What do at-risk elementary students need? Caring teachers and staff. Individualized attention. Parents engaged in the educational process. At the new Harambee elementary school, that’s exactly what they get – thanks to your support.

“This is a transitional program,” explains Christina Owens, head of the school now in its second year. “Students average a year or two here. Our goal is to prepare them to be successful in their home school.”

Your commitment to early intervention is making a difference at Harambee. By starting as early as possible, kids and their parents gain tools they can use. “That provides better prospects for long-term success,” Christina says. “When we help them overcome challenges early, it builds a strong foundation.”

Serving students from kindergarten through fifth grade, Harambee offers an enviable 1:6 teacher-student ratio. Students pursue core content, and experiential learning adds another dimension through field trips and hands-on activities. Behavioral specialists and support staff work closely with teachers, and parents play an active role.

“The kids see that their parents are involved,” Christina says. “They see us working as a team and that really underscores the importance of what they’re doing at school.”

Thanks to your generosity, Harambee School is able to evolve to meet new needs. “We intend to continue to grow and develop and make this one of the best programs in Virginia,” Christina says. In the next edition of the Advance, details on our new Early Intervention Center!
Elk Hill 20/20 Goal in Reach!

Spring “Friend-Raisers” planned to expand base of support

We're thrilled by the response to Elk Hill 20/20 – we've raised $5.5 million toward our goal of $7 million – but we're not ready to rest on our laurels. This spring we're hoping to broaden Elk Hill's base of support through a series of informal gatherings we call friend-raisers.

“We're hoping to spread awareness of Elk Hill to people who are not familiar with it or who want to learn more,” says Stephanie Jefferson, a member of Elk Hill's board of trustees. Hosted by various members of the Elk Hill board, the friend-raisers will be low-key, casual events.

“We'll invite friends and acquaintances, and I hope we’ll be able to invite a family who've had a positive experience at Elk Hill,” Stephanie says. “It'd be nice if they could share their story while mingling with guests.”

Personal contacts, she adds, are more likely to result in stronger connections – connections that might lead to new partnerships, further strengthening Elk Hill programs. If you haven't yet participated in Elk Hill 20/20, we'd love to have you join us at a friend-raiser. For more information, please contact Karen Ganiard at (804) 457-4866, extension 312.

Helping children with mental health needs

Two Elk Hill clinical therapists were recently certified as Mental Health First Aid Instructors. This is critically important, as their expertise will be useful to other staff members, parents and students as they help children who struggle with mental health issues.

At Elk Hill, the number of children who need mental health services is growing rapidly. It is a topic constantly on our minds, but especially during May, which has been designated as Children's Mental Health Month. In Virginia, just one child in five with mental health issues receives the help he or she needs. More than 200,000 children in our state await services.

With your help, we are making an impact on those numbers. Our 20/20 Campaign is an investment in early intervention services for children who are struggling with emotional and behavioral problems. The return on that investment is enormous. It provides the opportunity to transform overwhelming challenges into successful futures.

Those futures revolve around success in school and stable home environments. Through early recognition and referral to appropriate services, the prognosis for these children improves tremendously, giving them and their families renewed hope for a better future. Sooner, stronger, healthier!
New jobs program helps students make successful transition

A new program – **Cool Jobs** – is helping new graduates make the transition from Elk Hill to the world beyond. In the program, students make monthly visits to businesses to explore varied job possibilities.

Several Elk Hill board members are also participating in the program. “We’ve invited board members to interact with kids and share their expertise,” says Varina School Counselor Clifton Lawson. “What better way is there to do that than to help introduce the next batch of graduates to the business community?”

**Real-world experience**

With your help, Elk Hill students learn a trade, and many also complete requirements for various certifications in food handling and workplace safety. “These are very good things to have when you’re applying for entry-level positions,” Clifton notes. “But these kids don’t always have a good understanding of what entry-level jobs are available to them.”

Cool Jobs outings include a company visit of about an hour. In “debriefing” session afterward, students discuss what they learned about job possibilities, the interpersonal skills they need to master, and what they feel they can accomplish. “They learn to shake hands and look someone in the eye,” Clifton says. “It really takes them out of their comfort zones.”

Recent visits included stops at Performance Foods, Lucky 13 Tattoo in Richmond, Bullet Painting and Truckin Thunder. “A couple of those were managed by people who’d gone to Elk Hill,” Clifton adds, “and that was a great thing for the kids to see.”

**Preparing for success**

Students participating in the program must be performing well academically and behaviorally. They conduct research and discuss appropriate dress and behavior. “They understand what they have to do to ‘sell’ themselves,” Clifton says. “And it pays off. It really helps with self esteem, confidence and goal setting.”

In the next edition of the Advance: Details on an exciting new transitional program for youths ages 16-24!

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**Camp is important for many reasons. Here are just two.**

1. **Camp is fun – but it’s also serious business.** Our campers receive Day Treatment services during the school year. That continues at camp, where your support helps youngsters work on behavioral skills. “If you don’t work on a new skill, you lose it,” says Laura Easter, Director of Community Services. “Camp is a great place to work on things like social skills.”

   We also sneak in a bit of reading. “It’s fun,” Laura says. “There are no worksheets, no tests. Sometimes I bring my dog and let campers read to him. It’s a huge confidence builder.”

2. **Camp helps kids fit in – and succeed.** “Some of these kids have tried other camps, and failed,” Laura says. “Or their parents, knowing what a struggle it will be, just keep them home. Meanwhile, their buddies head off to the Y Camp or the Parks & Rec Camp.” Because you care, these children feel less isolated.

   At Elk Hill, campers get to practice newly learned behavioral skills. In August, classroom teachers can tell who’s been to camp. “After camp, these kids are much more prepared to start the school year successfully,” Laura says.

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*Elk Hill summer campers enjoy a sing-along and story-time activity with Elk Hill CEO Michael Farley and camp staff.*
What does their future hold?

- **Dropouts?**
- **Homeless?**
- **Inmates?**
- **None of the above?**

A gift through your will or estate helps us continue our work far into the future. **It's a simple gift that costs nothing during your lifetime** – but it makes a world of difference in a young person’s lifetime. *Let us answer your questions! Contact Ann Criswell, (804) 457-4866, ext. 310; email: acriswell@elkhill.org.*

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Elk Hill has many ongoing opportunities for volunteers.

Interesting?

*Elk Hill has many ongoing opportunities for volunteers.

**Contact Lauren Devitt at Ldevitt@elkhill.org (804) 457-4866 x336.**

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A gift she'll appreciate – and won't have to dust!

Make a donation to Elk Hill in honor of a special mother in your life and we'll send her a beautiful Mother's Day card featuring original artwork by an Elk Hill student. By honoring someone with a donation this Mother's Day, you’ll help children and their families transform overwhelming challenges into successful futures – and that’s a cause dear to every mom's heart! **Visit ElkHill.org by May 4, 2015, to send your Mother's Day tribute.**

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Save the date!

Graduation exercises and awards night for members of the Class of 2015 will be held at 7 p.m., Thursday, June 11, at the Glen Allen Cultural Arts Center, 2600 Woodman Road, Glen Allen. Donors and volunteers are welcome to attend.

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‘We are feeling hope’

“Thanks to the win he experienced at Elk Hill, Blake is settling into his new school nicely. He is even doing a little bit of homework without a battle. I believe your school planted the seeds of confidence and hope, just enough to get him across the country believing that school MAY be possible for him. We've got a lot of ground to cover to catch up, but we are feeling hope, and I thank Elk Hill for that.”

– Note from a former student's mother

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Like our fresh new look!

Check out our newly redesigned website (www.elkhill.org): We think you'll like what you see! And coming soon, Elk Hill will have a social media presence: Stay tuned for details!

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Sign up to receive the newsletter via email

Send an email with your name and mailing address to Ldevitt@elkhill.org
Elk Hill | PO Box 99 | Goochland VA 23063 | (804) 457-4866 x 336 | www.elkhill.org