



EMBRACE FLORIDA KIDS

HOMES, HEALING & HOPE

Page 3

A New Chapter. A New Beginning.

Since our humble beginnings in 1890 as an orphanage in Summerfield, Alabama, United Methodist Children's Home has grown to serve thousands of children and families spanning Alabama and Northwest Florida.

Today, we officially launch a new name and brand identity that better expresses who we are and what we do in the Northwest Florida region... *continued on page 3.*

4 *Former Girls Home Resident Returns in a Reversed Role*

When Alisha Clary had a chance encounter with her former house mother at her goddaughter's birthday party in 2006, she left with an answer to prayer.

6 *UMCH Finds New Name as it Embraces Kids Through Florida Programs*

When UMCH began expanding its programs in Northwest Florida, "Embrace Florida Kids" seemed like the perfect name for the growing ministry.



EMBRACE FLORIDA KIDS

*Sometimes, the thing
a child needs most...is to feel loved.*

We're Embrace Florida Kids.

We provide homes, healing and hope to vulnerable children who come from families in crisis, placed in foster care at no fault of their own. Together, we're embracing children and empowering families to create home environments where adversity meets God's grace and unconditional love.

Ready to get involved?

Learn how you can love and support vulnerable kids in our Northwest Florida communities.

1-833-EFK-KIDS • EMBRACE FL KIDS.ORG



A New Chapter. A New Beginning.

Friends of the United Methodist Children's Home,

We have exciting news to share about our Florida ministry. As the need for foster care and family preservation has nearly doubled in recent years, we have renewed our focus on serving vulnerable children and families in Northwest Florida.

With that commitment comes a new name. UMCH's Florida ministry will now be known as "Embrace Florida Kids," and the tagline will read "Homes, Healing & Hope." Many of our new branding materials will include "A Ministry of UMCH" as a nod to the parent organization and our previous history. In addition, we've updated our strategic plan for the region, and are recruiting leadership to build a Board of Directors for the area.

The decision to rebrand was not taken lightly. We believe it's important for two reasons. First, we're not the only United Methodist Children's Home in Florida which sometimes leads to confusion among donors and constituents. Secondly, we've experienced fundraising roadblocks in Florida because our headquarters reside in Alabama. Donors and granting organizations are often more willing to support an entity based in the same state.

The work we do in Florida has been important and transformational, and nothing will change with regard to the day-to-day operations of caring for our children and families. The primary difference is that our Florida supporters will be able to designate and directly send their gifts to Embrace Florida Kids if they choose to do so.

We're excited about the many ways God is growing our ministry. When you see "Embrace Florida Kids," whether in your church or in the broader coastal community, you can be proud of knowing this is your United Methodist Children's Home at work.

In closing, it seems fitting that we leave you with the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in Mark 9:36-37, from the late Eugene Peterson's *The Message*:

"He put a child in the middle of the room. Then, cradling the little one in His arms, He said, "Whoever embraces one of these children as I do embraces me, and far more than me—God who sent me."

Our new Florida name is a Holy call to action from Christ our Lord. Embrace Florida Kids. Embrace all kids. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



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EMBRACE FLORIDA KIDS

HOMES, HEALING & HOPE

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[EMBRACE FL KIDS.ORG](http://EMBRACEFLKIDS.ORG)
A MINISTRY OF UMCH

4 *Former Girls Home Resident Returns in a Reversed Role*

8 *Ministries Trade Spaces to Better Serve Community's Most Vulnerable*

10 *Inaugural Board Development for Embrace Florida Kids*

Former Girls Home Resident Returns in a Reversed Role

Embracing Success • [EmbraceFLKids.org/Impact](https://www.EmbraceFLKids.org/Impact)

When Alisha Clary had a chance encounter with her former house mother at her goddaughter's birthday party in 2006, she left with an answer to prayer.

The birthday girl's mother had lived with Alisha in UMCH's group home in Milton, Florida when they were teenagers, and staff members from the home were at the party. One staff member mentioned she was retiring and her position would soon be available. "She said it three different times, and I got the weirdest feeling," Alisha said.

Not long before the party, Alisha had turned to the Lord for guidance because she felt like her life had no meaning. She was working two jobs and constantly felt overwhelmed. "I prayed and asked what He wanted me to do," Alisha remembered. That night, she dreamed that she was surrounded by young girls. Their arms were together, forming a circle.

As she left the party, Alisha thought about the dream. "I wondered if this was what He was calling me to do," she said. "I didn't know if they would hire me because I had lived there."

They did, though, and one of Alisha's former housemothers would train her. Now, Alisha serves as a Youth Care Worker at the home. "Basically, I do everything a parent does, but with a lot of paperwork," she said.

She cooks, cleans and drives the girls to after-school activities, court or counseling sessions. She helps with homework, attends school programs, but perhaps one of her most notable responsibilities is to relate to girls like only she can having walked in their shoes. Whether it's emotional, relational or spiritual, she acts as a sounding board and offers insight that's a result of overcoming obstacles they too will have to overcome.

"I wasn't in exactly the same situation as a lot of the girls, but we had similar experiences," she said. "Hopefully they can see that there's hope for something better. You can be better than what your parents were."

Alisha came to the group home when she was 16 and stayed for nearly two years. "It was the only place I ever felt safe and loved," she said. She started college after she left, but had been working in retail when Abbi Shawyer, the group home's manager, hired her.

"When Abbi hired me, it was with the stipulation that I would go back to college and finish my degree," she said. "I think it was the push I needed." Alisha earned a degree in social work from the University of West Florida in May 2011.

Now she strives to be a stable force in the lives of the girls who come to the group home. "It's an awesome place," Alisha said. "It's a place where girls come and feel safe, secure, loved and nurtured. That's what we hope for."



1 Youth Care Worker Alisha Clary and Antonio McDonald, along with their two children, Alijah and Alexander, spending family time capturing a professional portrait.

2 Senior portrait of Alisha Clary during her senior year of high school in which she was a resident at the Embrace Milton Girls Home.



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UMCH Finds New Name as it Embraces Kids Through Florida Programs

Our Programs • EmbraceFLKids.org/Programs



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When UMCH began expanding its programs in Northwest Florida, “Embrace Florida Kids” seemed like the perfect name for the growing ministry. After all, the United Methodist Children’s Home has been wrapping its arms around children in need of homes, healing and hope in Alabama and Northwest Florida for nearly 130 years.

“The name and the logo are changing, but our focus remains the same, and our ministry will function the same,” said Kristin Alberda, Executive Director of Embrace Florida Kids. “In response to God’s Word, we’ll continue embracing and nurturing vulnerable children and families by providing homes, healing and hope.”

In Northwest Florida, that means providing foster homes, group homes, family preservation services, and support for the growing number of vulnerable children and families. “We work with hundreds of children and their families on any given day,” Alberda said. The kids we serve are victims of choices made by adults in their lives. Too often, they have endured unthinkable childhoods through no fault of their own.”

“While we would love to see fewer children needing to be placed in foster care, we know our services will continue to be needed next week, next month and next year,” says Charlotte Thomas, Director of Programs for Embrace Florida Kids. “Knowing this, we really strive to build effective programs because some kids may not need us right now but they will certainly need us in the future - we want to be ready to give them the best care and support possible,” Thomas adds.



Here’s a look at how Embrace Florida Kids provides homes, healing and hope:

EMBRACE FOSTER CARE. With an office in Pace, the Embrace Foster Care staff recruits, trains, licenses, supports and retains foster families to provide temporary homes for abused, neglected or abandoned children and youth. In 2018, the ministry provided 15,121 days of care to 116 kids in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties. The average number of families is about 30, but this number is expected to grow to meet an ever-increasing demand.

EMBRACE MILTON GIRLS HOME. Embrace Milton Girls Home provides 24/7 care to girls ages 12-18, who have experienced significant trauma. Last year, 2,469 days of care were provided for a total of 18 girls.

EMBRACE FAMILY PRESERVATION. The Embrace Family Preservation program aims to keep families together by helping parents who have lost or are at risk of losing their children. The intensive in-home treatment provides them with the necessary skills to handle challenges in a healthy way and provide safe, loving homes. The agency works with up to 28 families at a time. The program has a 95 percent success rate with no recurrence of abuse. In 2018, UMCH served 389 individuals in 92 families.

EMBRACE TEEN CENTER. The center serves youth who have been impacted by the foster care system and their caregivers. Services include tutoring, study skills training, interview training and assistance with job applications and resumes. Students also participate in enrichment and social activities. Caregivers have access to a clothes closet, supply room and food pantry to help offset expenses. Last year, 29 teens were empowered at the center.

“Our programs are life-changing,” Alberda said. “There is nothing more rewarding than watching the children and youth in our care begin to heal. When kids have a loving home, regular meals, structure, and a safe place to rest, they begin to blossom. The transformation is not overnight but it’s a joy to watch it unfold.”



COUNTIES



550
INDIVIDUALS
SERVED



260
FAMILIES



18,000
DAYS OF CARE

EMBRACE FOSTER CARE

15,121 DAYS OF FOSTER CARE for 116 CHILDREN and youth in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties

EMBRACE MILTON GIRLS HOME

2,469 DAYS OF CARE for 18 TEEN GIRLS in foster care at our residential home in Milton

EMBRACE TEEN CENTER

29 TEENAGERS IMPACTED BY FOSTER CARE received after school and summer care empowerment through our Teen Center in Crestview

EMBRACE FAMILY PRESERVATION

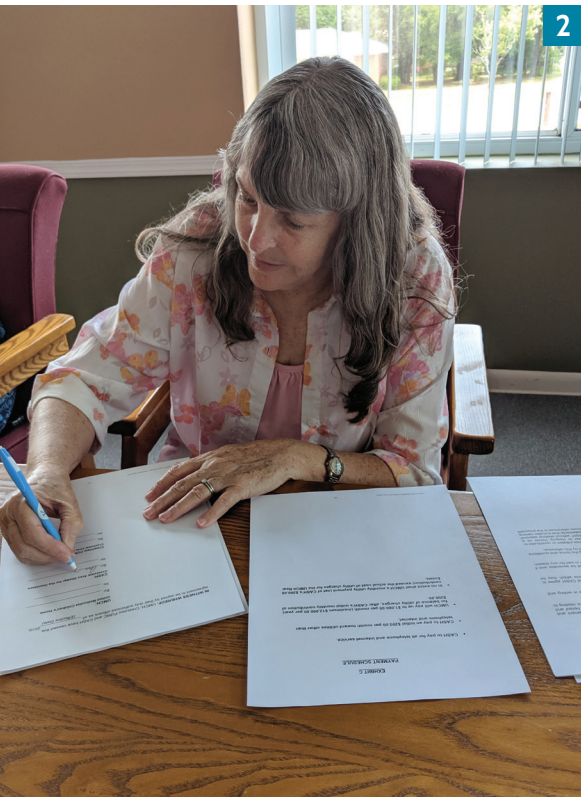
389 FAMILY MEMBERS were served (92 FAMILIES) through Family Preservation—our intensive, in-home prevention and reunification services in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Walton Counties

“It’s all about helping children and youth live and grow in a safe, loving environment.”

Kristin Alberda, Executive Director



1



2



3

Ministries Trade Spaces to Better Serve Community's Most Vulnerable.

When Ann Sprague was in the early stages of starting her ministry for the homeless in Crestview, she prayed for God to open doors and windows. She never dreamed those windows and doors would come with 14 bedrooms and 14 bathrooms.

That's what happened, though, when UMCH had a building in Crestview that was too big for its needs and Sprague's ministry had needs that were too big for its building. The two agencies decided to trade spaces to better meet the needs of the community.

"We're working together to do God's will," said Sprague, Executive Director of the Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless (CASH). "I knew God had a plan, but He's so creative. He comes up with ways I could never imagine."

The facility, now home to CASH's Helping Hands ministry, was originally used by UMCH as a group home for girls and boys, ages 11-

17, who could no longer live with their families. Four years after it opened, child welfare advocates at the federal level began advocating for foster homes instead of group homes, and UMCH helped the kids transition, finding foster homes for some as others transitioned to independence, according to Kristin Alberda, Executive Director.

In an effort to continue supporting the youth and their foster families, UMCH changed its focus and opened a teen center, offering after-school programs, tutoring, and help with resumes, job applications and interview training. The center also provides snacks, hygiene items, and opportunities for the youth to participate in enrichment activities such as art and dance classes. "It's hard for children in transition to participate in extracurricular activities, but it's important to help them build social skills" Alberda said. "This all came from a desire to provide some additional support to keep kids stable wherever they are."

- 1 Kids and youth at First United Methodist Church in Crestview gather outside of the Embrace Teen Center. Over the past year, the church has taken on the teen center as a major missions project.
- 2 Anne Sprague, Executive Director of Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless signing contract for the non-profit's new facility, owned by UMCH.
- 3 Supplies First United Methodist Church in Crestview donated to the Embrace Teen Center during a welcome celebration it held in honor of its new location.

While the Embrace Teen Center serves many needs, the facility was too big for its current use. The solution came during a meeting with staff of UMCH's recently rebranded Northwest Florida ministry, and Dr. Michael Precht, who at the time, was the pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Crestview. CASH had been using a former parsonage on the church property as a cold night shelter and the ministry's headquarters, and Precht knew of Sprague's desire to expand.

"I was very aware of how desperately the community needed these resources for the homeless because we fielded those calls every day," he said. "By the end of our meeting, we were thinking, we were dreaming, we were wondering if it could come to be. It was a real answer to prayer."

Sprague had been searching for the perfect facility for quite a while. After a 35-year career in teaching, she started her ministry in 2008 in hopes of providing a cold night shelter for those living on the streets. She partnered with churches that opened their doors to the homeless during bad weather, but after a

few years, the demand had grown and so had the ministry.

In 2014, CASH organized as a 501(c)3 and First Methodist offered the use of its former parsonage for office space. They added a day program coined "Helping Hands" which provides lunch, laundry facilities, showers, clothing, and other necessities. In addition, volunteers provide transportation to doctors' appointments and help the homeless get prescriptions, identification and benefits such as Social Security disability.

The only thing missing was a permanent home that would allow the ministry to serve those in need year-round. When Sprague first saw UMCH's space, "my mouth dropped open," she said. The building has two separate wings so they can accommodate men on one side, women and children on the other, and have a few rooms reserved for families. "We've had as many as 30 people lined up to use one shower at our old place – one shower," Sprague said. "Now we have 14 showers. You always hope and dream you'll get a better place and be able to help more people, but you don't know

how that will happen. You just know that God has a plan.

Precht, who has since moved to Dauphin Way United Methodist Church, said the Crestview congregation was excited about the opportunity to work more closely with the Embrace Teen Center. "We take great pride in honoring and supporting the kids in the Children's Home, and I just knew our church would be so excited to have them in our backyard."

Alberda said the Embrace Teen Center is enjoying its new home in the 3-bedroom, 2-bath parsonage at First Methodist, and the congregation welcomed them by stocking the shelves with school supplies, backpacks and toiletries. In addition, the students are able to use the church's facilities and outdoor space for their programs. "The church has been very gracious," she said. "It's all pretty exciting."

No one is more excited than Sprague. "I get emotional talking about it," she said. "We're just so grateful to the Children's Home for this blessing. God definitely had His hand in this."

Inaugural Board Development for Embrace Florida Kids

Board of Directors • EmbraceFLKids.org/AboutUs

When UMCH leadership committed to rebrand and hire an Executive Director in Florida, the first-ever subsidiary Board of Directors was formed consisting of board members who both live and serve in Northwest Florida.

“With the growing needs for more foster care programs in Florida, we have to better connect our primary Board of Directors in Alabama to the Florida constituents, and the community we serve,” Horne said.

Leaders asked to serve on the inaugural board have been supporting UMCH as donors or church leaders for many years. Their first official business was to help rebrand UMCH’s

Northwest Florida ministry by serving alongside staff during a branding workday to assist in strategic planning, necessary to help shape the new Florida name and brand. Jerry Maygarden, Kirby Williams, and Kim Stagner served in that capacity, and have since recruited Jeff Dannelly, Greg Crouch and Lisa Ausley.

Embrace Florida Kids board members will be searching for additional members to fill the roster. “Our plan is to ensure our Florida leadership consists of a board as diverse as the population we serve,” said Horne. “We want representatives from each county, and we want them to be from both the north and south ends of the county—where the census data and community resources are very different,” he concluded.

Current NWFL Representation:



Jerry Maygarden

Chairman of the Board
L.A. Maygarden Center for Financial Literacy, University of West Florida



Greg Crouch

President/CEO, Pepsi-Cola Bottling Co. of Luverne, Inc.



Jeff Dannelly

Senior Vice President
Emerald Coast/Bay Private Wealth Management, Hancock Whitney



Lisa Ausley

Associate Pastor
Crosspoint UMC



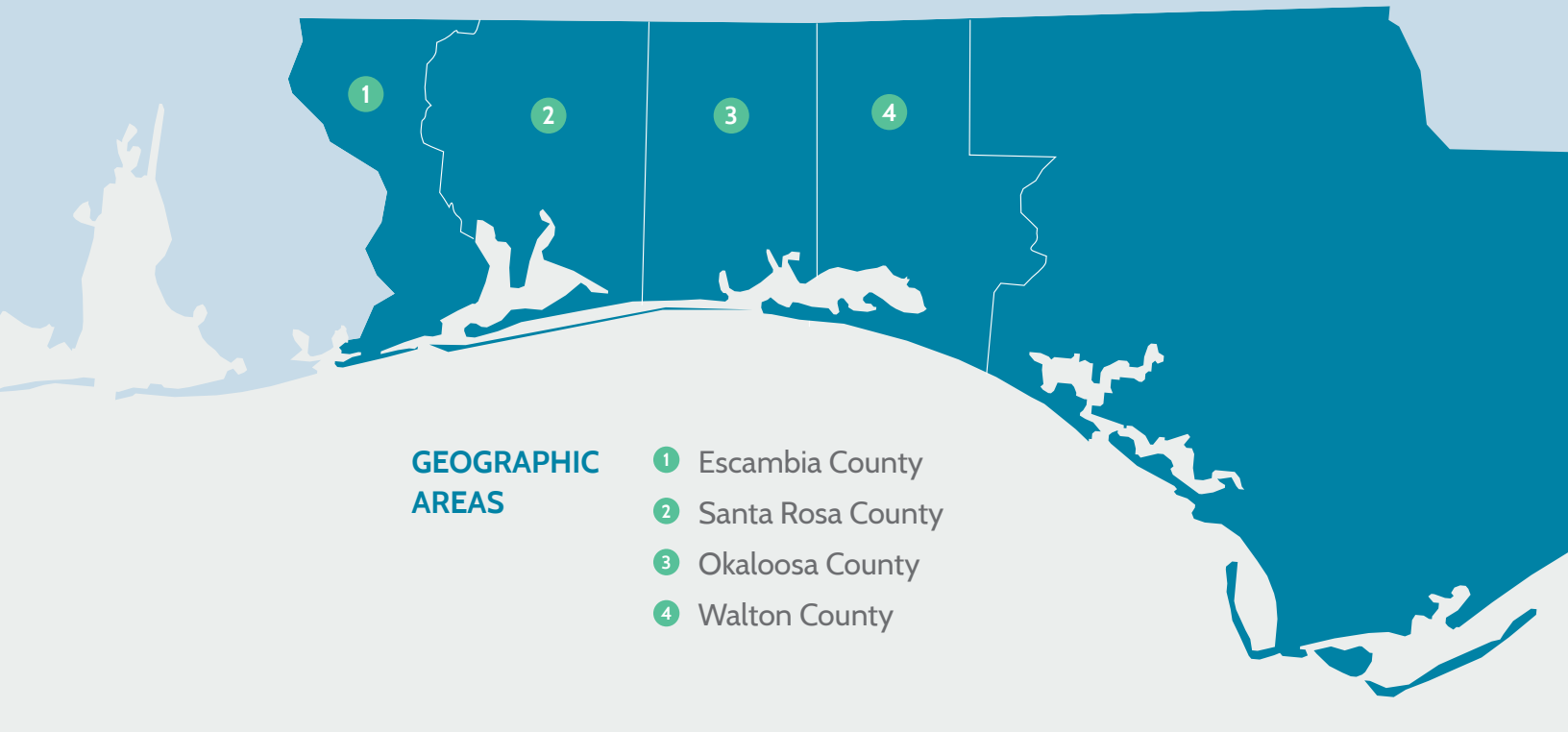
Kim Stagner

CFO and Co-Owner
Global Military Marketing



Kirby Williams

Attorney
Barker Williams, PLLC &
Owner at Shoreline Title, LLC



GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

- 1 Escambia County
- 2 Santa Rosa County
- 3 Okaloosa County
- 4 Walton County



I lost my three kids once, and after finally getting them back, I promised never to lose them again. The Embrace Family Preservation program helped me become not just a better parent, but a better role model for my children. Now I'm going back to school and pursuing educational opportunities that will help me support myself, my children and my family.



PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Ready to Get Involved?

PROGRAMS

To learn more about making a difference as a foster parent, contact us at:

1-833-EFK-KIDS
PROGRAMS@EMBRACEFLKIDS.ORG

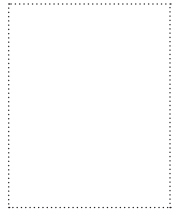
CONTRIBUTE

To learn more about loving and supporting kids through a contribution of time, money or resources, contact us at:

1-833-EFK-KIDS
DONATE@EMBRACEFLKIDS.ORG • INFO@EMBRACEFLKIDS.ORG



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