want to tell them that we're cold and heartless and that it's easy – but that's not it at all."

Leaning on their faith in God and prayer is one of the biggest things the Dickinsons believe has brought them this far.

"All the kids that have come through our home, we've picked up something from them – something they said or did. And I'll see or hear something that reminds me of them, and I'll go through a moment of sadness," she said. "But then I turn to God and pray for them and pray for whatever family they're with."

But through all the pain, both Celeste and Bill say with great confidence that they would do it over and over again. When asked why they would do this over and over, and in this stage of life, the couple smiles.

"I usually tell them it's a mid-life crisis. We don't believe in divorce and we don't have enough money to buy sports cars, so we went and got babies," laughed Bill. "I think it keeps us young, too." ■

Midland-Odessa company takes on serving in big ways

For many people, the desire to volunteer is big – but they just aren't sure where to start. For Kellie Britton, she made different attempts to rally her friends, employees and clients around a cause, but none were successful. Through her brother and his fostering journey with Buckner, he mentioned the needs for Christmas – and the company that helped previously couldn't help for the upcoming holiday.

Kellie, owner of Permian Basin Drug & Alcohol Testing in Odessa, found herself a part of nonprofits where it seemed like all they did was meet. "I wanted to do something to get my hands dirty and do something that actually made a difference – where we could see what we were doing," she said.

In 2017, Permian Basin Drug & Alcohol Testing employees, clients and friends joined in the effort to support the local Buckner Christmas drive. "Our staff shared it on Facebook, told their friends about it – and then their friends would want to help and pick a child. By the end of it, we had taken all the kids on the list!"

For this company, the owner felt the desire to serve the Midland-Odessa community, but her staff did too. While participation is not mandatory, Kellie found that all of her staff were excited as well as their families.

"It helps your heart. Even all of our kids picked a child and picked out presents and little toys. It helps showing them how to share and give back – even the little ones," she said.

"My daughter is 6 and we've been doing it for the past two years. She'll go through the toy book and look for gifts for these kids. It's a great way for us to give back to the community locally," said Kellie.

After two years of committing to Christmas, 2019 gave them the opportunity to do something a little different. Another company had already taken care of the presents and gifts – but clients, customers and staff kept asking how to help. Buckner is typically always in need of jackets, diapers, baby wipes, pajamas and underwear. Kellie and her many friends jumped in and delivered the needed items.

"I think there's a lot of people out there that just don't know how. I think that if the organizations can let these customers, clients and companies know what they're in need of, somebody is going to step up and help you do that," explained Kellie.

"Getting money donated is great – but there's a lot of people out there that want to physically help and that's through so many different ways – gathering people, wrapping presents, or just getting that information out."

Kellie was encouraged that she wasn't the only one looking to give back locally – and that there are so many opportunities in the Midland community to continue to serve. ■



Buckner Volunteer Opportunities

During this season of uncertainty, many of our volunteer events and opportunities are on hold or have been canceled to maintain healthy social distance to stop the spread of the coronavirus. However, there are still ways you can support Buckner safely from your home, and more coming soon!

Here are a few examples of ways you can support Buckner in this new season:

- Write an encouraging note to a senior adult or a foster family. We are accepting letters both digitally and through email. For information on where to send your note, check out our volunteer page on the Buckner website.
- Pray for the vulnerable children, families and seniors in your community. Pray for health, safety and protection.
- If you are passionate about helping families struggling due to implications of COVID-19, we are accepting financial gifts to support them in this season.

As the situation progresses, we are continuing to update our website with ways you can volunteer and serve throughout this time. To check out the most up-to-date ways we are continuing to serve our Buckner families (and how you can help), visit [buckner.org/volunteer](https://www.buckner.org/volunteer).

