VOLUNTEER **SPOTLIGHT**

Building *trust,* **Healing** *hearts*

Volunteering is a good thing. Volunteering to serve and love on at-risk children is an even better thing.

But often, when we volunteer, it turns out to be a bit harder than we might have expected. The best volunteers, like Sonya Chestnutt, understand even when the "job" is tough, these children deserve to have us keep coming back.

Sonya has known about Crossnore for years, even having a cousin who was a cottage parent here. Last spring, her church "adopted" a cottage and became Cottage Sponsors on our Avery campus. It was through this experience that Sonya looked into becoming a Visiting Resource.

Signing up as a Visiting Resource to form true connection and develop solid relationships with children who have experienced trauma is hard work. Teaching children to trust you when they have learned not all adults can be trusted is an exercise in consistency, patience, time, and unconditional love. It's certainly not all unicorns and rainbows, but it is worth every ounce of our time, prayer, and emotional energy.

Visiting Resources are volunteers who are paired with a child in Crossnore's care. Through this program, our children, many of whom may not have visits with their biological families, get the opportunity to create bonds and trusting relationships with adults. This is so important, as studies tell us that **having even one meaningful relationship with an adult can help a child heal and can literally change their future trajectory.**

Getting to Know Lisa*

Sonya has been the Visiting Resource for 14-year-old Lisa for eight months. Like most girls this age, Sonya says Lisa is into hair, makeup, and boys. Both Sonya and Lisa love Mexican food, coffee drinks, and ice cream, so those have been avenues to quality conversations and building trust. Sonya says that Lisa has even given her tips on her makeup and training her puppy!

But it's certainly not all makeup parties and puppy talk. Building trust is hard. Lisa has been skeptical, and conversation often does not come naturally. Sonya says, "It has not always been easy to build a bond with her, but it has definitely been worth the time and effort to try to build a relationship. She is opening up more and trusting me more as time goes on."

And building that trust is paying off. Sonya has learned a lot about Lisa in their time together. "Lisa is very family oriented," says Sonya. "I do hope that she can return home to her family successfully." And until that can happen, Sonya is happy to play a role in Lisa's healing and growth. "I hope to show her that someone, outside of her biological family and Crossnore employees, really does care about her. I want her to know I'm concerned about her happiness and well-being."

Sonya hopes Lisa will get to return home soon, consistently attend school, and make wise choices for her future. As a retired teacher, Sonya knows the value of staying in school and a quality education. "I also hope to teach her that she can always reach out to me, and that I will be there for her," says Sonya. Sonya wants for Lisa what we all want for our kids – a good education, eventual independence, and a happy future. And it's volunteers like Sonya who help make that happen.

"These children are desperate for good role models and to know that someone truly cares about them," she says. And the benefits are mutual. Building a relationship with Lisa has been tough but rewarding. She says the joy and blessings she's received in return are priceless.

What We Can Learn

It's true, too, that God teaches us so much in the struggle. When things aren't easy, when our endeavors take extra time, effort, and fortitude, that's when He teaches us so much about ourselves and pushes us to grow. So, as Lisa grows, Sonya grows too – both of them in trust, in love, in persistence, and in perspective.

Sonya says her Crossnore volunteering experiences have changed her for the better. "I feel so blessed to have these relationships. Working, playing, and being with the kids in our cottage [as a Cottage Sponsor] and with Lisa [as a Visiting Resource] has added so much more love and joy to my life!" And maybe that is the best part of volunteering – that in helping our children grow, trust, and heal, they in turn grow our own hearts just as much.

If you would like more information about volunteering at Crossnore, contact Kimberly King, Director of Community Outreach, at (336) 721-7600 or kking@crossnore.org.

**Name changed for confidentiality.*