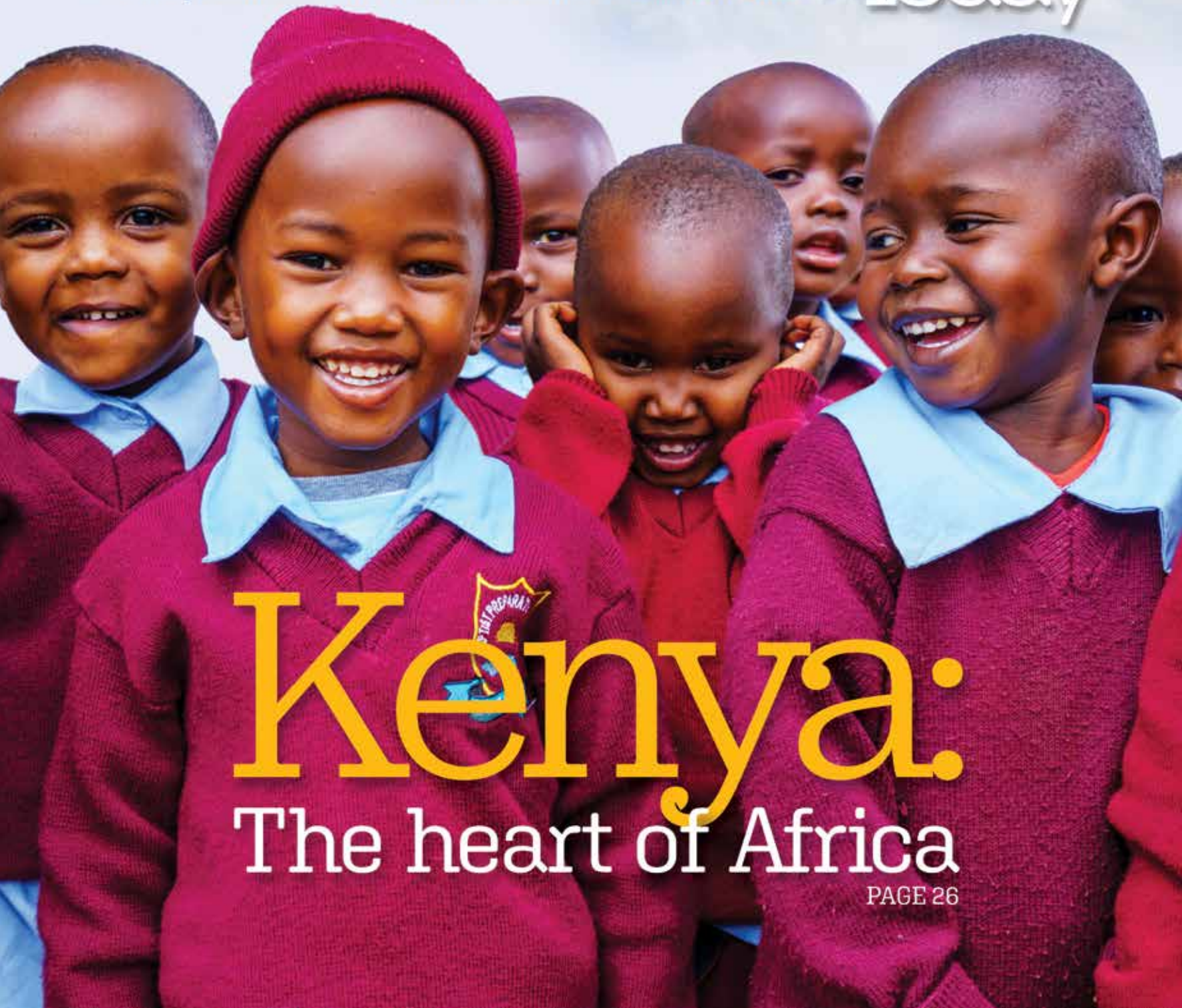


See inside for ways you can support families.

Buckner

The magazine of Buckner International | Summer 2018

Today



Kenya:

The heart of Africa

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Buckner

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Last Look
Princess



Cover photo by
Mark Sandlin

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is the condensed speech President Albert Reyes delivered at the "Hope for Children" event May 1.*

What a remarkable honor for me to be on stage with President Bush and Jenna Hager. The events tonight took me back to the echoes of President Bush's first inaugural address in 2001.

"It is the American story," President Bush said. "A story of flawed and fallible people united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born."

That clear call from President Bush must reverberate in this hall tonight. Everyone deserves a chance. No insignificant person has ever been born. And while those words were spoken in 2001, their meaning has been the very heart and soul of Buckner International and friends like you for more than 139 years. That is why we say with one voice, "Hope shines here!"

Hope shines tonight because in the eyes of our creator, every person is significant. The abused child hiding in a corner; the family on the verge of economic collapse and destitution; the parents trying to improve their lives so that no one takes their children from them; those who live in the shadows. Hope shines tonight because God knows them – he knows them by name. Hope shines because God has given you and me the task of being his beacons of hope.

We are not the hope. We are those who shine hope into darkness, as if we held a flashlight and pointed its beam. That beam – the light we shine – is the hope of the world found in Christ. We are torchbearers of his hope, the only hope that can ultimately transform lives.

What does that mean? What does it look like to offer hope to the most vulnerable children in our world? I would return to President Bush's inaugural address, in which he said that we will be people who, when we see the wounded traveler on the road to Jericho, will not pass to the other side. We will instead lift that person into our own arms and care for him with our own resources. And even then, we will say, as the Good Samaritan said, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you." That is the very definition of shining hope.

We do this, not because of what we gain, though we are the richer for it. We lift the wounded because we know it is what Jesus did and we are his presence in the world today. We do this because, in the words of another president, John F. Kennedy, human life and the rights we share "come not from the generosity of the state, but from

the hand of God."

The hope we shine tonight is motivated by the love we have for those we serve and for the God who loves us. If we are not driven by love, we are as the Apostle Paul writes, nothing more than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." For while faith, hope and love abide, "the greatest of these is love." No matter what I surrender; no matter what I give, "without love, it profits me nothing."

It is love that opens our eyes to a hurting world and it is love that drives us into that world to shine hope and make a difference. The world is waiting for us to shine.

At one of the Shoes for Orphan Souls® distribution events in Dallas, we had plenty of volunteers show up. As I welcomed the families coming into the cafeteria to play games with volunteers or eat the breakfast we served, I was astonished by the stories of those I greeted. I talked to families from Guatemala. Mexico. Honduras. Countries we serve internationally through our Buckner ministries. I realized that we don't have to travel much past our own neighborhoods to serve people from these countries.

One mother shook my hand and asked in Spanish, "What are you doing here? Why are you helping this community?"

It gave me an opportunity to tell her about the Buckner Family Hope Center and the rich programs designed to help families in deep ways through family coaching, after-school and children's programs, and adult enrichment opportunities.

She stopped me short. She'd heard enough. "¿Dónde está este lugar? (Where is this place?)"

I responded that we were planning to build a new Buckner Family Hope Center right here, in her neighborhood, on Lombardy, very close to where we stood, in the next few years.

Her look of disappointment and desperation was obvious. She gripped my elbow tightly to emphasize her next words. "You don't understand. We don't have a few years. We need help. Necesitamos este lugar ahora! (We need this place now!)"

There is a whole community of families just like hers, desperate for help and hope. Yes, we are already having a tremendous impact there, but dream with me tonight about what the future can be. I believe the supply of love and hope in this room is endless and infinite.



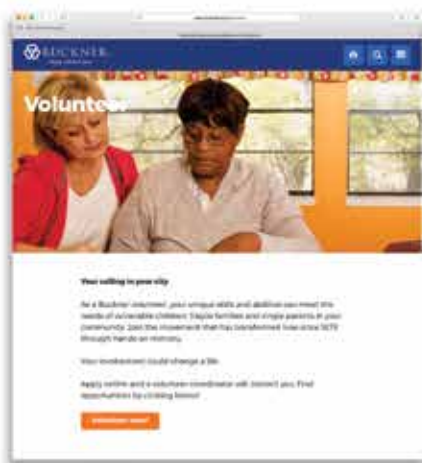
Albert L. Reyes, President and CEO
Buckner International

Visit my blog at www.bucknerprez.com



Jamye McAlister was going to school full time and at night she worked. Sometimes, she worked double, even triple shifts to provide for her family. The problem was she rarely saw her children. She needed something to change. She needed hope. She received both at Buckner Family Pathways in Longview. Now her family is thriving, and she is achieving all her goals. **Learn more at buckner.org/BucknerToday**

Visit 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

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Permanent

There was a lot to absorb earlier this year when I traveled to and through Kenya with a group from Buckner. We were there with Albert Reyes, our president, visiting the Buckner ministries in that East Africa country.

This was my first trip back to Kenya in almost seven years. Everything seemed to be the same, but everything had changed.

By that I mean, Africa is slow to change. I lived in Botswana for two years and the Africa I see today is much like the place where I lived more than 35 years ago.

And yet, so much is different. The work of Buckner Kenya is recognizable from seven years ago, but it's so much more today. Dickson Masindano is a leader with vision, drive and passion. Dickson does not just settle for the status quo.

So, it came as no big surprise to see Buckner Kenya at the forefront of the global permanency movement at Buckner. Last year, Buckner Kenya placed 78 children in forever families through adoption. (see page 42)

And while I wasn't surprised that Buckner is leading the way in finding permanent solutions for children, I was surprised at the enormous impact adoption is beginning to have in Kenya. While cultural understanding about adoption is far from the norm, Dickson and the Buckner team are working to overcome stigmas attached to families who adopt.

Hurdling the cultural obstacle is one thing. But Dickson says just as challenging is building awareness that adoption is even an option for families – and children.

What Kenya needs is a national awareness campaign to build support for adoption. We're finding that once people are aware of adoption as an option, they are open to learning more.

The hope is that adoption will become a permanent part of Kenyan (and African) society so that more vulnerable children find permanent, forever families.



Scott Collins is Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.

3 Reasons we're excited at Buckner!

The first Buckner Family Hope Center is coming to West Texas!



With a swing of a hammer, the first Buckner Family Hope Center is coming to West Texas.

Buckner leaders, community officials and supporters swung the first hammers that kicked off the remodel to the Buckner Family



Pathways campus that will add a Family Hope Center to the community.

"It's Demo Day in Lubbock," said Buckner President/CEO Albert Reyes. "We're demolishing poverty. We're knocking down barriers to self-sufficiency. We're building a way for hope to shine throughout Lubbock through strong families."

The program will be the organization's 27th Family Hope Center, strengthening vulnerable families in Texas and six other countries. These centers are community-based places of hope where families go to find strength and empowerment to reach their God given potential.

The creation of the Family Hope Center in Lubbock is made possible by a gift from the estate of Maxine Steige, who lived in Lubbock from 1968-2014. She and her husband, Herbert, led a successful dental practice for 35 years and were generous to numerous organizations. At the age of 72, Steige published the children's book "Journey to the Back-40" in 2006.

We're back home in Beaumont!



The Rebuild Texas Fund gave a gift of more than \$320,000 to Buckner Children and Family Services of Southeast Texas, enabling the ministry to rebuild its Beaumont foster care campus damaged by Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

Buckner Gift Officer Rhonda Robichau said Harvey caused "tremendous devastation to three of our four campus homes at Buckner Children's Village, and to our administration building."



The Rebuild Texas gift will provide for the majority of renovation to the campus.

Laura May, executive director of BCFS Southeast Texas, shared her gratitude with Rebuild Texas and other individuals and organizations that contributed to the build-back.

"Thanks to Rebuild Texas and others who contributed to the safety of the children in our care, these donations allowed us to place three families back in homes, as well as our staff back into offices after being displaced seven months," she said.

Chris Hensman, program officer for the Rebuild Texas Fund, said the choice to name Buckner as the gift recipient was an acknowledgement of the types of services Buckner provides. "We knew Beaumont was one of the hardest hit areas in East Texas and that so many children and families are affected by Buckner services, so we wanted to support Buckner in serving these families."

Buckner Senior Living, Cooper Aerobics collaborating on wellness program for Ventana!



Buckner Senior Living and Cooper Aerobics announced May 11 a collaboration to bring top health and wellness initiatives to Ventana by Buckner in Dallas.

Future Ventana residents, along with key personnel from Cooper Aerobics and Buckner Senior Living, gathered May 11 at Cooper Aerobics Center to celebrate the collaboration.



"This exciting collaboration is a blending of two unique, strong brands," said Charlie Wilson, senior vice president of Buckner Retirement Services. "Both are Dallas icons and have collectively been working to create vibrant lifestyles for active adults for nearly 115 years. Our goal is to provide the best in holistic wellness for Ventana residents, and there's no better provider to help make that happen than Cooper Aerobics."

When Ventana opens in 2019, Cooper Aerobics will provide health and wellness consulting at Ventana for all residents, manage the on-site wellness center and lead ongoing wellness initiatives throughout the community.

SHINING HOPE DALLAS

THE CAMPAIGN FOR  BUCKNER.



Buckner announces campaign to build Family Hope Center in Bachman Lake community



Buckner International President and CEO Albert Reyes joined campaign co-chairs Meredith and Kyle Bebee and Katie and John Golden May 8 to announce the “Shining Hope Dallas Campaign,” a capital campaign to build and fund a new Buckner Family Hope Center in the Bachman Lake community of Dallas.

Reyes said the impetus for the project began with a “simple question: What if we could protect Dallas’ most vulnerable children? Buckner helps families rise above their circumstances and meet their God-given potential so that each child is safe and thriving. This Buckner Family Hope Center will enable and empower children to stay where they belong— in their own families.”

Meredith Bebee of Dallas echoed the need, inviting Dallas to rally behind the effort.

“We believe family is God’s ideal for every child, which is why we’ve joined with the Golden family and other Campaign Council members to lead the Shining Hope Dallas Campaign to fund a new Buckner Family Hope Center at Bachman Lake.”

The campaign seeks to raise \$14.5 million for the new Buckner



ministry, which will offer programs and services to protect children and strengthen families in the area. Construction costs for the project are \$10.5 million, with a \$4 million endowment to fund ongoing programs. Reyes said preliminary fundraising efforts among select Buckner supporters have already raised \$9.5 million toward the goal, including a \$1.125 million commitment from the Crystal Charity Ball.

Reyes said construction on the project will begin this fall. A groundbreaking event is set for Sept. 27 at the building site. The

proposed 21,795-square-foot, two-story Family Hope Center will be built on approximately two acres at the corner of Lombardy Avenue and Geraldine Drive. It will sit strategically between multi-unit family living complexes and single-family homes in one of Dallas' most economically challenged areas. Buckner operates

26 similar Family Hope Centers in Texas and six countries.

"This is a unique area that needs our unique services," Reyes said, pointing to the Bachman community's challenging demographic needs. "We will be coming into a three-square-mile area with an estimated population of 82,000. Its five elementary schools have 4,000 students, 96 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged. It has a Child Protective Services removal rate twice the average in Dallas county. Knowing this just increases the urgency we feel to move forward on this campaign." **BT**



Former President Bush talks about family, faith, service during Buckner Hope for Children event



George W. Bush, 43rd President of the United States, talked about the importance of family, faith and service to those in need during the Buckner Hope for Children dinner May 1 at Dallas Market Center. The event, Buckner International's premier annual fundraising dinner, saw a record-setting attendance.

Bush shared his comments along with his daughter, Jenna Bush Hager, in a question-and-answer interview format with WFAA Channel 8 news anchor Cynthia Izaguirre. Among the topics discussed were the recent death of his mother, Barbara Bush, grandparenting and parenting daughters Jenna and Barbara while serving as president.



The pair also shared their personal recollections of the events surrounding 9/11, offering the crowd of almost 1,000 a personal look at the tragedy that shook the world and served as a defining moment of Bush's presidency.

Buckner International President and CEO Albert Reyes called Bush's public service and family an "inspiration" to America and the world.

"President Bush and Jenna, day after day, the staff of Buckner who work with some of the most vulnerable children and families in the world, tell me that one of the greatest gifts we can give them is inspiration," Reyes said. "Inspiration is the first step to hope. You and your family provide the kind of inspiration that leads to hope."

In recognition of the Bush family's contributions, Reyes presented the former president and his daughter with folk art depictions of Jesus washing feet. The set was crafted from

banana leaves by a Kenyan artisan whose family was served by the Buckner Family Hope Center of Nairobi.

During his keynote address, Reyes recalled Bush's first inaugural address in 2001. "Standing in front of the American people and the entire world, he talked about a 'story' that was the American story."

He remembered Bush's words that America is a story "of flawed and fallible people united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The grandest of these ideals is an unfolding American promise that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born."

"That clear call from President Bush must reverberate in this hall tonight," Reyes said. "Everyone deserves a chance. No insignificant person has ever been born. And while those words were spoken in 2001, their meaning has been the very heart and soul of Buckner International and friends like you for more than 139



Photo by Grant Miller

years. That is why we say with one voice, 'Hope shines here!'"

The event also served as the public kick-off of the "Shining Hope Dallas" campaign to build and fund a Buckner Family Hope Center in the Bachman Lake community of Dallas.

Campaign co-chairs Meredith and Kyle Bebee and Katie and John Golden made the announcement, appealing to the crowd to support the effort.

"The goal of the campaign is simple," explained John Golden. "To raise \$14.5 million to build a new Buckner Family Hope Center in the very heart of the Bachman community – an area that is home to nearly 90,000 vulnerable people. Together, we're going to build something that becomes the most significant place in the Bachman community. This Family Hope Center will become a beacon of hope."

Meredith Bebee echoed the need, inviting Dallas to rally behind the effort. "Kyle and I are so excited to be part of this campaign.

We're already seeing the incredible impact we can have on this community. And with your help, we'll do even more."

The campaign seeks to raise capital and operating funds for the new Buckner ministry, which will offer programs and services to protect children and strengthen families in the area. Preliminary fundraising efforts among select Buckner supporters have already raised \$9.5 million toward the goal, including a \$1.125 million commitment from Crystal Charity Ball.

The proposed 21,795-square-foot, two-story Family Hope Center will be built on approximately two acres at the corner of Lombardy Avenue and Geraldine Drive. It will sit strategically between multi-unit family living complexes and single-family homes in one of Dallas' most economically challenged areas. Buckner operates 26 similar Family Hope Centers in Texas and six countries. **BT**

A growing legacy: Resident recognized for 55 years serving with Good News Club



Marueen Duncan began leading Good News Clubs out of her New Hampshire home in the early 1960s. Through moves across the country with her military husband — New Hampshire to California to Alabama to West Texas — the now 84-year-old Baptist Retirement Community resident continued volunteering with the Good News Club every year for 55 years.

"Wherever she's lived, she's had a Good News Club," said Duncan's daughter, Pam Gasper.

In February, the Child Evangelism Fellowship, parent organization to the Good News Club ministry, honored Duncan for her outstanding service. Representatives from the organization traveled to San Angelo from their headquarters in Missouri to present Duncan with a personal letter from the organization's president and a leather-bound Bible commissioned for their 80th anniversary.

That Bible is now one of Duncan's most prized possessions.

"This Bible is really special," Duncan said. "I've committed to reading the whole thing through, and I'm in Leviticus already!"

"This recognition is quite the honor," Gasper added. "She was dedicated to the kids in her Good News Clubs, and she led by example."

Originally, Duncan hosted the clubs in her home. Local elementary school children would gather in her living room for

songs and Bible stories, which she told on flannelgraph. Eventually, the clubs transitioned to schools, but even so, Duncan maintained her commitment to sharing the gospel with the next generation.

"Maureen sowed the word of God into the hearts of countless children," said Tim Noe, global partnership ministry representative with Child Evangelism Fellowship who presented Duncan with the Bible. "She didn't just give a glass of water for a day or a meal for an evening. She gave them the water of the Word of God for eternity.

"Her influence has probably done more to grow our ministry, not only with what she did personally but also with the ways she encouraged others to participate, than any other element. She's one of the very special people who've helped us grow to serving 20 million children each year."

"When it comes to legacy, my mom has a large family with kids, grandkids and great grandkids who support and love her," Gasper said. "That alone speaks for itself."

It was the Buckner commitment to living out faith, a commitment much like her own, that led Duncan to Baptist Retirement community. She and many fellow residents at the San Angelo senior living community share a connection deeper than just neighbors. Together they celebrate the work God has done in their lifetimes, even the work they may never see. **BT**

How to love a spouse with Alzheimer's

By Dorothy Horne

Byron has now been in memory care at Buckner Westminster Place for eight months. I'm thankful for the gift of community God has given Byron at Buckner, and I'm grateful he's in such a caring and loving environment. I have come to know the staff well, and they are amazing. I love watching them interact with and care for the residents with such patience and love. Theirs is not a job, but a ministry of serving.

There is such tenderness and beauty in Byron's community. If you want to see what unconditional love looks like — a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things — then visit Buckner memory care.

You'll find husbands, wives and family members who come on a regular basis to be with their loved ones. They may or may not be able to converse much, depending on the stage of the disease. That doesn't matter, though, because their communication and love is expressed through simply being present, not necessarily through words. Being present with someone is saying, "You matter to me and I love you unconditionally." Just sitting together, holding hands — being instead of doing.

When I'm present with Byron, he's content and so am I. At this point in our journey, much has been stripped away. We're down to the marrow. What's left, though, is life's essence: unconditional love. And when the inner light of love shines from Byron's eyes when he looks at me, it's pure gold.

Whether our loved ones with Alzheimer's (or other long-term diseases) are in a memory care community or at home, there are many ways we can continue loving them well. What better way to do this than by being present and creating moments of joy?

It's not in our power to give our loved ones a great day, but it is in our power to give them happy, joy-filled moments. They won't remember these, but the contentment and good feelings you've helped them experience will linger.

So, when it comes to loving a spouse through Alzheimer's or dementia, think "moments" and simplicity. Think about what brings delight or comfort. The simplest activities can bring the most satisfaction. I've learned to look for what brings a smile and sparkle to Byron's eyes, and that's what we do.

It varies from day to day, depending on his energy level or state of confusion. It may be listening to music, playing his guitar, going for walks over by the Buckner lake, looking for rainbows in the

fountains, dancing (we've always loved to dance) or playing catch. Think about what the two of you have always loved to do, then modify and adjust the activity and keep doing it!

For practical ways to love your spouse despite their disease, try these ideas:

- Hug and hold hands often.
- Tell them how special they are, and why. Remind them of the great things they were known for.
- Remind them how they've made a difference to you, your family and friends.
- Think about the ways your loved one used to show you love, then do those things for them.
- Touch, feel and talk about their treasured possessions.
- Give them a back rub.
- Comb their hair.
- Rub scented lotion on their hands.
- Read and sing to them.
- Read Scripture and pray with them. Remind them how much God loves them and how he is taking care of them.
- Look at photo albums together. Talk to them about your shared experiences. Tell them "their story" often. It hands them back their life and memories, even if just momentarily.
- Go out for ice cream.
- Talk about all the things you are thankful for. Make a list and read it together often.

Thanks be to God for the gift of his miraculous grace that turns water into wine in the magnified, joy-infused moments He gives us each day!

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ" —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

*Dorothy Horne is a Longview, Texas, author and contributing columnist and blogger for the Longview News-Journal. Her husband, Byron, lives with Alzheimer's disease and is a resident at Buckner Westminster Place's The Harbor. **BT***





Parkway Place couple celebrates 60 years of marriage

For Jim and Rosalyn Huddleston, Feb. 14 isn't just Valentine's Day. More than six decades ago, it was also their wedding day. They married on Feb. 14, 1956, and this year celebrated 62 years of marriage alongside friends and family at Parkway Place in Houston.



The couple's trip to the altar was anything but ordinary. They grew up together in east Houston — just down the street from each other. They officially met during a group date, then went on a double date and finally went on their own first real date. They immediately knew they were in love.

Rosalyn's mother, however, didn't approve. She wanted to send Rosalyn off to an all-girls school about a year into the relationship. The couple decided the only way for them to stay together was to get married. Since Jim was 20 and Rosalyn was 17, they needed her mother's permission to get married in Houston. They knew that wasn't going to happen, however, so they drove to Crowley, La., and eloped.

Now, the couple is more in love than ever.

"We wanted to be together and knew we were the ones for each other," said Jim. "It was the best decision we could have made. Our bond grew, and we learned more about one another."

Family tensions were still strong when the couple returned and didn't get better until the birth of their first child five years later. When Rosalyn's mother realized the couple was really in love she and the family gave their full support.

"Look at us now, 62 years together and these have been the best years of my life," Jim added. "We made it through the hardest times in our lives with just each other. There is nothing that can come

between us. The good times and bad times have made us into the strong couple we are today."

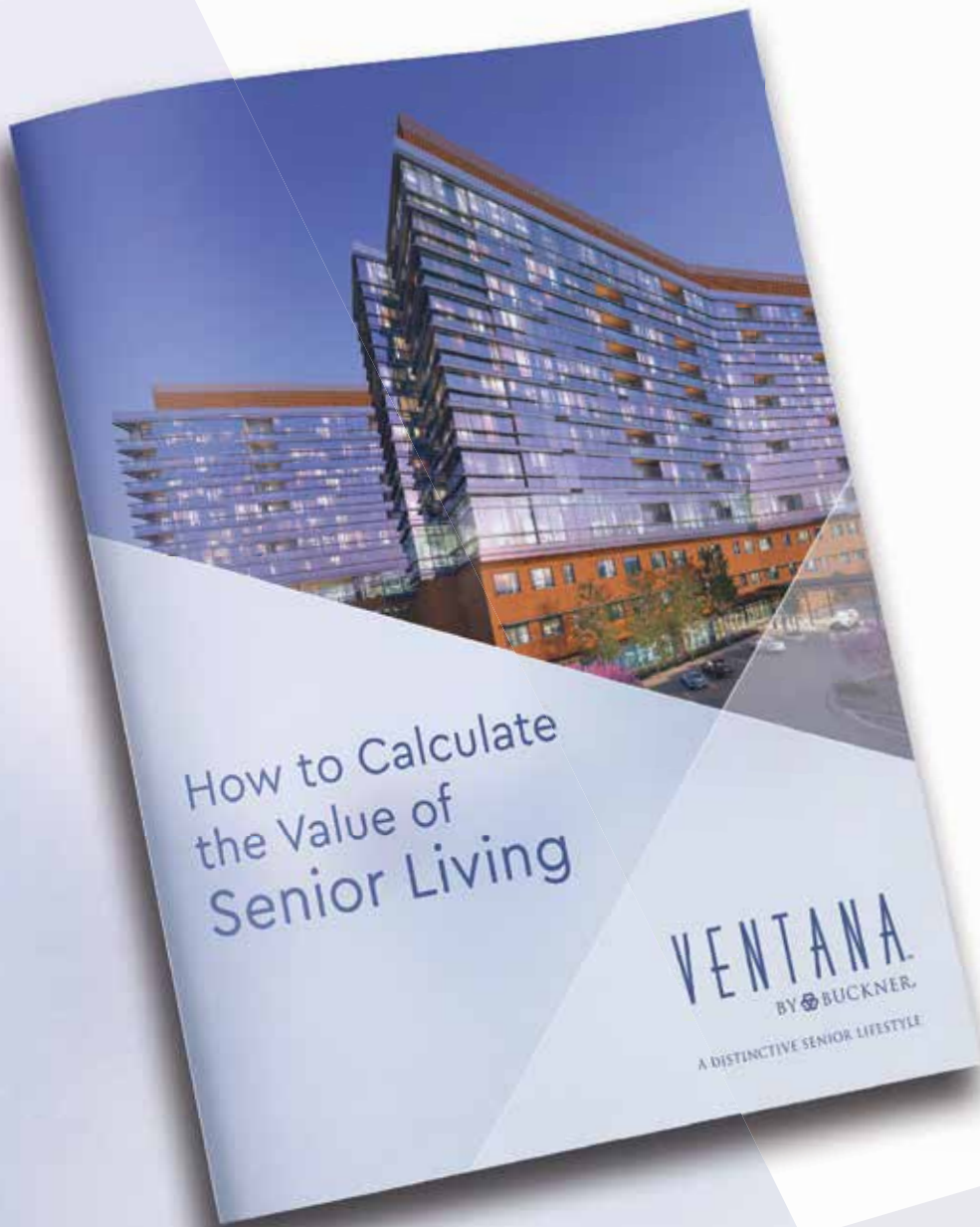
The couple spent most of their married life in Alvin, Texas, southeast of Houston, with a short stint in Beaumont, Texas. Jim worked in the oil and gas industry while Rosalyn was a nurse. They raised three kids and have three grandchildren and one great grandchild.

After Jim retired in 1993, the couple never actually quit working. They started mission trips and went to work for the National Park Services. Later they served as missionaries in Papua New Guinea for two years where they helped with Bible translation. While volunteering overseas they spent time on a ship and worked in Granada.

"Everything Jim and I accomplished was together and with the Lord's help, and I couldn't imagine anyone else by my side," Rosalyn said. "This is a special anniversary because we are in a new city and new home at Parkway Place. I am thankful for our love. Love isn't always easy, but when you have the right person in your life, it sure does make it fun. Without Jim, my life wouldn't be complete."

"Jim and Rosalyn are godly people, and their love story is truly inspiring," said Susan Phelps, executive director at Parkway Place. "Through all the ups and downs they stuck together as a couple. You don't see that as much today. It's a beautiful story, and it's one people can learn from. We are thankful they call Parkway Place home." **BT**





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FAMILY PATHWAYS:

Transforming

vulnerable

families

A recent MIT study found that education is the key to lifting vulnerable families out of poverty. Education gives parents marketable skills that propel them toward higher earning potential, which results in more stable lives at home.

But for many single-parent families, higher education is only a dream. A dream with so many obstacles in their way that they hardly give it a second thought. Why wish for what you can't have?

These families need a way to self-sufficiency, a path to hope.

Join us as we see transformation take place at various points through Buckner Family Pathways.



Buckner Family Pathways has strengthened more than 1,900 families in the past 20 years, helping determined single parents like Lorena Alvarez of Amarillo turn their dreams into realities.

Desperate, hopeless

Lorena Alvarez was in a difficult situation. She needed to leave and take her two sons with her. Their father was a drug addict, and they had to get out of there.



But like many single-parent families struggling in trying circumstances or poverty, she didn't know how she could support the family. She lacked the skills that would empower her to attain a well-paying job. She lacked the education to gain those skills. And she had no way of getting either of those.

"I didn't have anywhere to go or the money," she said. "I ended up in the hotel. I worked for them and they let me live there."

The family stayed there for three years. There were sacrifices: They crammed into one room. There was no kitchen. Working hours were long.

"But it was a comfort zone for me. My children and I were safe."

Once Alvarez was able to get her and her family back on their feet, she wanted more. She wanted her family to thrive. A friend pointed her to Buckner Family Pathways in Amarillo.

Open doors, open hearts

In Houston, it's a new beginning for 20 single parents who moved into the new Buckner Family Pathways apartments located at New Hope Housing at Reed within the Star of Hope's Cornerstone Community.



"This is a very important and exciting day for us as we are moving in our residents on this beautiful new campus," said Erin Broussard, Buckner senior executive director in Houston. "It is the first time in Houston that we will have all of our residents in one place accessible to their support services."



As their possessions were unloaded off the moving trucks into their new homes, residents could not contain their smiles or excitement. For many of them, this is the

first new home they have ever lived in; for others it is the first time they won't have to share a bedroom with their children.

Some of the parents moving into their new fully-furnished homes are escaping abusive situations or homelessness. Entering the Buckner Family Pathways program allows them to work on their education while providing a safe and stable home for their children. They also receive counseling, resources and other skills to become self-sufficient.

"I'm going through a lot of emotions," said Family Pathways resident Shanarica Bennett during her move in. "I'm excited and nervous about the change, but I know it's for the better. Just the set up here has everything I need as far as the child care for my children, enrichment programs and summer programs. They have a lot of things here that will be wonderful for my children and myself. I see great things for my future. I know that when I graduate, I'm going to be very prepared for what is to come."

Hitting the books

Jamye McAlister had a dream. She wanted to help people, particularly people who were struggling like she was. But pursuing that dream meant sacrificing a role that was more important to her: Mother.

She was trying hard, but the math doesn't add up when you essentially have three full-time jobs: student, employee pulling double and triple shifts and mom. Something had to give, and by default that was time with her children. It came to a head at her children's school.

"When I had the



parent-teacher conference at school, they asked, 'Does he sleep at night?' I didn't know. That's when I realized I was disconnected from my children."

Family Pathways knocked down the obstacles in her way and provided an avenue for McAlister to pursue her dream without giving up time for her children. With safe housing provided and assistance for child care, McAlister could keep going to school and working without sacrificing time for her family.

"It means the world to me to graduate and earn my sociology degree," she said. "Number one, I'll be the first in my family to graduate college. Number two, with all the experiences I've had in life, it's my passion to want to give back and counsel women to let them know if you know where you want to go, you can get there."

Working outside the classroom as well

When Krystal Smith sneaks into her children's room to wake them for school, she doesn't enter on her tippy toes – she dances.

"We have a lot of dance parties," Smith said. "We start pretty much every day with music that gets the blood flowing and we dance."

With the music on, her children jump out of bed, and they start their day – together happy, dancing.

The dance parties started in response to Smith's 6-year-old son, Jaxon, who was always on the move.

"My children are contagious," Smith said. "When they're in the room, you can't help but get up and move and do and be."

So when Smith noticed Jaxon was always snapping his fingers, she at first thought it was just something he did to release energy. The counselor at Buckner Family Pathways in Dallas suspected his tendency to snap his fingers might be more than just nervous energy. She suggested he see a psychologist. Family Pathways made all the arrangements – from the



referral to the payment.

In December, Jaxon was diagnosed with autism. Smith realized that when Jaxon snapped his fingers, he was feeling overwhelmed. Now that he has resources and aid, he is improving at school and at home.

Smith, who is working toward a degree in applied behavioral science, felt that she was prepared to work with Jaxon and be his advocate in school.

"It all started to work that life and school started to mesh into one," Smith said. "Jaxon is the coolest kid ever, but he is uniquely made for me."

Family Pathways became a place of refuge for Smith and her children after her husband left them with nothing.



"When I first came [to Family Pathways] for the first time, just the spirit of the place and the staff assured me that I was safe. For the first time since my ex-husband just up and left, I knew we were going to be OK."

There have been storms in Smith's life – she is also a thyroid cancer survivor and a domestic violence survivor – but she only sees the blessings.

"It was the compilation of the worst period of time in my life which has brought me to the best time of my life," Smith said. "I was raised in the church. It's one thing to know the Lord from other people's testimony, but to know him intimately and to see how he really fulfills his promises, it adds a new layer of appreciation for who God is and what Jesus did."

"I have no reason to complain," she continues. "Nothing is guaranteed. Nothing is promised, but you can't help but think every day is a blessing. You can cry or you can dance. So we just dance instead of cry."



A larger family than expected

Breanae Campbell and her 3-year-old son Maddex have lived at Family Pathways in Lubbock for nearly a year. The computer engineering major is doing well in class and out.

Still, they encounter difficult days from time to time. Moments that would try any mother trying to do it all. When a grant helping her pay for child care falls through suddenly. Or when there's not enough time for school and family. Or a calculus test approaches.

For those times, Campbell has discovered Family Pathways is more than a place to live; it's where lives change. She was connected with a financial adviser who helped her learn how to save money. She meets regularly with a counselor.



Program Director Sharion Stephens has become a mentor and a friend. Stephens is a caring ear willing to listen. She's a source of wisdom, whether it has to do with schoolwork or raising Maddex.

"Mrs. Sharion is my friend," Campbell said. "I don't think I would have made it without her."

"Breanae is just so smart," Stephens said. "She can do anything she sets her mind to. The way she tackles her schoolwork is so, so impressive. And she's such a dedicated mother. She just needed a little help. We all need that from time to time."

With her help, Campbell sets periodic goals. As a result, she's become a better cook and gotten her young son in a routine. The family is safe and stable.

"It's an amazing feeling," Campbell said. "Now my son and I are close. Now that I can be with him, I know more about his personality. In Midland, he was with my mom and dad a lot so I could work. Now, I know him. I know his personality. I know everything about him."

Hope shines here

LaCheryal Royal came to Family Pathways in Midland a "broken" woman. She has blossomed since. Counseling and support groups have helped her learn how to set boundaries with others. She's gained confidence as she completed her classwork for her elementary school teaching certification.

Now, the once "broken" woman has the brightest smile in every room. She's warm, caring and outgoing. She may not yet be in front of a classroom, but she's already putting her skills to use with her children, ages 2 and 4, with nightly lessons on reading and basic skills.

"She is our go-to person," Sindy Muro, Midland program director said. "She helps us all the time. She's part of our resident council. She puts together our monthly newsletter. She's a role model here for the other women. She's strong in her faith and that shows to the other women."

Royal enjoys each moment of her new life, soaking in the sounds of her children's laughter, playing games with them at the dinner table and working on a book she hopes will encourage other women in difficult places.

"I didn't want to be seen as another black single mom," she said. "I didn't want to be a statistic. But once I gave it to God, I realized that's a worldly label. My kids need to be safe. They need so much more than me worrying about being a label. What I was afraid of is exactly what I've embraced. I love it."

Now she sees an even brighter future on the horizon for her family. She's an elementary teacher and her children go to school where she works. Her family is safe, secure and able to help others.

"I made a covenant in here with God," Royal said. "I want to give back. When I transition to being fully financially independent, I want to give back. I have not lacked for anything. My kids have not lacked for anything." **BT**



Jasper matching grant empowers others to help Buckner fight for families

Sitting around the dinner table with the Jaspers, the East Texas family's bond is tangible. It can be felt in each hug, story and burst of laughter. They love, support and encourage each other because they know how important it is that families are strong.

That's why they're so passionate about helping Buckner Family Pathways strengthen single-parent families. Serving in eight locations across the state, Family Pathways provides single-parent families safe, secure housing, child care assistance and a variety of other resources so single parents can attain their higher education goals and stabilize their families.

"Family is so important to us," said Jane E Jasper Campbell. "Buckner tries to keep families together. Family is hard in general. You throw financial burdens into that, and it's harder. We love that Buckner is fighting to keep families together through the program."

The Jaspers have seen first-hand the impact Family Pathways has in Longview. They've met single moms and their children who are thriving in school. They see smiles on faces where there once weren't any. For some of these families, they have hope for the first time in their lives.

"It's so uplifting," Brent Jasper said. "You see lives flourishing. You see lives being changed. Whether that's kids in a room or mom's in a classroom excelling in their education, we want to multiply that."

To increase the ministry, the Jaspers are offering a matching grant this summer to support Family Pathways, doubling gifts made toward the program. In the past 20 years, Family Pathways has impacted more than 5,800 individuals, transforming 1,900 families in the process.

"I hope we see a whole lot more of what we've seen," Jon Jasper said. "We want to see more young women whose lives have been changed."

Family Pathways makes dreams attainable for single-parent families. A significant number of the Family Pathways moms have encountered abuse in various forms. Many of the families come out of generations of poverty.

Research repeatedly shows that education is the key to increased earning power and family stability. These parents often are the first members of their family to go to college, let alone complete it. Earning a college degree instills confidence in the parents and sets the stage for success throughout life.

"Buckner addresses those basic needs: I need somewhere to live. I need somewhere my kids are safe. I need to be able to support my kids in the future," said Carrie-Ann Jasper Yearty. "That's what every parent wants. This provides an opportunity that they otherwise may not have: two to three years to get their feet underneath them." **BT**





Shine this Summer

Single parents across Texas are struggling. Struggling to find enough time. Struggling to improve their lives. Struggling to provide for their children.

This summer, you can make a difference by shining light on the path to a better life for these vulnerable families. **It's easier than ever before, thanks to a generous donor family who is offering a \$100,000 matching grant to support Buckner Family Pathways.**

Because of your support of Family Pathways, parents can strengthen themselves and their families as they pursue their educational goals, giving them the skills to earn higher paying jobs. Increased income empowers parents to give their children the kind of life they dream of each day.

**Give today and your
gift will be doubled
to strengthen more
families.**



BUCKNER®

Hope shines here.®



Family ties

Buckner Kenya
ministries
strengthen
families to
protect children

Story by Scott Collins

Photography by Mark Sandlin



Rhoda Anyolo stokes the fire and fans the flame of her oven. The bread is ready to bake and soon customers will be stopping by to purchase Anyolo's products.

A broad smile creases her face as Anyolo talks about her life – a life she almost lost to cervical cancer. But today, she is happy and healthy, caring for her children and grandchildren and providing economic stability she thought was impossible before she found the Buckner Family Hope Center at the Seed of Hope Orphanage in rural Kitale, Kenya.



Rhoda Anyolo

"The Family Hope Center taught me how to save money and strengthened my spiritual life," Anyolo says. "They helped me to be economically empowered by helping me start my bakery."

Throughout Kenya, Buckner social workers emphasize the importance of economic empowerment for poor families struggling to care for children and grandchildren. At Family Hope Centers in five key locations, Buckner is giving families like Anyolo's the tools they need to generate income to support two and sometimes three generations living together.

"What we've realized is that our families will never be successful unless we teach them how to fish; it's better than being given a fish," says Dickson Masindano, Buckner Kenya country director. "We utilize the things that they know and where they live and what they can do,

their education and even the resources they already have and then we train them from that point."

Masindano says the key for many families served by Buckner is teaching them to save, "creating a savings culture. We teach them how to begin saving from this little resource they have, creating a saving culture in them and then investing those savings so that they learn to create a continuous income for their families and that enables us to empower the families."

For Anyolo, saving part of the income she generates from her bakery business enabled her to buy 17 chickens, 25 chicks, two sheep and rabbits.

"My life has been completely changed by the teachings I've received on economic empowerment," she says.

While the key to Anyolo's success has been her bakery business, Emily Lei Lei has made the most of a small portion of land she owns near the Herbert Reynolds Center outside Cherangani. Named for former Baylor University President Herbert Reynolds, the Family Hope Center there took what little resources Lei Lei had and is helping her transform them into income that allows her to feed her five children.

It started when Lei Lei underwent surgery. But because she had no support system, her surgical wounds became infected and she nearly died. "I was bedridden and hopeless," she says. A neighbor helped her get to the medical clinic at the Reynolds Center and the treatment there saved her life.



Emily Lei Lei

A photograph of a person in a green shirt crouching in a traditional outdoor kitchen. The kitchen is built with large, rough-hewn stones. A fire burns in a central hearth, with a large metal pot placed over it. Steam rises from the pot. To the left, a yellow plastic container sits on a stone ledge. In the foreground, there are several plastic containers, including a blue pitcher and a purple bucket. The background shows a simple structure with wooden pillars and a dark interior.

Cultivating financial success

Buckner Family Hope Centers in Kenya are helping families re-examine their resources and use those skills and items to generate income that will help them be self-sustaining.

A widow whose husband died in 2007, Lei Lei was left destitute and unable to care for her children. On the verge of starvation, she and her children were introduced to the Buckner team at the Reynolds Center, who helped her with medical issues and family problems. Buckner staff provided family coaching and through that, taught Lei Lei how to transform her land into an income-generating asset. Along with providing food, the income is now enabling her to pay school fees so her children can get an education.

"I am so grateful for the family coaching program because it is teaching me how to take care of my family," she says.

Family Plan

Connecting economic independence with strengthening families keeps children in homes, according to Masindano.

"Buckner is very strong in terms of the family," he says. "We, as an organization, insist on strengthening families. We insist that children must live in a family. We want to see children growing up in the family. That way, a child will grow up to understand where he or she belongs and where they come from."

With that mindset, Masindano and the Buckner Kenya staff have built the entire ministry around providing permanent solutions for vulnerable children, a belief that utilizes Family Hope Centers, foster care, kinship care, adoption, education, micro-finance and healthcare to build strong families where children are protected and safe.

"The Family Hope Center targets the family and provides the necessary training that is needed, which means we're equipping the family in the key areas that make them healthy," says Rosemary Wasilwa, Buckner Kenya's Family Hope Center manager.

"We target the family. We train the family and the long-term effect is the family is able to raise healthy children."

While much of Buckner work in Kenya today pivots on the Family Hope Center, it all started more than 17 years ago when Buckner took over operations of the Baptist Children's Center in the capital of Nairobi. At the time, BCC was caring for about 30 children in two small buildings.

Masindano was just graduating from Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, with a master's degree when Buckner hired him as its first Kenyan employee. He has run the ministry ever since.

Masindano led Buckner to transform BCC into a short-term shelter for children while introducing foster care to Kenya. Eventually, BCC became a waystation for children headed to foster or kinship homes.

"Initially, we looked at just the one child," he says. "But now we are focused on the family and we're seeing even more transformation. We're seeing families change and empowered to work their way in

life and this is what really excites me."

After 17 years, Masindano says the hard work is paying off and Buckner Kenya is one of the leading child care organizations in the country, working with some of the top officials in the government to develop new models to care for vulnerable children.

Masindano is passionate when he talks about ensuring children grow up in families and not institutions like children's homes or orphanages.

"We're seeing the results of our hard work and investment in the lives of children and families," he said. "When we started, we didn't have enough resources, both physical and human resources. But God has blessed us.

"We've become stronger in terms of creating alternative family care for our children instead of keeping them in institutions and our focus is more about creating a family for every child instead of having children stay in institutions."

Today, Buckner Kenya is serving more than 500 children across Kenya directly through intensive care. "That's a big stride forward for us since our inception," Masindano adds.

Fostering hope, caring for kin



Maxwell Okuta lives with his 86-year-old grandmother Maria Okuta. Maria was forced to take in Maxwell and two other grandchildren when three of her five children died. Maxwell, 17, entered the Buckner Kinship Care program in 2006, when he was only 6 years old.

Buckner has helped Maxwell and Maria stabilize their economic situation, allowing Maxwell to attend school. Someday he wants to be a civil engineer and build roads and buildings. Living with his grandmother through the Buckner Kinship Care program means Maxwell has a chance to fulfill that dream.

"I have someone behind me who can look after me and takes care of me," he said. "She knows all my problems and supports me



so much.”

Maria is part of a Buckner foster care and kinship group in Busia that supports each other economically, socially and spiritually. Their combined resources are shared among the group to help children when each family has needs.

That support is critical for foster and kinship care families who are often living in poverty.

Placing vulnerable children in foster and kinship care has been part of Buckner Kenya’s ministries for nearly 15 years. It was one of the first programs Masindano introduced to the country after taking over BCC. Last year, 270 children lived in Buckner foster and kinship care homes.

Ann Nyabayo, a Buckner social worker in Busia, says the kinship program changes the direction of children’s lives every day.

“We are able to visit them in their homes and see the children in school and track their progress. We see them improving and being empowered to grow and achieve their dreams,” she says.

On the horizon

While Buckner Kenya’s reach over the past 17 years has exploded, Masindano sees even more opportunities to have an

impact on the country’s vulnerable children and families. To ensure the future, he is leading the staff to develop economic sustainability for the organization. Last year, Buckner Kenya generated nearly one-third of the income it needed to meet its budget, meaning less dependency on U.S. sources of funding from Buckner International. Through entrepreneurial business development that includes making and selling bricks, growing and selling vegetables, chickens and cows, and generating energy to cut down on expenses, Buckner Kenya is modeling the kind of self-sustainability it teaches families.

“We have to be creative so that we can sustain ourselves,” Masindano says. “We have created a department within our organization that is specifically handling business ideas through business development.”

The combination of generating in-country revenue and expanding programs leads Masindano to say the “future for Buckner in Kenya is huge. We have strong leadership and involvement from younger people and our connection to local churches and the government is important.

“We want to touch many families and change many lives in the communities where we serve.” **BT**



Kenya:

The heart of Africa

A photo essay by Mark Sandlin



From vibrant cities to rural outposts

Buckner Kenya serves in the busiest parts of the nation as well as in more rural locales, tailoring its programs to the families it serves in each location. Each place offers specific resources that can be used to stabilize families.







Diverse needs, diverse ministry

Because Buckner serves in such diverse areas, it seeks to meet a wide variety of needs by providing medical clinics, schools for children and family strengthening efforts for children. These efforts address the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of the people in these communities. As a result, families grow closer together and move toward self-sufficiency.



A photograph of a cluttered workspace, likely a workshop or studio. In the foreground, there are several tools including a blue-handled screwdriver and a metal rod. The background is filled with various items like newspapers, papers, and other tools, creating a sense of a busy, creative environment. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the textures of the materials.

Artistic freedom

Story by Scott Collins
Photography by Mark Sandlin

The room is smaller than your closet. Three men work quietly as their hands slowly and carefully pull apart banana leaves, gently tearing each leaf longways.

The room is stifling hot and a whiff of glue permeates the air. Old newspapers are scattered around the room and line the walls.

The men's knees nearly touch, but they are so engrossed in their task, they barely notice each other, much less a group of visitors admiring their work.



Creating a new life

Thomas crafts cards with care. A refugee from Rwanda, he taught Willys Indah the unique technique of making items from banana leaves and fibers. Indah has turned that skill into a company.



ABOVE: Willys Indah's art supports his family, including 14 children he has taken in. **BELOW:** Willys Indah shows Buckner President/CEO Albert Reyes one of the pieces he recently created.



In this small corner of Kenya, tucked away inside a nondescript alley and hidden in the maze of walkways and paths it takes to get here, Willys Indah has found freedom. He has also found a way to make the Bible come alive in visual art.

Using a unique art form, Indah and his employees make cards and posters from banana leaves or fibers. Each piece is individually handmade and one-of-a-kind.

While the small business provides income for Indah, it gives him something money can't buy.

"Spiritually, it helps me relate to God," he said. "When I do this, physically, I feel like I'm touching Jesus. And at the same time, you know you are spreading the word of God through this visual medium."

Indah learned his craft 20 years ago from his friend Thomas, a refugee from Rwanda who is also one of the men working alongside Indah now. It wasn't until Indah started working with the team from Buckner Kenya that he realized his art could also be his income. The Buckner team helped Indah put together a business plan to sell his products.

Today, his products are available through 27 & Oak, a Buckner-run cooperative of artisans served by Buckner Family Hope

Centers in Latin America and Kenya. Profits from 27 & Oak go back to the artists to help them and a portion of the revenue helps Buckner programs.

That income allows Indah to care for 20 people, including 14 children he has taken in, among them his foster daughter, Jen Rose.

And while Indah's recent connection to Buckner centers around his artwork, his relationship with the organization goes back nearly 16 years, when he became the first-ever Buckner foster parent in Kenya, taking in Jen Rose and raising her as his own daughter. Today, she is studying civil engineering at the University of Nairobi and Indah uses his art income to pay all of her college expenses, including tuition.



"You know, giving a chance to a kid that's not your own child is amazing; it's a beautiful thing," Indah said. "Buckner has done a great thing, not only for Jen Rose, but for so many other children.

"I love children," he added. "Remember, it was Jesus who said, 'Let the children come to me.' That's why I love children.

"The greatest blessing God has given me is allowing me to take care of children and other people around me. I think as Christians, actions preach more than words. You may not be in the pulpit, but just taking care of the needy teaches people the word of God. You become the salt of the earth."

Now 50, Indah was stricken by polio when he was 5. He needs the aid of crutches to walk. But that doesn't slow him down.

"Disability is not liability," he said, a wry grin crossing his face. "Disability is in the mind. What can I do? After all, everyone is limited in one way or another. I don't say I enjoy being disabled. I tell people I enjoy living with a disability, because you have to learn to live with no regrets." **BT**

To learn how you can purchase Willys Indah's cards, go to www.27andoak.com.

Financing Futures

Buckner micro-finance system enables, empowers families

A little here. A little there. Before long, a little turns into a lot – or at least, more than a little.

That's the theory behind a micro-finance system used by Buckner Kenya to help families gain financial sustainability so they can care for their children.

The Buckner Kenya Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization (SACCO) functions much like a credit union in the United States. SACCOs are popular throughout Kenya. A SACCO is owned, managed and run by members who invest money in the SACCO and can borrow from it.



Buckner is using its SACCO to help families served by Buckner Family Hope Centers in Kenya start small businesses. Individuals can invest in the SACCO with a small amount of money after they have gone through the Family Hope Center equipping process. Even Buckner Kenya employees invest in the SACCO.

With guidance from Buckner staff, families who deposit funds with the SACCO develop a business plan and qualify to borrow up to three times their shares and pay about 1 percent interest, compared to banks in Kenya that charge up to 24 percent.

The results can be seen throughout the country as families invest and borrow to purchase everything from seeds to chickens and cows. **BT**

Through the fire

Kenyan orphan finds hope through Buckner International

Samwel Meraba has a slight scar on the left side of his head. It's a constant reminder of the fire he escaped as a small boy – a fire that took the lives of both his parents and made Meraba an orphan.

And while the physical scar may be visible, it's not as noticeable as Meraba's smile, which lights up at the mention of how his life is turning out.

At age 6, Meraba's grandparents took him to the Seed of Hope Orphanage on the outskirts of Kitale, Kenya. Seed of Hope was started by German evangelical missionaries, but today it is part of the ministry of Buckner Kenya, an arm of Buckner International.

Seed of Hope became Meraba's home until he graduated from high school and later a local teacher's college where he trained as a primary school teacher. Teaching youngsters was something Meraba knew he wanted to do because of his experience at Seed of Hope.



"Being at Seed of Hope transformed my life from my bad background," Meraba said. "I can see that there is light and hope."

I've seen my dreams come true at Seed of Hope."

That dream was to one day return home to Seed of Hope, a dream that was fulfilled last year when Meraba joined the faculty of the Seed of Hope Primary School. Today, he teaches Swahili, social studies and Bible classes. It's his way of giving back.

"It's good for me to raise other children and to be a good example to them," he said. "I give them hope and show them that they can also make it in life."

"I want to give more because Buckner has shown me how to share and how to help other people grow up. I want to give as they have given to me."

In addition to his role as a teacher at the school, Meraba gives back through his church, Ecclesia, where he is a praise and worship leader, playing the electric piano and teaching the children at the church to sing.

"For me, music is what empowers me. Sometimes after work, when I'm tired, I listen to music and it builds my faith in God."

Without Buckner, Meraba believes his life would have been completely different.

"Through Buckner, I can now do things for myself. Buckner has helped me work and gives me the opportunity to give back," he added.

When he teaches the school children about the life of Jesus, Meraba said he teaches them to share, as Jesus did.

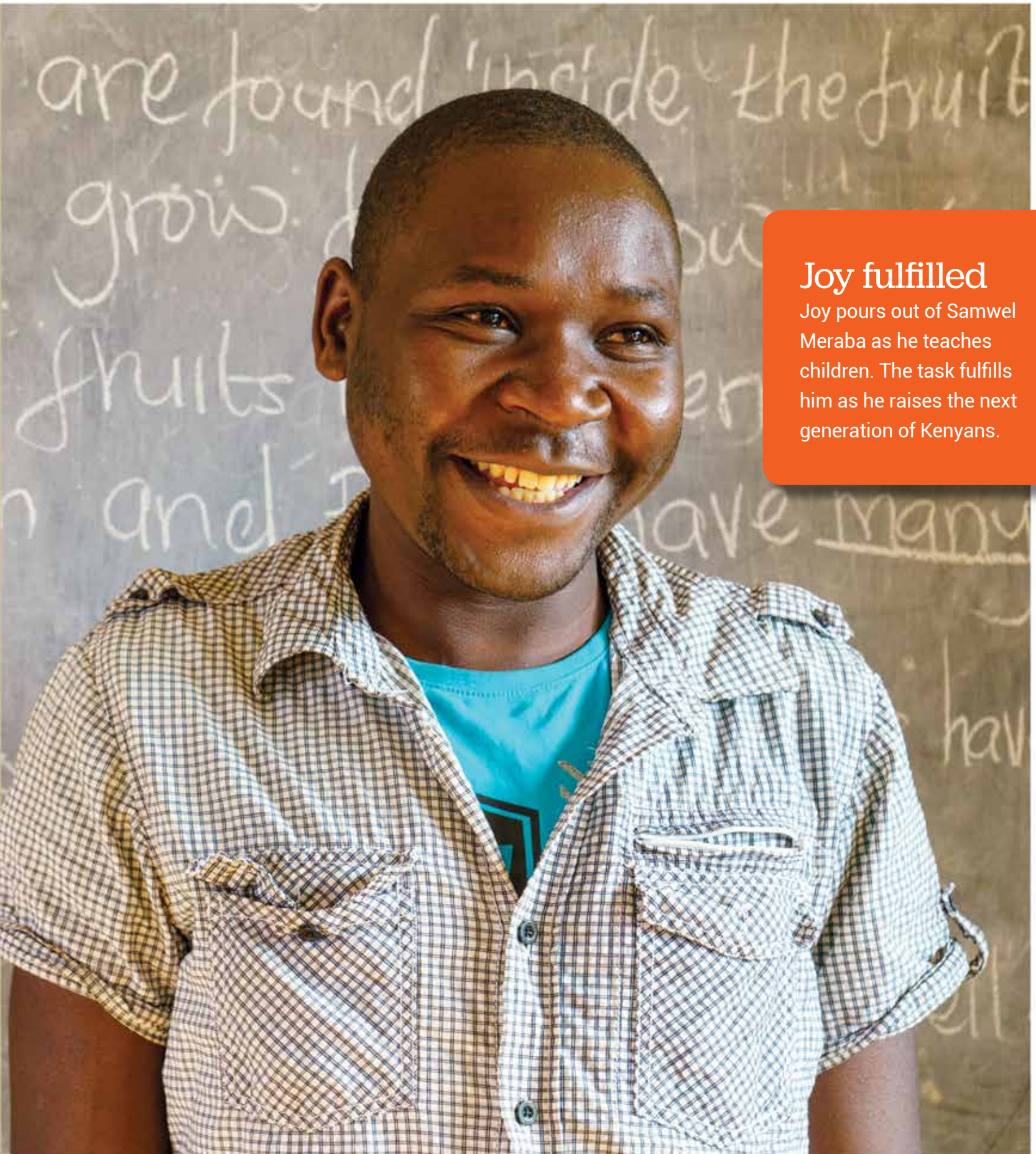
"We should emulate Jesus, because he shared and we should share with people and help them, just as Jesus did. I also teach about love, because Jesus also loves us."

Meraba said his relationship with Christ is the most important thing to him, because "without Jesus Christ, I would not be the way I am. He is the one who provides for me. Jesus is my best friend."

"I do things from my heart," he said. "I am a happy person who is loving and caring." **BT**

Story by
Scott Collins

Photography by
Mark Sandlin



Joy fulfilled

Joy pours out of Samwel Meraba as he teaches children. The task fulfills him as he raises the next generation of Kenyans.

Every child belongs in a family

Buckner leading the way for adoption in Kenya

Pauline Njonge remembers the embarrassment her mother felt the first time Njonge visited with her own daughter, Samantha. It's a painful memory that today has turned into a lesson in acceptance.

"My mom didn't want me to take Samantha out," Njonge recalled. "She was afraid of what the neighbors would say. But I kept telling her that we had to be confident and know that I had done the right thing.

"Now, she even takes the child from me when I visit and they want to keep Samantha overnight. They tell me, 'We'll bring her to you tomorrow.'"

The lesson for Njonge and her mom is that adoption is OK. In fact, Njonge tells people "adoption is divine. There's a reason why God gives you a certain child."

Crossing that cultural divide has been one of the major challenges facing Buckner staff as the organization has emerged as the leading adoption agency in Kenya. In 2017, Buckner Kenya placed 78 children with adoptive families.

That trend, known as "global permanency," is becoming one of the most important ministries for Buckner. As inter-country adoptions to the United States have fallen dramatically in recent years, children in other countries who might have been adopted by American families are left in limbo.

That's why Buckner is ramping up global permanency in countries where it serves. The results are taking hold

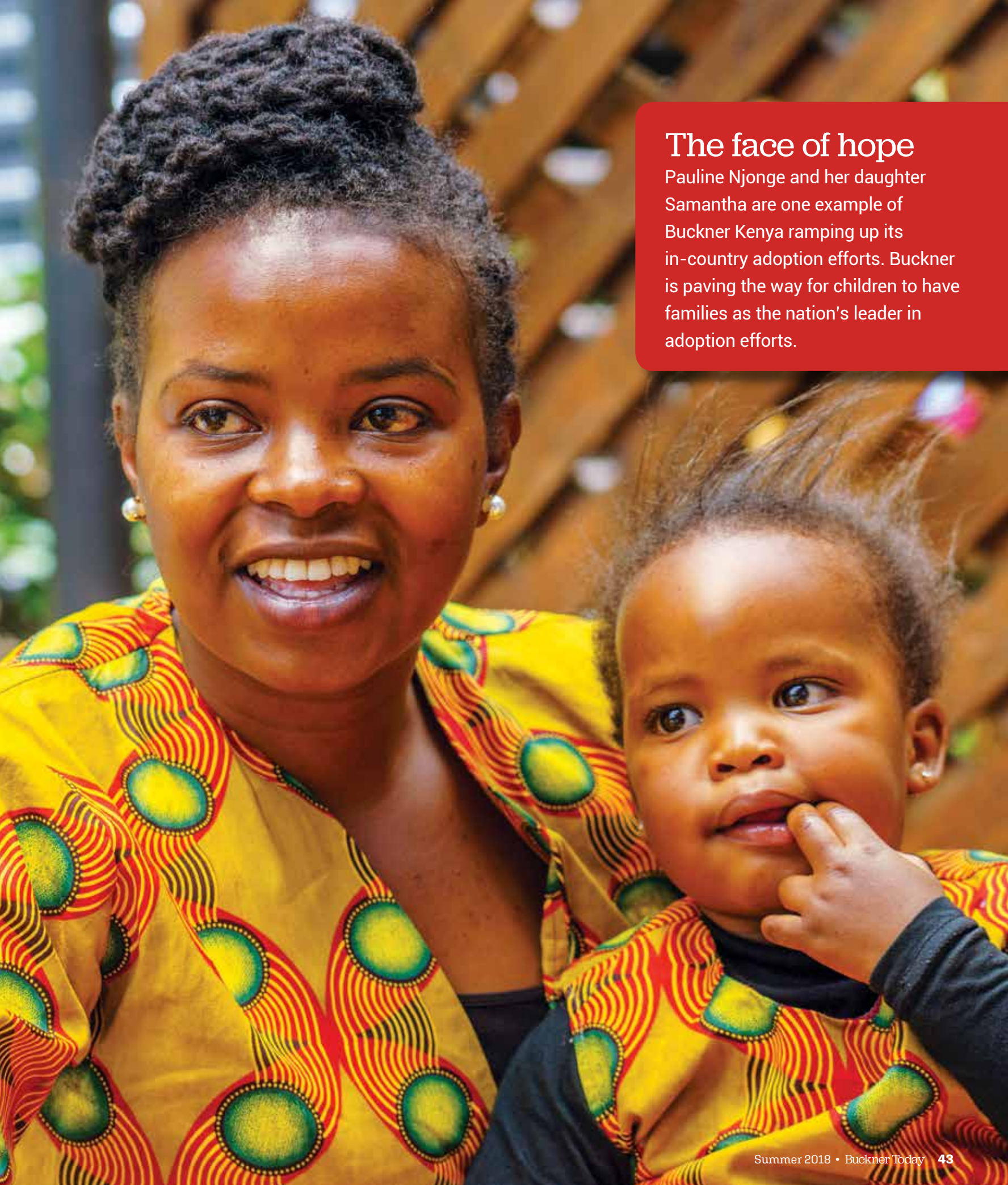
and Buckner is quickly becoming the leader among U.S.-based agencies. Officials at Buckner say in-country adoption provides permanency for children who might otherwise be left in institutions or to fend for themselves. Growing the global permanency model fits Buckner's biblical premise that children belong in families – and preferably permanent families.

"We insist that family is the cornerstone of what we do," said Dickson Masindano, country director for Buckner Kenya. "So, adoption creates an opportunity for a child to belong to a family."

Margaret Sanganyi, a Buckner Kenya adoption case worker, sees her role as protecting children by placing them in adoptive families ensuring those children grow up outside of institutions.

"In all the studies done, it's obvious that a child who grows up in an institution does not grow holistically," she said. "So, it's best when a child is brought up in a family setting. Getting them out of institutions and into families where they are going to feel loved, cared for, and wanted like any other child is critical. In the children's home, you don't have anyone you can call mommy or daddy. They need to be in families," she stressed. "That's the gospel that even Jesus was preaching."

Story by
Scott Collins
Photography by
Mark Sandlin



The face of hope

Pauline Njonge and her daughter Samantha are one example of Buckner Kenya ramping up its in-country adoption efforts. Buckner is paving the way for children to have families as the nation's leader in adoption efforts.



Our family

Eric Oyodi and Linet Gwengi come to Buckner Kenya with their adopted daughter Amore.

Masindano said Buckner's commitment to placing children in families is rooted in the belief that children thrive in families, not orphanages.

"The family is so dynamic," he said. "In the family you learn by observation. You learn the values of the family. The family creates an opportunity for a child to grow without being succumbed to the rules that train him to be a robot."

That sentiment is echoed by Eric Oyondi and his wife Linet Gwengi who adopted their daughter Amore through Buckner.

"I do not believe that children belong in a children's home," Gwengi said. "They belong in families. We all belong in families. I believe every child needs a family."

While family is the center of Kenyan (and African) society and culture, adoption faces hurdles for many people, from the adoptive parents to their extended family. Many people interpret a family's adoption as an inability to have biological children, a stigma still prevalent in many corners of the continent.

That stigma has led to adoption having very low awareness in Kenya, according to Masindano.

"Awareness is low," he said. "Not many families or couples know what adoption is all about, so it creates a challenge to explain it to people."



Dickson Masindano

“I do not believe that children belong in a children’s home. They belong in families. We all belong in families. I believe every child needs a family.”

—Linet Gwengi, who adopted her daughter Amore through Buckner



The most zealous advocates for adoption in Kenya are families who have adopted, like Robert Mwangi and Esther Thuo, who adopted their daughter Collette through Buckner.

"I feel called to create awareness about adoption because I feel the best place to bring up a child is in a family environment," Thuo said. "I would like to make people aware that adoption is not hard; adoption is something good. Adoption is divine. I always say adoption is doing something for God. And when you do something for God, you always get a blessing."

Adoptive parent Oyondi said adopting his daughter Amore "demystified the issue of adoption for us, because for many people it's a mystery; it's an unknown. Then you find that it's something normal and it's something you can do. We just love having Amore in our family. She's a joy to us."

And he is quick to point out that adoption is biblical.



Robert, Esther and Collette Mwangi

"We are all children of God who have been adopted by him," Oyondi said. "God has adopted us, so actually adoption starts in the Bible. After all, Moses was adopted, too."

Buckner adoption caseworker Mary Kamiri said the clouds surrounding adoption in Kenya are beginning to clear as more families speak out about adoption.

Those stories include Buckner families adopting children and helping change the perception among fellow Kenyans, she said.

"I love seeing children in happy families, in forever families," Kamiri said. "I just love witnessing a child who has been abandoned or who is homeless, without someone to call mommy or daddy, finding a forever family. I feel so proud to be

associated with making a lifetime change in the life of a child."

For the Buckner adoption team, their work is an extension of their Christian faith. Sanganyi described her work as an act of service.

"We are doing service," she said. "Our work is all about service to our community, just the way Jesus would have done. If Jesus were here, he would do exactly what we are doing, offering service to the less fortunate, the orphans and vulnerable within our community."

Today, Samantha is so much a part of Njonge's life "sometimes I don't remember she's adopted. She's everything to me. She's everything I prayed for."

Oyondi and Gwengi agree adopting Amore has changed their lives in every way.

"If I were to start describing Amore, I would not even have the adjectives and the words to use," Gwengi said. "She means the whole world to us. She's a gem. She's the most beautiful thing that is upending our lives and she is a blessing to our family. She is a joy. She is God-sent." **BT**

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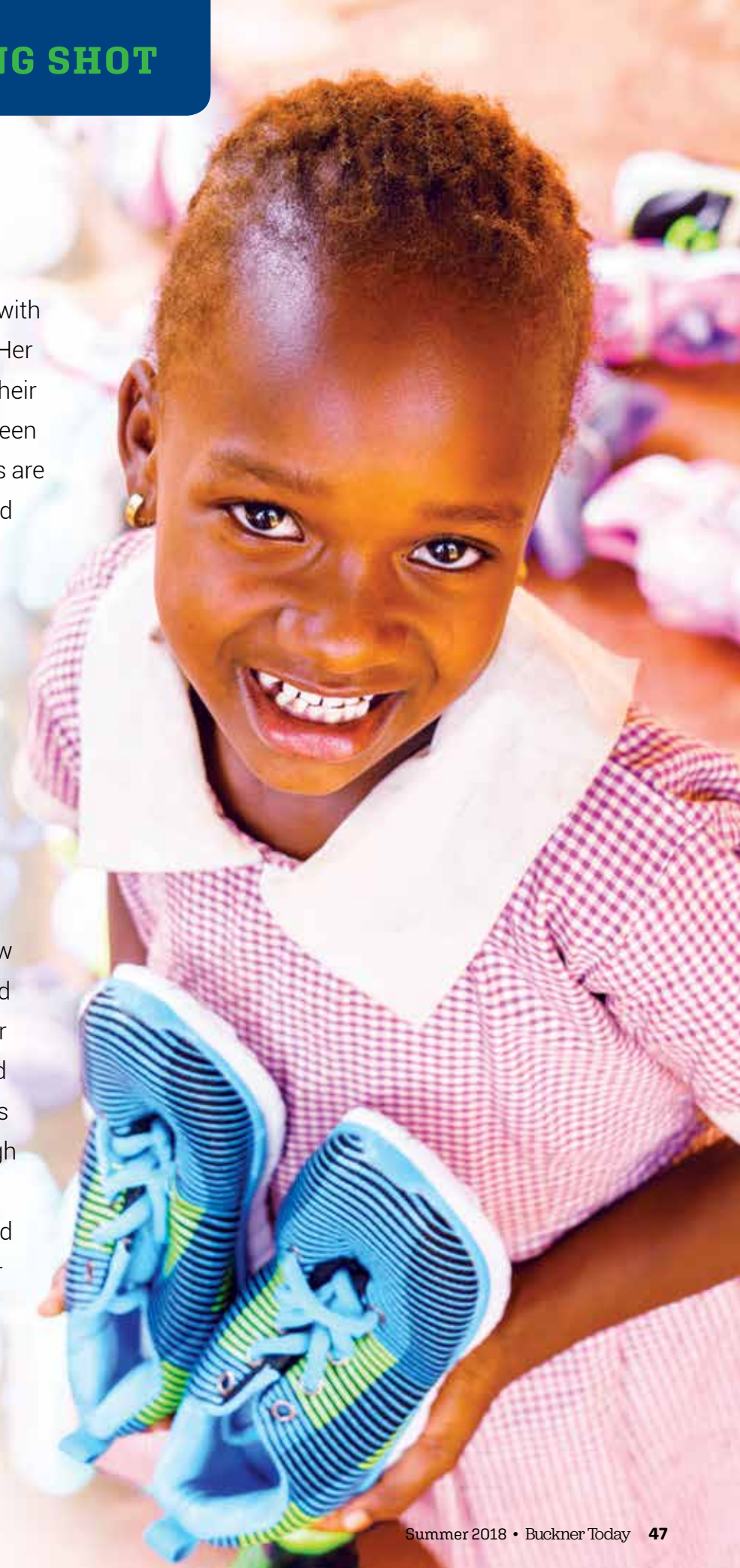
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Princess

Six-year-old Princess Apiyo lives with her grandmother in Busia, Kenya. Her grandmother is the sole provider for their family and money is sparse. Princess has seen a lot of tragedy in her young life. Her parents are not a part of her life and her twin sister died when they were young. Her grandmother works hard to provide for her, but it is a challenge. Buckner Kenya has been able to relieve some of the financial burden on her family and has given them hope.

Princess attends a school near her grandmother's house operated by Buckner. There, Princess is assured a quality and affordable education, warm meals and other assistance. Because her grandmother was unable to buy her new shoes, Princess would trek to school in old sandals that provided little protection to her feet as she walked across dirt and pebbled roads to school. Recently, Princess was able to receive a new pair of shoes through Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®.

As she held her new shoes, she smiled brightly. It's one example of the way Buckner Kenya is working through the lives of Princess and her grandmother, offering them hope for a bright future.



Buckner International

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