



A Family Legacy

BRIGHT FUTURES

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A Family Legacy (Continued)

Highfields' counselors teach the residents lessons and skills to develop better communication and independent living skills. Reggie says he was even able to apply the lessons and skills to his own life, making him a better communicator.

"I learned a lot about myself in that job," he said. "I learned how to deal with problems I might not have dealt with before."

He said while he was working at Highfields, one boy got into trouble, but his parents weren't there for him. But Reggie supported him. He encouraged him to go to Lansing Community College. From there, the boy went on to Arizona State University. He now has his own family and a good life in Arizona.

"I knew if I didn't turn my back on him, he would be OK," explained Reggie. "He just needed someone to believe in him."

Rodney and Ronnie also had times they gave emotional support to kids who needed it.

"That's why you get into that line of work," Rodney explained. "You like to see the kids' progress. You like to see them achieve their goals."

Growing up and watching her family work, Takarra knows firsthand the importance of making strong connections with the residents.

"My favorite part of the day is interacting with the kids and building relationships," she said. "It's rewarding." **BF**

Highfields Holiday Toy Drive



Every winter, WLNS and many Mid-Michigan Ford Dealers help our organization by giving us a place to host our annual Holiday Toy Drive. This year, thanks to many generous donations made by community members, we were able to give toys to children in 114 families. Here, you can see counselors Kim Zeiger and Dave Leese picking out toys for children in their client families. **BF**

This newsletter was created by Molly Linn. For questions or comments, she can be reached at mlinn@highfields.org, (517) 628-2287 ex. 334 or (906) 231-1284.

TaKarra Wilson takes after her dad and uncles. They're tough but they all have big hearts. That might be why they're so good at being residential counselors.

TaKarra has worked for Highfields as a residential counselor for about two years. She spends her days with the residents, offering them support and behavioral counseling when they need it and supervising their day-to-day routine.

frequently visited the residential campus and even made friends with some of the residents. She said seeing her dad and uncles working with so much passion really made an impact on her.

"They always seemed to have fun because they genuinely enjoyed their jobs," TaKarra said.

Ronnie said caring for others is simply a Wilson family trait.

"Our door was always open to anyone. It's just how we were raised."

"I've always enjoyed working with kids," she said.

Her dad, Reggie, worked for Highfields for 13 years. He was a residential counselor, a team leader, a substitute teacher and worked with the Youth Attention Program at the Onondaga Campus. His brothers, Ronnie and Rodney, worked right alongside him.

"Our mom was always taking in kids from the community when I was young, so it just comes naturally to me and my brothers," Reggie said. "My friends and other kids in the neighborhood called my mom, 'mom.' Our door was always open to anyone. It's just how we were raised."

When the brothers worked at Highfields in the '90s, TaKarra and her cousins

"It's a bonding thing for us and I think TaKarra really likes that," he said. "She likes building relationships with the kids." Just as TaKarra grew up knowing her dad and uncles loved their jobs, her father and uncles know she has the right qualities to excel as a residential counselor at Highfields.

"I knew she would be great at that," Reggie said. "She's always been a nurturer."

TaKarra said she thinks her family's ability to recognize when people make mistakes, to be caring and to be honest all help them to be great counselors.

"We're not perfect," she admitted. "That makes it easier to do the job, because we get it." **Continued on back.**

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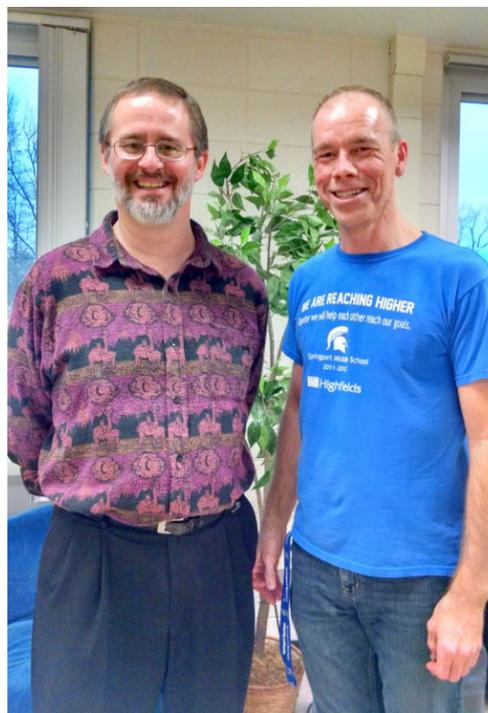
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When Teachers Play GAMES



Curtis Richard, left, and Dan Bright have brought GAMES to five afterschool program conferences this year.

When you give afterschool program facilitators a problem, they find an answer. That's what they are trained to do – think on their feet and find solutions.

Brenda Weck, Highfields' Reaching Higher project director, proved this last October. When she discovered that her coordinators may not be able to attend the Michigan AfterSchool Association Conference, she challenged them to get a workshop approved so they could attend as presenters.

Several teams formed and accepted her challenge. The approved team's workshop was called GAMES: Great Activities, More Engaged Students. The workshop is exactly what it sounds like: games—the very games that the workshop's creators, Dan Bright and Curtis Richard, play with their students at Reaching Higher.

"We thought, we have a cool program which gets kids involved," Curtis said. "Let's get it on the road."

The goal of GAMES is to teach hands-on, large-group activities that facilitators can include in their programs. Dan and Curtis teach GAMES in a simple and intuitive way. Instead of giving a lecture, they push the tables and chairs aside and actually play the games.

"Almost the entire workshop has our participants on their feet playing the different team building games," Dan said. "Participants are laughing and interacting with each other. I believe most come away from our workshops feeling like they spent their time wisely and learned something new."

The games are designed to improve communication skills, to demonstrate similarities between kids as well as to build sportsmanship.

Curtis said, since first launching these games, he has seen significant changes in kids' confidence and communication skills. He is proud to know his work has made such a big difference.

"It's nice to be able to go into work and know this is valuable," he said. "This has meaning. This could change a kid's life for the better."

Dan and Curtis have presented it four times already, including at the National AfterSchool Association Conference in New York City in March 2014

"I never dreamed I would be presenting national workshops in an educational setting," Dan said. "I'm enjoying every minute of it and I am excited to see what the future holds."

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Brenda said she is excited that Highfields and Reaching Higher are being considered at the same level as the presenters whose workshops she has been attending for years.

"It's validation that we're on the right track with our students," she said. **BF**

Even though it's chilly outside, we've been thinking about golf. Our annual golf outing will be on Monday, June 8 at Forest Akers West in Lansing, Mich. RSVP to Bev McGill at bmcgill@highfields.org or (517) 628-2287 ex. 332.



#GivingTuesday



#GivingTuesday is an international day of giving back. It comes after Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday to bring people together in the spirit of bettering their community.

This year, Highfields asked our community to help us make a difference in the lives of 45 children. We wanted to give 45

children the shoes needed to accomplish their running goals. Without these shoes, the children aren't able to safely practice and train. Often, their families cannot afford to buy them new running shoes.

Thanks to many generous donors this year, we were able to give 45 children, as one donor put it, soles for young souls. **BF**

52 Years of Positive Change



Since our beginning in 1962, Highfields has worked diligently to give people the second chances they deserve. We believe with the right resources and opportunities, people have the ability to take their lives into their own hands and create positive change. When you donate to Highfields, you are giving a family the chance to create a better future. Thanks to you, more than 6,000 lives changed for the better in 2014.

There are many ways to contribute to Highfields. Direct donations can be sent to **Highfields, 5123 Old Plank Road, Onondaga MI, 49264**. To contribute over the phone, call Bev McGill at (517) 628-2287 ex. 332. Online donations can be made at highfields.org/donate.

Our Mission

To provide opportunities to children, youth and families to be more responsible for their own lives and to strengthen their relationships with others.

Highfields Services

Highfields is a non-profit human services organization. While it began as a residential camp for at-risk boys in Ingham County, it has greatly expanded to serve over 6,000 people in 11 counties every year.

Highfields strives to meet people at their earliest point of need. With this in mind, our organization has grown to include community and educational services.

Our Community Services

Our Community Services bring help to a family's home when they really need it. Operating out of three satellite offices, our 11 different programs help families come together and heal using a variety of evidence-based practices to ensure success.

Our Educational Services

Our Educational Services include Ingham Academy, an alternative high school, and Evening Reporting, a program for court-involved youth improve their social and living skills. Reaching Higher is our afterschool program offered at seven area schools. At Reaching Higher, kids can get homework help, improve their social skills and explore their interests and talents.