

See inside for ways you can support families.

# Buckner

The magazine of Buckner International | Summer 2019

Today

Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® celebrates



# Buckner

A publication of Buckner International • **Volume 44, Number 2 • Summer 2019**

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**Clarification:** In the last issue of Buckner Today, we detailed Juan Pablo Wiggins' return to Guatemala years after being adopted by the Wiggins family in the United States. When he was 18 months old in Guatemala, a gas explosion burned his face, forcing him to spend six months in a hospital.

# Hope Now

*Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from Albert Reyes' new book, Hope Now: Peace, Healing, and Justice When the Kingdom Comes Near (Iron Stream Media Publishers). The book is being released this summer.*

Most of my pastoral ministry emphasized evangelism, discipleship, church planting and missions with very little focus on social ministry. I don't recall a time in my pastoral ministry when I was focused on the physical, emotional or economic well-being of people in my circles of influence.

My concern focused on their spiritual needs rather than their material needs. While I am deeply indebted and grateful for my experience in seminary, the concept of caring for people in practical ways, looking for solutions to life's most pressing issues like hunger, thirst, injustice, access to resources, access to education, the opportunity to grow up in a family, economic stability, and a long list of items associated with a life of privilege were all foreign concepts to me.

When pastoral ministry needs confronted me with the practical needs of the people I served, I was not equipped to help meet them. My journey to Christ, early experiences in my local church, my experience as a growing disciple of Jesus, my theological training, and my practice as a pastor were missing something, creating a blind spot in my ministry. I was blind to the needs of others and unsure what I could do when faced with the daily struggles of the people I served.

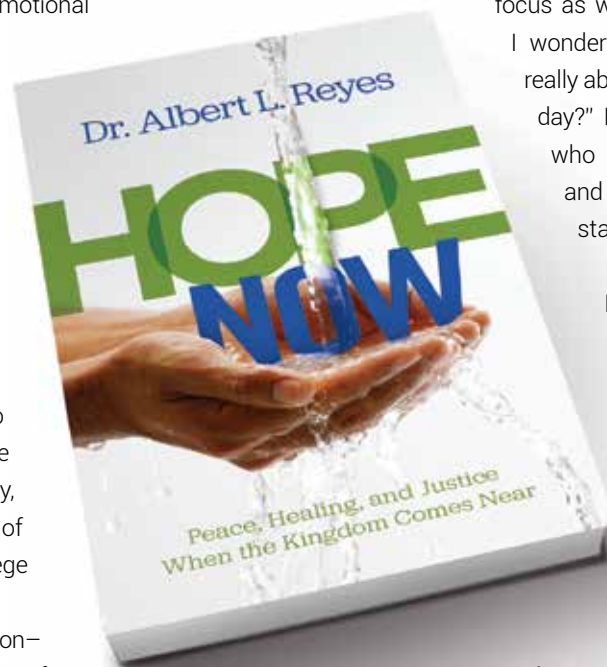
Could there be more to faith and practice not only as a pastor but as a follower of Jesus? What would it mean for the kingdom of God to be real and present in the here and now of my ministry of serving others? What was expected of me as a follower of Jesus and leader in his church? What commands was I to follow serving those in my circle of influence? How would I live out my

life as a seeker of God's Kingdom?

I often wondered, "Am I supposed to help people improve in their living contexts?" Or, "Is my assignment to share the gospel message and truth about the claims of Christ and the power to transform lives and families? Or am I to do both? And should my focus be limited to individuals and families, or should I be concerned about the whole community and life context?" Would the community, the environment and the city be my focus as well? After all, this is where people live. I wondered, "Is this what pastoral ministry is really about ... serving people in deep need every day?" I observed other pastors of churches who seemed to focus on spiritual issues and delegated meeting physical needs to a staff or church member.

When I looked in my ministry tool box, I found tools I needed to provide good sermons, Bible studies, counseling support and spiritual development but very little to address the trauma families were experiencing right in front of me. I knew from a theological perspective the gospel was powerful enough to transform lives and that the Lord, himself, as redeemer could take what was intended for harm and turn it into good. I knew that the redeemer's kingdom, if it came close enough, would make a difference in the lives of those I was serving, but how did this happen, in practical terms?

I don't really know how, in traveling through my ministry journey, I was so oblivious to the basic needs of the people around me. Perhaps most of the people I grew up with had their basic needs met. These kinds of needs did not seem to stand out to me as a young man. My theological training in a Master of Divinity program did not seem to emphasize human welfare solutions and frameworks to address these issues. Something was missing. The nuts and bolts of practical application of the peace of God and the nearness of the kingdom did not seem to surface in my graduate studies. I accepted my first pastoral assignments



# “This new leadership assignment led me to re-examine the basic teachings of Christ, the difference his incarnational presence made and the challenge of imitating him in our daily interactions with people in our community.” –Albert Reyes

with little knowledge and ability to respond to the cries for hope, the desperate needs of hurting people, and the deep wounds of traumatized people.

My sensitivity toward meeting basic needs of people in ministry leap-frogged when I was called to serve at Buckner International in 2007. In 2010 I was elected the sixth president of Buckner. This ministry positioned me right at the feet of vulnerable children who experienced abandonment, abuse and neglect; with children who became orphans lacking parents and family; and with families who desperately struggled to survive. I felt the Lord called me directly to my blind spots. It was time for me to stretch even more; to face hard life issues up close and personal; to inspire and lead staff to become the hands and feet of Jesus.

This new leadership assignment led me to re-examine the basic teachings of Christ, the difference his incarnational presence made, and the challenge of imitating him in our daily interactions with people in our community. I found myself face-to-face with some of the most horrible conditions innocent children could face. I faced situations of neglect, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, complete abandonment and a sense of being alone in the world. My heart was broken, but this time I was surrounded by extremely competent and trained social work staff who knew what to do and willingly jumped in to make a difference, to find solutions and to create healthy family environments where children were loved and could thrive. I wondered if there was a biblical foundation for the kind of ministry I was doing. I wondered what my theological underpinnings would be. I wondered what Jesus had to say about these situations and what he did to transform lives.

## False dichotomy

As I found the other side of the coin of ministry: evangelism on one side and ministering to the needs of people on the other, I became aware of two distinct schools of thought; maybe two distinct philosophies of ministry or two differing theological perspectives. Two camps seem to emerge: Those who hyper-focus on evangelism, church planting and missions through para-church or church ministries against those who hyper-focus on meeting personal needs of people in para-church or church ministries almost to the exclusion of a verbal witness. Rarely did I encounter groups that served both ends, both goals, both sides

of the coin. I felt like evangelical Christianity fell into two broad categories: evangelistic oriented groups and social-ministry oriented groups.

These two groups usually did not work together and were normally critical of each other. This apparent division may even be more evident in the wider church leading to varying levels of kingdom impact and ineffectiveness. I believe both camps are alive and well today in churches, para-church organizations and ministries. The problem is they represent a false dichotomy not found in Scripture and not supported in the teachings of Jesus. These two groups operate from only one side of the coin and tend to be oblivious to the notion there is another side. They often do not consider that it is a stewardship to be faithful to or a command of Jesus to be followed.

## Why I chose to write this book

I wrote this book to rediscover a biblical understanding of Jesus, his life and work, as well as his commands related to a holistic approach to meeting human needs, both spiritual and physical. It is an effort to document the meaning of peace, healing, justice and the possibility of his kingdom coming near in our lives, in our families and in our communities. It is my hope that in defining this biblical and Jesus-focused approach to ministry, we might find a sense of unity in evangelical Christianity on these issues. I hope this will address the split in our thinking, the false dichotomy, the discontinuity in our theology and practice, and issue a call to unity and to a more biblical approach, a holistic approach to serving others by bringing the kingdom near. This book is an effort to answer key questions that matter today in our hurting world and in our ministry. I admit I am on a journey, an inquiry into the heart of Jesus and his teachings, and I invite you to go with me to explore the meaning of bringing the kingdom near for people around us who need help, hope and the possibility of a better life, both now and in eternity. **BT**



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

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

# Redeemed

I was sitting across from Karlee Knuth in her Family Pathways apartment in Longview, Texas, interviewing her for a video. The camera was rolling and lights flooded the room. (See page 14)

We were at the end of the shoot when I asked Karlee to name a song – any song – that best describes her life since coming to Buckner.

Without pause, she instantly said the popular Christian song, "Redeemed."

"I'm just redeemed," Karlee said. "Being redeemed means that I am not the same person I was. That I am a new creation in Christ and God loves me. I am redeemed. Everything that I've done before, I don't have to feel guilty for that anymore. I'm new. I'm a new creation."

To fully understand the impact of that statement, it's important to know the old creation she was and everything she had done. She spent most of her previous life on drugs, even when she was pregnant. At one point, she was homeless and pregnant with her second son. That's when Child Protective Services got involved and removed her boys.

If redeemed describes her life now, a fighter might be who she has always been. Losing her boys changed her life. She connected with a local agency that helped her kick her habits and that opened the door to Family Pathways.

"It was just an amazing feeling to know that I was going to go the next step with my kids and they weren't going to have the same mom anymore," she said. "He (God) just loves me and he loves my kids and he loves my kids even more than I love my kids, which I can't even understand that all.

"My biggest thing is, once you find that unconditional love from God, you don't need that love from everybody else. I was searching for that love in something that was not there. Now I have that love."

And then Karlee took our tagline and gave it new meaning.

"Hope shines here means that this is the light. This is the light of God to me. You're not living in the darkness anymore." **BT**



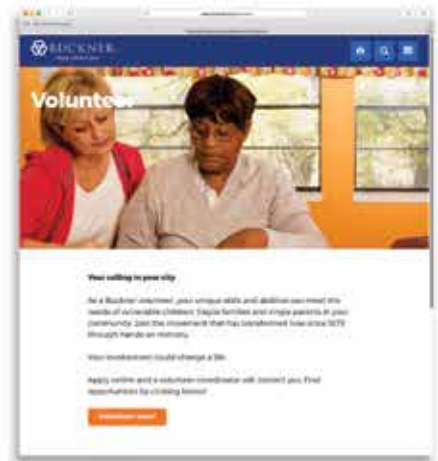
Scott Collins is Vice President of Communications at Buckner International.

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Thanks to the generosity of people across the United States, millions of vulnerable children around the world have hope today as a result of the gift of a pair of new shoes through Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls®. More than 3 million pairs of shoes have been donated and distributed to children in more than 80 countries, paving the way for transformed lives. **Learn more at [buckner.org/shoes](http://buckner.org/shoes).**

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!




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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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# Patricia Heaton talks about family and service at Buckner Hope for Children benefit in Dallas



**E**mma Award-winning actress Patricia Heaton, best known for her role as Debra Barone on the series "Everybody Loves Raymond," talked about the importance of faith, family and service to those in need during the Buckner Hope for Children benefit May 7 in Dallas.

Never shy about proclaiming her Christian faith, Heaton shared about her experience with family and how she uses her influence to help vulnerable people around the world by highlighting the work of nonprofits during a question-and-answer interview format with WFAA Channel 8 news anchor Cynthia Izaguirre.

"In order to sustain a commitment to an organization, it helps if you can be hands-on and see results in real time," Heaton said. "I always recommend that if someone is looking to share their gifts with a charitable organization to start in your own community .... There's no shortage of organizations that could use great volunteers, and it's a great way to meet people and feel really connected to the place you live."

During his keynote address, Buckner President and CEO Albert Reyes spoke on the importance of volunteers and friends of Buckner who are helping vulnerable children in foster care.

"There are 443,000 children in the United States living in foster care," Reyes said. "Where will they go? Who will be there for them? We must ask ourselves that question because the answer has eternal consequences for boys and girls.

"I want to say thank you to each of you here tonight. Thank you for being a blessing to children and shining hope into their lives. You are changing the world one child at a time. Because of you, children know they are welcomed by Jesus."

Heaton also spoke during a luncheon prior to the Hope for Children benefit, honoring foster mothers for their service and National Foster Care Month.

"Patricia Heaton has long used her platform as an acclaimed actress to help inspire change in the world through advocacy and philanthropy," Reyes said. "We hope her words on the importance of family and service to others will likewise inspire those in our community to become involved with Buckner, whether it be through volunteering, annual gifts or spreading our message of hope and ministry." **BT**



# 3

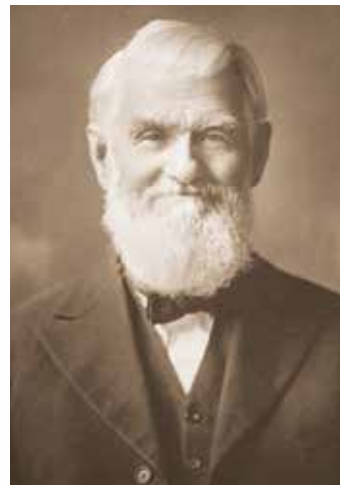
Reasons  
we're  
excited  
at  
Buckner!

## Happy birthday!



This year marks the 140th year Buckner International has partnered with you to transform the lives of children and families as well as inspired happiness in the lives of seniors.

From the ministry's beginnings as



an orphans home in East Dallas, Buckner has expanded to serve across Texas as well as in six foreign countries. Thanks to you, Buckner has protected thousands of children from abuse and neglect, strengthened the families of millions and improved the lives of countless seniors.

God has blessed

Buckner in the past 140 years. Here's to an even brighter future for children, families and seniors!



## Buckner opens first West Texas Family Hope Center!



Struggling Lubbock families have new hope thanks to a Buckner ministry that opened recently in the area.

The grand opening of the Buckner Family Hope Center in Lubbock was commemorated with a public ribbon cutting and reception. The event marked the official start of programs and services for West Texas' first Family Hope Center, which is a community-based place of hope where families go to find strength and empowerment to reach their God-given potential.



"We are incredibly blessed to open our doors to the community," said Angelina Rodriguez, who was announced as the center's director in January. Rodriguez previously worked as Buckner Lubbock's Foster Care Home Developer Supervisor.

"Buckner Family Hope Centers are our preventative approach to reducing the rate of family disintegration and number of children who end up in the system. Families who come to the Buckner Family Hope Center will find the tools and support needed to grow stronger and break the cycle of poverty through education and jobs."

## Ventana by Buckner, Stephan Pyles come together for seniors!



Buckner Senior Living and celebrated restaurateur Stephan Pyles have entered into an agreement to develop five dining and drink concept establishments within Ventana by Buckner, a \$140 million high-rise Life Care retirement community in North Dallas opening later this year.

Pyles, dubbed the father of modern Texas and Southwest cuisine, will devise and develop five food and beverage concepts exclusive to Ventana. Collaborating with a nutritionist, Pyles will craft breakfast, lunch, dinner and specialty drink menus that cater to the health needs of senior adults while also providing the acclaimed dining experience Pyles' legacy is built around.

"I want Ventana's members to know they're in for a great experience when it comes to dining," Pyles said. "It's not going to just be food for sustenance. It's going to be an experience. I want to deliver a restaurant quality experience at Ventana, so they're going to have choices." **BT**



# Calder Woods unveils community expansion

**B**uckner Retirement Services recently unveiled its expansion and renovation project at Buckner Calder Woods, Southeast Texas' premiere faith-based, nonprofit senior living community.

The project included an 80,000-square-foot expansion and 51,000-square-foot renovation, resulting in a new wellness center and 67 additional residences.



Buckner Calder Woods' improvements include two new three-story garden apartment buildings, which adds 36 independent living apartments to the community. In addition, all independent living common areas were renovated, and a state-of-the-art wellness center was constructed. The wellness center includes an indoor pool, gym, activity space and bistro.

Two skilled nursing small house cottages were also built, which adds 24 skilled nursing rooms. All skilled nursing and assisted living common areas were renovated, while the assisted living wing was

expanded to include seven new apartments.

"We are proud to bring together our community with the greater community of Beaumont to reveal the fruits of our labor," said Buckner Calder Woods Executive Director Ben Mazzara. "These extensive expansions and renovations ensure Calder Woods will continue to provide the best senior living options in Southeast Texas – all in one community."

Located in Beaumont's growing West End, Buckner Calder Woods is a 17-acre community providing affordable senior living. As Beaumont's only faith-based, nonprofit Life Plan Community, Buckner Calder Woods offers a full continuum of senior living and care on site, so residents can have the peace of mind knowing their address can remain the same despite changing medical needs.

Since 1970, Buckner has served the Beaumont community through the ministry of Buckner Children's Village, which serves the most vulnerable children in the community. Today, Buckner's local ministries include Calder Woods, which opened in 2000 to serve the area's seniors.

"Buckner opened Calder Woods nearly two decades ago in direct response to local faith leaders who approached our nonprofit in 1998 seeking a faith-based senior living community for Beaumont," said Charlie Wilson, Buckner Retirement Services senior vice president.

"Beaumont's leaders expressed the desire for a 'mission-driven community for seniors' who, at the time, were having to relocate to Houston to find a faith-based senior living community. We are proud to continue to meet that need and faithfully serve seniors in Southeast Texas while inspiring happiness during the next stage of their lives." **BT**





# A DELICIOUS COLLABORATION



Food is a connector. To each other,  
and to our most basic needs in life.  
So why not make it great?

– CHEF **STEPHAN PYLES**



STEPHAN PYLES

When Ventana opens its doors this summer, it will also open a window to the most progressive and exciting dining experience of any senior living community across the country: three unique dining venues curated by Dallas' own "Father of modern Texas and Southwest cuisine", Chef Stephan Pyles.

Designed exclusively for Ventana, each venue will be unique, with distinct menu selections that delight the sophisticated palate while catering to the health needs of Ventana members. It is truly a groundbreaking concept.

With a mission to inspire happiness, Ventana is set to do so at every meal, every day.

With a select few residences remaining, and a limited time to secure the current Life Care benefits, now is the time to secure your private tour and view our available floor plans.

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LIFE CARE MEETS LUXURY IN THE PARK CITIES

# “This is full circle”

Story by  
John Hall



# The death of a mother changes everything. So when Angela Phillips' grandmother died, the family stability of her mother and her eight siblings was in jeopardy.

Phillips' great-grandmother stepped up and cared for the children. But she needed help, so she turned to Buckner Orphans Home in Dallas. The family loaded up in the car each Sunday for years and drove to the campus for a variety of help – anything from food to clothes.

"That was just a staple for the family to keep it together," Phillips said. "It really was."

Thirty years later, Phillips was looking for a place where she could volunteer and help children when she heard about the Buckner Family Hope Center at Reed Road in Houston.

"When I learned it was the same organization, I just said, 'Oh my God. This is full circle. I have to serve this organization.'"

Phillips helps children with their homework and reading skills each week during the Family Hope Center's after-school program. The initiative serves vulnerable children who live with their families as part of the Star of Hope community, which serves the impoverished.

Children who live in poverty are more likely to fall behind their peers academically, especially during the summer break between school years, and the Family Hope Center's after-school program stands in the gap for the children it serves. Some of the children at the center are reading at least two grade levels below where they should.

As a teacher, dyslexia interventionist and soon-to-be assistant principal, Phillips knows it's nearly impossible for teachers to fit everything they need to teach in the time allotted. Tutoring helped her children make it through school. Now Phillips is helping others do likewise.

"As a volunteer here, I tutor," she said. "And it's funny, I walked through the door, and Carson, I've only tutored him twice, he says, 'I have homework.' And I said, 'Boy come on in here, and let's get this homework done.' I have a passion for tutoring. I've always been that teacher that rallied and recruited other teachers to tutor."

Phillips goes beyond the Family Hope Center to advocate for the children as well, even visiting with leaders at the Houston Independent School District about ways to help.

"These children are living in a shelter," she said. "They're having trouble reading. That's two horrible strikes. We need to get these children the help."

The Family Hope Center opened last fall and is learning where



students are academically and how to best help. Phillips admits at this point, she's "drilling and killing" work with the students to help them through the school year. But this summer, large gains will occur.

"I think during the summer we can put some real intervention in place, because I'll have the data; the district has agreed to release the data to me," Phillips said. "And I can know specifically where they are, and we can work on those gaps over the summer."

"I hope to get students on grade level. And I know that that is possible with the right resources and right people in place. I know that it could happen because I've seen it happen."

Phillips knows each step these children take academically greatly increases their chance at a better future.

"If you can't read, you aren't going to function properly in life," she said. "You are not going to be a productive citizen, point blank period. So, why not catch it now?" **BT**



BT

## A new start, a new mom

*Through Buckner Family Pathways in Longview, Texas, Karlee Knuth has established a foundation for success – for her and her sons.*



“I grew up with parents who were drug addicts and they were there, but they weren’t there emotionally and everything. When I was 12 years old, my parents went to prison,” Karlee Knuth remembers. “I really thought that I was going to go in the opposite direction of my parents.”

# Becoming the person she was **born to be**

Story by John Hall • Photography by Russ Dilday



The words hang in the air as Knuth begins to share her story. They're foreboding and heavy, so much so that she takes a breath before she continues. Because as Neil Gaiman once wrote: "As we age, we become our parents; live long enough and we see faces repeat in time."

After graduating high school, Knuth fell deeply in love with a young man. When he left, her world fell apart. A roommate introduced her to methamphetamines.

"It took the pain away," she confesses. "I loved it because I didn't have to feel. So, I started using and after that I ended up losing things. I ended up having to move back home and I was the kid that was going to succeed and all these younger siblings looking up to me. I felt like I failed my whole family. So, I just got worse into it. Just deeper into the drugs and the lifestyle."

She met a man. He also used drugs. Two weeks later, she found out she was pregnant.

After giving birth to Kyler, her subsequent journey is like that of many addicts: paved with good intentions and effort followed by dark times.

Knuth went to rehab. She stayed clean for a month.

Then her dad died. She began using again.

She quit. It lasted three years. Then Kyler's father got out of prison. She started again.

She went to prison. Child Protective Services removed Kyler from her care for eight months. She kept using.



She moved in with her mom to get clean. Her mom was using too. They used together.

Kyler's father was released from prison a second time. He and Knuth got back together, and Knuth

**“I got into Buckner Family Pathways. It was like the greatest thing ever, and it was just an amazing feeling just to know that I was going to go the next step with my kids, and they weren’t going to have the same mom anymore.”** *–Karlee Knuth*

---

became pregnant again. Kase was born shortly after.

“It was the biggest blessing in disguise for me because I ended up leaving, this time leaving willingly like this is never going to work with my baby daddy,” Knuth says.

She entered into a drug rehab program and clung to her sobriety. After six months being clean, she started working with Heartisan’s Marketplace, a nonprofit organization in Longview, Texas, that helps women become self-sufficient. From there, she decided she wanted to go college.

“I got into Buckner Family Pathways,” she says. “It was like the greatest thing ever, and it was just an amazing feeling just to know that I was going to go the next step with my kids, and they weren’t going to have the same mom anymore.”

The ministry wrapped its arms around Knuth and helped with “a million different things.” A safe, secure home. Parenting skills. Financial budgeting tools. Tutoring.

“There’s all kinds of different things that Buckner provides here,” Knuth says. “It’s just insane. I could go on and on about it. I’m very grateful of Buckner.”

Knuth has connected strongly with God, finding fullness in a relationship with him. She no longer seeks the approval of others to fill her needs; she is a child of God. She no longer dwells on her past, but looks forward to a bright future.

“Once you find that unconditional love from God, you don’t need that love from everybody else or that man I was searching for for so long. I was searching for that love in something that was not there. Now that I have that love with God, that love doesn’t matter.

Thanks to her hard work and the influence of Buckner, Knuth can move in the opposite direction of her parents. She’s a different person. And it’s making all the difference for her children.

“I think the biggest impact for my boys is they have consistency,

stability. They see me succeeding so they want to do the same thing and I just feel like the stability and the consistency is the biggest thing. I think, that they – especially my 10-year-old boy ‘cause he’s been through it with me – sees his mom differently. There’s all kinds of things though that go into that.” **BT**



# Shine hope this summer

---

**K**rystal survived domestic violence, and she and her children found themselves in another desperate situation not long after.

*"I had a job, but I only made enough money to rent a home or eat meals. Not both. So we were living with friends, and it started to disrupt my children's lives. I remember crying out to God, 'I just need you to provide because I don't know how this is going to work.'*

*Then I found out about Buckner. For the first time, I knew we were going to be OK."*

Because of generous supporters, the Buckner family was there for Krystal in her crisis.

Buckner Family Pathways provided safe, secure housing for Krystal and her children and allowed her to go to college, setting the family up for long-term success. With a firm foundation in place, Krystal and her children are thriving thanks to your support.

*"It's one thing to know what hope means, or the definition. But when you've lived it and it's part of your life story, it just has brand-new meaning. And that's what Buckner has given me and my kids."*

**"... Then I found  
out about Buckner.  
For the first time,  
I knew we were  
going to be OK."**





**D**DOUBLE your impact on single-parent families by giving today, thanks to a \$100,000 matching grant.

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hope  
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**BUCKNER**  
Hope shines here.®



# Welcome

Story by John Hall • Photos by Mika Mitchell

---

**W**hen I knock on the Ostrandersons door, I can already feel the energy behind it. Laughter pours through the walls of the home. Michelle opens the door and greets me warmly as people whirl around the large family room behind her. She's warm and kind as she lets me in. But it's the quietest person in the room who welcomes me.

Silently, an elementary-age boy slips his hand around two of my fingers. He leads me around the house, stopping in each doorway with minimal explanation. "This is mom's room. This is where we eat. This is where the toys are. You'll love them. This is *my* room."

At the end of the tour, he squeezes my fingers just a bit tighter for a moment and looks up at me. Without saying a word, I know exactly what he's communicating: *It's OK to be new. I was too. You'll be safe here. You'll be loved here.*

Family is a cherished concept for the Ostranders. For them, it's a source of energy and compassion, a mark of pride. Aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters and cousins are regularly together. Their home is a cocoon of energy and love. Being part of their family is more than a birthright; it's a bond that makes you special.

Ostranders help, stick up for and encourage each other. They support people no matter where they come from or how hard the circumstances. And they extend that attitude toward others as often as possible.

"Family to me was almost anybody really connected in your life," Jerry Ostrander says. "Anybody that's over a lot, close, because my grandma was one of 14. To me, it's anybody that's around all the time. When we bring our foster kids in, they're family. They're here. They do everything with us."

In the past two years, Jerry and Michelle have cared for 11 children through Buckner foster care. They specialize in caring for therapeutic children in the foster care system, young people who have higher level needs. These children are often harder to place with families, putting them at risk of never knowing a loving home.

"I requested special needs," Michelle says. "I love special needs. I love everything about them. They intrigue me. Just the things that they can do. The things that they want to do. They're so innocent."

The Lubbock couple loves to see how children blossom in a loving environment. Young people come to the Ostranders for a variety of reasons through the foster system, most commonly neglect or abuse.

The Ostrander home becomes a place of refuge for children. They learn they can relax. They don't have to worry about anything. They can simply be cherished for who they are.

That's when they grow. Children learn, laugh and love. They take significant steps in their development. Often they surprise others with how much they know and accomplish.

One child in particular captured the Ostranders' hearts. "His time was about to be up at a shelter, and he needed a place to go," Michelle says. "I got lucky, and Buckner called me and asked me if we would care for him. I was like 'Yes!' We got him. He is just

amazing."

Colton bonded quickly with Michelle. She became "his person." They did everything together. She was the rock he could cling to. Soon after, he was bouncing around the house making friends as quickly as he was making them laugh.

Though they were strictly a foster home, the Ostranders knew Colton was meant to be a permanent part of their home. They adopted him at the beginning of 2019.

"He's made a good fit with our family," Jerry says. "He gets along with everybody great. Everybody has a good time."



Michelle Ostrander hugs son Colton after dinner. The Ostranders make it a point to welcome people into their home, including 11 children through foster care in two years.

When Jerry and Michelle think about Colton and the other children they've had the opportunity to care for, a smile spreads across their faces. They still keep in touch with many of the children. They're thriving and growing. Just like the Ostranders' family.

"When I hear 'hope shines here,' it makes me just think, when you see the hope come out in the kids' eyes, when they realize they're safe," Jerry says. "You see their dreams, and them shining, and the hope coming into their eyes." **BT**



# The little shoes changed

 **BUCKNER SHOES**  
FOR ORPHAN SOULS®

Hope shines here.®



be drive that  
the world



The world was so much bigger in 1994. For those born in this millennium, it's almost impossible to overstate just how true that is. The Internet was still a mystery hidden behind the beeps and whistles of dial-up modems. International travel was rare and expensive. All of us were coming out of the shadow of the Cold War as we discovered what life was like in Eastern Europe.

That's the stage a small KCBI radio mission team was working on when it traveled to underfunded, overcrowded Russian orphanages. They encountered incredible people serving amazing children in dire circumstances.

"We talked to orphanage directors [about what we could do], and what emerged again was a need for shoes," said Ron Harris, who was leading KCBI at the time. "Almost every list was shoes. 'We desperately need shoes.'"

It was such a simple request, but an immense need. Because these children didn't have strong shoes, they were susceptible to diseases and infections they would contract through small cuts on the bottom of their feet. Parasites would enter their bodies, leading to dysentery and a weakening of their bodies.

The Dallas-based radio station sought to help. Leaders thought they might raise 400-500 pairs of shoes. Listeners responded by donating more than 5,000 pairs. And they did so every year through 1998.

### **A movement was born.**

One shoe drive led to another. Then another. And another. Churches. Schools. Businesses. Bible studies. People were moved by the realization that they could help vulnerable children around the world. They told their friends, family and co-workers.





BT

## It started in Russia.

*Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls began as the KCBI-led Shoes for Russian Souls in 1994. The radio station discovered a need for shoes in Russian orphanages and sought to help.*



*Buckner President Emeritus Ken Hall places a new pair of shoes on the feet of children. Hall served as president when KCBI handed Shoes for Orphan Souls to Buckner in 1999. The ministry has since taken the program to unforeseen heights.*

The effort exploded, gaining so much momentum that it outgrew KCBI's capacity to run it. The station turned to Buckner.

"God clearly was doing something special," said Ken Hall, Buckner president and CEO at the time. "Everyone could see it. It was undeniable. The only question was what was the next step in this journey? KCBI knew about our work with vulnerable children, knew our passion and our expertise, and felt God wanted us to carry the torch of changing children's lives through shoes forward. We were and continue to be honored to do so."

If the radio drives were an explosion of activity, the effort known as Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® became a supernova. People donated more than 20,000 pairs of shoes the first year under Buckner. The initiative reached beyond Dallas and soon after well beyond Texas.

Drives were happening so quickly, the ministry had to lease space in a mall in order to house all of the shoes. Boxes and boxes showed up at Buckner through the mail and delivered by hand. Thousands of volunteers began sorting, prepping and boxing shoes to be shipped, first to Russia, then all around the globe when the supply became big enough.

In a few short years, more than 100,000 pairs of shoes were

being donated annually. Drives happened in all 50 states and even internationally as other countries saw how they could help within their own borders. More than 3 million shoes have been donated since 1999.

Hundreds of people each year participated in shoe distribution mission trips through Buckner, seeing the impact donated shoes have first hand.

"It's hard to put into words just how moving it is to kneel in front of a child and wash their feet like Jesus did with the disciples, wiping away the dirt and the muck, then placing a new pair of socks and shoes where tatters once were," said Rachel Wallis, director of Shoes for Orphan Souls. "The joy a child expresses in that moment of receiving what is often their first pair of new shoes is overwhelming."

Buckner built a 45,000-square foot Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid largely for shoes, but also for other items such as clothes, school supplies and water filters. Buckner has shipped shoes to more than 80 countries, shining hope into the lives of children.

In each location, a pair of shoes is used as a way to foster a conversation with a family struggling in poverty. While helping

a child, ministries like Buckner can share about other services they provide such as financial empowerment efforts, parenting classes and programming for children.

"The gift of a pair of shoes is often the first step in the transformation of the life of a child and a child's family," said Buckner President and CEO Albert Reyes. "After seeing how much Buckner cares for their children, families often enter the holistic programming of Buckner Family Hope Centers, where we help them reach their God-given potential."



That transformation is what continues to drive Shoes for Orphan Souls as it marches toward 4 million shoes and beyond. The need for shoes remains. As does the commitment of vast army of people who care about children.

"A new pair of shoes is so much more than simply new footwear," Wallis said "They provide health, the opportunity to go to school, opportunity for additional services through Buckner and hope for a better future. Children around the world know they are loved through the gift of a pair of shoes, and it's changing their lives." **BT**

## 'I will never forget how those shoes made me feel'

**N**atasha Potts remembers clearly how a simple pair of black boots through Shoes for Orphan Souls brought so much hope into her life at 12 years old. She lived in a Russian orphanage and didn't have "anything." These boots were the only thing she owned and she knew how much someone cared about her because of the generosity of the gift.

"I will never forget how those shoes made me feel," Natasha said.

Little did she realize how true that was. A photo was taken of Natasha and her brother with the new boots and published in Buckner Today and a Dallas couple saw it. Eventually, that couple would adopt the siblings.

"When Buckner arranged my adoption with my American family, I wore those boots home," Natasha said. **BT**



# Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls<sup>®</sup>: The first step in transforming a child's life

Many of us take our footwear for granted. But for vulnerable children in the United States and around the world, the gift of a pair of shoes is the simplest way to change a life.



Dulce gets to go to school.

Mom and dad hear about Buckner Family Hope Center programs and get involved.

The shoes protect Dulce's feet. She stays healthy.

Dulce gets new shoes!

## Shoes put children on a path to:

Dulce tells her friends about her shoes; more children find out about Buckner.



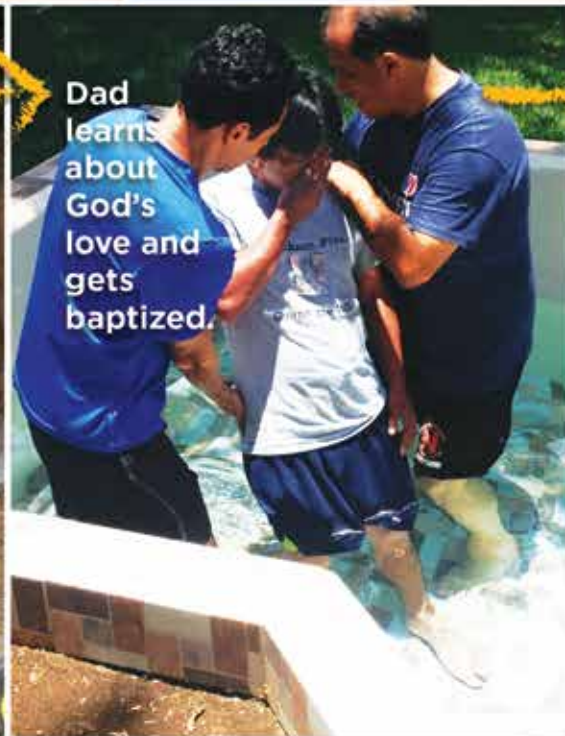
Other vulnerable children get involved at the Buckner Family Hope Center.



Home stabilizes.



Dad learns about God's love and gets baptized.



With new skills from the Family Hope Center, dad gets a better job to provide for family.

Mission team helps Dulce's family by providing funding for a new home.

## HEALTH

Shoes protect against disease and infection. In many developing countries, children walk barefoot in muddy, rocky terrain to gather clean water or go to school. Parasites and diseases can enter the body through cuts in the feet. These illnesses can stunt a child's growth and development, as well as cause lifelong mental damage.

## EDUCATION

Many schools around the world require children to wear shoes to attend, but for many poverty-stricken families, shoes are a luxury they cannot afford.



## HOPE

Typically, vulnerable children share everything — they do not have a single possession of their own. New shoes provide hope for these children that someone out there cares about them and loves them unconditionally.



## OPPORTUNITY

For many families, receiving shoes is often the first step to connect them to critical services, ministry and mentoring at the Buckner Family Hope Centers in their communities. Family Hope Center staff help families make plans for transformation and walk alongside them as their lives are transformed.

# Missouri rotarians: 320,000 pairs of shoes and counting

## Story and photography by Aimee Freston

**T**hroughout the years, Buckner Shoe for Orphan Souls® has partnered with many people to provide shoes for vulnerable children around the world, but Rotary District 6040 has been committed to children the longest.

For the last 18 years, Rotary District 6040 in North Missouri has collected over 320,000 pairs of shoes among all their clubs to give to Shoes for Orphan Souls. Larry Lunsford was district governor in 2001 and looking for a humanitarian international project the Rotary district could do together. When he discovered Shoes for Orphan Souls, he knew it was the perfect service project for rotarians.

The first year, they had a goal to collect 2,600 pairs of shoes – one pair of shoes for every rotarian in their district. What they actually collected was 7,000 shoes. It has only grown from there, now

averaging about 16,000 pairs of shoes annually.

But what makes their collection even more unique is the actual way they collect the shoes.

Instead of having 56 clubs drop off shoes at a central location, a group of rotarians caravan with a 53-foot trailer to all the communities throughout North Missouri and pick up the shoe donations.

"The project is certainly admittedly large in scale," Lunsford said. "But there was just something interesting and special about the dynamic of actually traveling to the Rotary communities. It reinforces their service. It reinforces their rotary club and it reinforces their community. And it's really neat to pull up in a 53-foot trailer in one of the local communities and see those community members come out and realize there's really meaning behind all this work."

For four days in the spring, the shoe caravan makes over 15



stops throughout Northern Missouri to pick up shoes donated by the Rotary district. The days start early and end late. The trip is grueling, but for those who participate in the caravan, it's their favorite time of the year.



"Our caravan stops are a hoot. You never know what you're going to find," said driver John Gill. "But this project is so near to my heart. The reason I do it is for the kids. You want to help the kids but we have this concept of gathering shoes and doing it together as a district. It's the shoestring of our district. This shoe project is what holds our clubs together and being able to caravan and pick up the shoes."



And it's something they don't intend to stop doing.

"It just continues my interest to continue to serve as the shoes cheerleader for Rotary District 6040," Lunsford said. "And we're looking forward to our 20th anniversary or even our 25th anniversary. This caravan has continued to show me that our Rotary clubs are in this project for the long haul and we keep looking forward to continuing to collect new shoes for orphans and vulnerable children with Shoes for Orphan Souls." **BT**

## 'Hope says it all'

**F**or Ed Wales, it was a morning commute like any other. As he made his way to work in 1999, he was listening to KCBI radio in Dallas as he did nearly every day. He enjoys the encouraging programming and uplifting music.

In between songs, the disc jockey shared a story about an orphanage overseas. The children there had no water. They were resorting to hand carrying water from a river in order to survive.

"I was so taken with that, I had to pull over," Wales said. "I pulled my car over on the side of the road and started crying. I just knew I had to get involved in that organization."



Shortly after, Wales was part of the first Buckner International trip in Russia serving in orphanages similar to the very ones he heard about that morning. The crack that formed in his heart that day on the highway grew to a full broken heart. There, he committed to helping children however he could.

After retiring in 2007, he stepped up that pledge when he "joined a bunch of faithful volunteers" each Wednesday to sort and pack items at the Buckner Center for Humanitarian Aid in Dallas.

"It's making a difference in God's kingdom. Kids all over the world are hurting. They don't have the same advantages we do. They need to have hope. I could not imagine growing up in those countries in the poverty they are and not have hope, something that says there are people out there who really care about me," he said.

"Hope is the word for me. Hope says it all." **BT**

# Christian radio: Carrying hope through the airwaves

Story and photography by Aimee Freston

**R**adio is where Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® all started, and it's a partnership that continues to grow each year.

Shoes for Orphan Souls began as a project of KCBI Radio in Dallas, Texas. Today, Buckner continues to work with radio partners to provide a unique opportunity for radio stations across the country to engage their listeners and broadcast a message of hope and redemption that is easy for listeners to identify with and connect to.

"I have had the privilege of visiting personally with parents whose families have gone from desperate to completely transformed by the love of Jesus. And it all started when their child was lovingly fitted with a new pair of shoes," said Sharon Geiger, assistant general manager/outreach director for KCBI Dallas. "Our partnership with Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls has been a blessing for our listeners – giving them an opportunity

to minister to people they may never meet by buying new pairs of shoes for children in need."

Whether it's through collecting shoes in a radio-sponsored shoe drive or participating in short-term mission trips to deliver shoes to vulnerable children, radio has the capacity to bring together entire communities anxious to live out the gospel in a tangible way.

"Through a simple gift of a pair of shoes, our generous listeners have opened the door for thousands of children to hear about the greatest gift of all – Jesus," said Paul Martin, senior announcer for 88.9 Moody Radio Chattanooga. "Our listeners resonate with such a simple message with a profound eternal impact."

The impact is staggering. On average, Shoes for Orphan Souls collects 30,000 pairs of shoes annually from radio

BT

## Traveling at the speed of sound

*Christian radio has been a crucial partner for Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls, empowering listeners to change the lives of millions of vulnerable children.*





partner shoe drives.

"The ability that Christian radio has to bring together entire communities – families, churches, civic organizations and businesses – for the sake of making an impact on the lives of children through this project is amazing," said Shawn Spurrier, assistant director of Shoes for Orphan Souls. "Our ability to impact the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of children and families throughout the world, can be directly traced back to the Buckner story being told by Christian radio. And for that, we are so grateful." **BT**



# Thank you Buckner supporters

Buckner wishes to thank the following corporations, foundations and other organizations for their charitable contributions of \$1,000 or more during the first quarter of 2019.

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## Buckner FYi Center: 'They just helped in so many ways'

Story by John Hall • Photo by Mika Mitchell

**B**renda entered the foster care system at 17. Her home life had gotten to the point that she decided she was better off elsewhere and moved in with her best friend and her best friend's parents.

There, she looked for where to go next. That's when she discovered the Buckner FYi Center in Lubbock, which provides a support network for teens aging out of foster care. The center equips young people with the skills and encouragement needed to succeed in the next stages of their lives.

"Those 6 months before I aged out, I met with Buckner for the longest time," Brenda says. "They just kind of help set you up for college and life in general. It was honestly amazing, the things that came out of the woods, some of these people I never knew. They just helped in so many ways."

Buckner staff members let her know what resources were available, including assistance with college tuition. They guided her through the application process to Texas Tech University and



helped her find a place of her own.

"I didn't even know anything about that, so honestly without Buckner, I wouldn't know I could apply for college and get into college for free pretty much," Brenda says.

Buckner coaches supported Brenda when she needed it. They also held her accountable. Brenda particularly bonded with Cindy Garza, her after care case manager, who also aged out of foster care.

"One of the main things that I really like about Buckner is you have to meet up with someone like Cindy once a month and you catch up on like, OK where are you at in life, what do you do in school, what are your goals," Brenda says.

"Cindy's like a mentor, but also that provides for you. She's almost like a second mom. Almost like your best friend's mom that you go over to her house and she has snacks in the pantry and she's kind of just like, 'I got you.' She's like that. I'm pretty sure I could call her with anything and she would be ready to help me out."

Brenda's working hard in the classroom and out. The Haitian native holds a job at a local coffee shop and strives to be a better person daily. With the knowledge she's gaining, she hopes to help people who are in the same situation she is.

"Ultimately, I would like to graduate with my bachelor's in global studies and political science and later on, get into this grad program at Tech," she says. "It's a dual-credited master's program with public health and administration, so it would mean three years into that then I would graduate and be able to work with nonprofits internationally. I would like to go home and help people, for sure. Like kids like me that don't have a resource like Buckner, or just a foster care system like, that's not a thing in my country, you know?" **BT**

# Shoes mean hope

The last Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls® drive before this issue was printed took place in Beaumont, Texas, where more than 2,500 pairs of shoes were donated to shine hope into the lives of vulnerable children.

It's a reminder of how deep and wide your commitment to vulnerable children has been in the last 20 years of Shoes for Orphan Souls. Drives have taken place in all 50 states, collecting more than 3 million shoes that have been distributed to more than 80 countries. As a result, the lives of children worldwide have been radically transformed. Children and families have been able to go to school, have a brighter future and get involved in broader Buckner ministries that have strengthened their families.

All this is because of you. You mean hope to vulnerable children. And we are eternally grateful.

Sincerely,

Rachel Wale:



Your Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls team.



# Buckner International

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