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“Maybe I Do Need to Change”: One Young Woman's Journey

When you grow up in a home without structure or stability, you learn an important lesson: *The only person you can trust is yourself.*

Chloe began using marijuana and cocaine at a young age and hanging out with friends who weren't really friends. She knew they didn't care about her — and she didn't care, either.

When she was expelled from school and referred to Elk Hill's Spring Garden Group Home for girls, Chloe was unfazed. “It's nothing new, you know,” she says. “I'm so used to being institutionalized, and hopping around everywhere.”

To Chloe, Spring Garden was just another cage. She didn't plan to change. “I was just going to fake it to make it,” she admits.

Then, the Spring Garden staff surprised her: They gave her the love and support she had never received before. Her counselors listened. They told Chloe she wasn't alone. And they valued her for who she was.

“Maybe I do need to change,” Chloe realized. So she began to try.

Chloe possessed a special gift: a deep self-awareness that helped her understand her own challenges. “I'm an insightful person. I really know why I do the things I do.... why I act the way I act. I'm always myself around everybody,” she says.

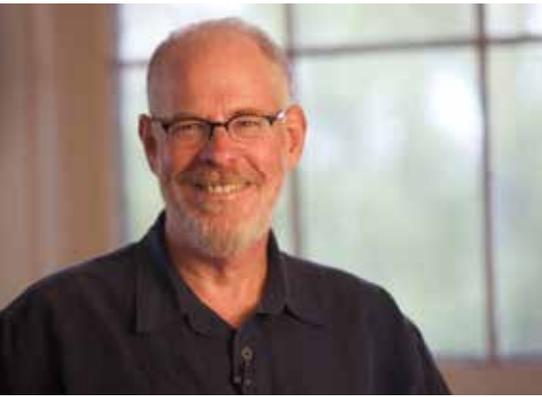
“I think every day here is a good memory for me,” she says.

Her main problem, she says, was managing her anger. Over the years, she had learned to stifle her emotions, letting her anger build and build until she could no longer control it. The Spring Garden staff taught her new ways to cope and better strategies for dealing with that anger.

“Praying is a big thing for me,” she says, “and talking to people I trust.”

In just five months at Spring Garden, 17-year-old Chloe has radically transformed her vision for her own future. She's working on her GED, and once she receives her diploma she intends to join the Navy. After that comes medical school, where she plans to study dermatology.

In the meantime, she'll continue to thrive at Spring Garden. “I think every day here is a good memory for me,” she says. ■



CEO Michael Farley Reflects on 40 Years at Elk Hill

What was your experience like as an Elk Hill counselor?

Michael Farley: In 1980, Elk Hill was relatively small, working with a maximum of 16 adolescent males. We facilitated experiential learning through Elk Hill's adventure challenge program, spending weeks at a time in the outdoors —white-water canoeing, rock climbing, and back-packing — all designed to encourage team work, self-reliance, good decision making, and the ability to accomplish goals.

A key component to all of this was the ability to relate the challenges in the outdoors — and the decision making/ courage/fortitude it took to be successful — back to the challenges they had in their lives in their communities. I remember often thinking, "I can't believe that I am getting paid to do this!"

Why did you decide to dedicate your career to Elk Hill?

In May of 1980, I committed to spend one year as a counselor for Elk Hill. My plan was to return to Kenya, Africa, after that year, where I had served in the Peace Corps. That one-year commitment turned into a nearly 40-year career, including the last 20 years as Elk Hill's executive director/CEO.

My own personal values — be kind, be honest, be courageous, pay attention, and have fun — lined up nicely with Elk Hill's guiding principles and organizational values. My personal life's mission of "Do good, have fun" also synced up well. I also have been surrounded with incredible

people at Elk Hill — staff, trustees, as well as the children we work with — all of whom have enriched my life so much! And the Board of Trustees has not only supported my continued personal mission/work in Kenya with the Makindu Children's Program, they have celebrated it as an extension of our mission at Elk Hill. For that I am eternally grateful.

Could you share one of your best memories from your years at Elk Hill?

The mother who came to me after her daughter graduated from one of our schools at our annual Graduation and Awards Ceremony. She was crying and stated that we saved her daughter's life. I thanked her. She grabbed my arm and said quite forcefully, through the tears, that she wanted me to fully understand that without Elk Hill her daughter would not be alive today.

"She grabbed my arm and said ... that she wanted me to fully understand that without Elk Hill her daughter would not be alive today."

What are some of your proudest achievements?

The Elk Hill culture! Over the years I feel like we have created a culture where we live our values and guiding principles in

everything we do. I believe the most important responsibility I have had as CEO is to ensure that culture is maintained by surrounding the children we serve with quality adults who have a similar personal value set.

I am also very proud of our flexibility over the years to evolve and adapt, which has resulted in a continuum of services and programs, helping many more children and families. As part of that evolution, we have gone "upstream," keeping children with their families and in their communities.

What do you plan for your retirement?

I will be continuing my work with the Makindu Children's Program in Kenya through the Proper Walks and Safaris. If you want to experience Africa and help children, visit makindu.org to learn more. In addition, I really hope to be playing more music. And I plan to laugh more, walk more, read more,

love more, and continue to enjoy the essence of life — while doing some good and having fun! ■



Michael Farley with some of the children from the Makindu Children's Centre in eastern Kenya



The 1st executive director of Elk Hill was William L. Hazelgrove, who also served as the executive director of the Virginia Home for Boys.

Meet Elk Hill's Incoming CEO, Ronald Spears

Ron Spears grew up in two vastly different worlds.

From living with his grandparents in rural Cumberland County, he learned the value of a life structured around hard work and family. His grandfather ran a restaurant and a service station, built houses, and farmed.

From living with his stepfather, a nightclub operator in Queens, New York, he learned the joys of independence — even the small pleasure of buying lunch with a little pocket money, while playing basketball in neighborhood parks without adult supervision.

Many years later, those twin experiences would give him a deep understanding of the challenges Elk Hill's youth face: how they need structure but resist rules, how they crave freedom but must learn self-direction.

Spears came to Elk Hill by serendipity, he says, or by divine intervention. After earning a degree in human services from Wilberforce University, he worked for Fulton County Adult Probationary Services in Atlanta, Georgia, helping adult ex-offenders get their lives back on track. In that role, "potential was a negative word, as opposed to a positive word," he explains. "We were always talking about what people would have been or could have been."

Spears was summoned back to Cumberland to help run Booker's Restaurant, the family business, and then took a position at the New Dominion School wilderness program as a counselor for youth with behavioral challenges. Cutting down trees with primitive tools and hauling logs on his shoulders with these young men to build the shelters they lived in, Spears witnessed the power of relationships to heal and connect them. "The word potential was now a

positive word," he says.

When he fractured his ankle in a basketball game, he had to leave his role at New Dominion — and that's when Spears was hired as a counselor at Elk Hill, in 1984. In his tenure, he has served as team leader, admissions and aftercare coordinator, director of community services, director of programs and chief operations officer.

"There's no finer group of people that I would have wanted to spend 36 years

with than the staff at Elk Hill, and our board of trustees," Spears says. As the new CEO, he plans to raise Elk Hill's public profile in order to gain more supporters and ensure that the organization can continue to be a powerful advocate for youth as Virginia's human services landscape evolves. He also intends to uphold the strong culture and organizational integrity he helped to build with Michael Farley.

"The culture at Elk Hill is something that's extremely important to me," Spears says. "For us, it's always: What's good for kids? That's an intrinsic question that we can always ask ourselves."

Also, he says, "we take what we do seriously, but we don't take ourselves seriously... Michael always says, 'Do good and have fun.'"

Spears takes that to heart. You may find him on the basketball court, playing a game with Elk Hill youth just as he did when he was a counselor.

Spears lives in Powhatan with his wife, Linda. They have two children, Ronald and Ashley, and four grandchildren. He will become CEO in July. ■

"For us, it's always: What's good for kids? That's an intrinsic question that we can always ask ourselves."



Elk Hill Turns 50 — Thanks to You!

As you can see in the pages of this newsletter, 2020 is a monumental year for Elk Hill. We're looking back at our legacy and making big plans for the future. We're recognizing our alumni and all the people who helped transform their lives: staff, teachers, volunteers and donors. We're honoring the leadership of Michael Farley and welcoming Ron Spears as our new CEO.

We hope you'll join us in our year of celebrations! Please mark a few upcoming events on your calendar:

- ✓ **September 12:**
Feast on the Hill, a farm-to-table culinary experience benefiting Elk Hill
- ✓ **September 13:**
Community Day at the Hill, a carnival-themed family event
- ✓ **November 24:**
Thanksgiving on the Hill
- ✓ **December 15:**
Holiday on the Hill

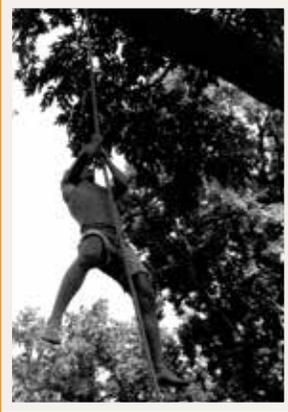
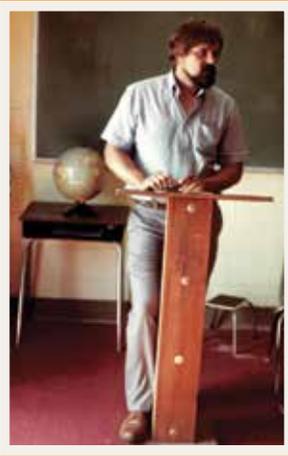
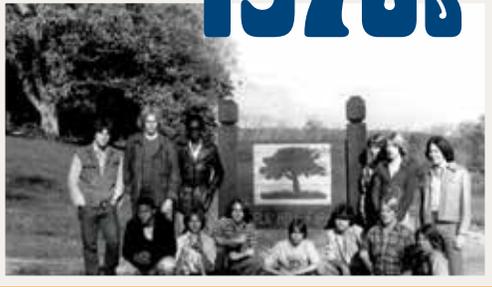
We also invite you to join other supporters in investing in Elk Hill's future. This year, we're building a \$1 million innovation fund to allow us to meet the ever-evolving needs of the youth we serve. We're hoping to broaden our donor base with 50 new planned gifts and 50 new donors. Will you be one of them? Private donations allow Elk Hill to ensure that every child receives the services they need to thrive.

Donate online at elkhill.org, or talk to our team at 804-457-4866 about the many ways you can give. ■



Our first "rec room" was on the second floor of the two-story barn — with no heat.

1970s



2000s



Elk Hill Farm Timeline

1970 - Elk Hill opens a residential program for orphans, serving a maximum of eight.

1970

1980s - Ball Cottage opens.

1980

1995 - The Harambee School begins to accept day students.

1990

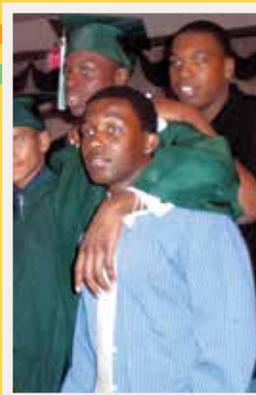
2000

1979 - The Alfred L. Blake School — now known as the Harambee School — opens on the Elk Hill Farm Campus.

1990s - Caravati Cottage opens, increasing the number of youth served to 50 boys in 5 cottages.

1999 - Varina Day School opens.

1990s



1980s



2007 - Spring Garden Group Home for Girls opens.

2010 - Community Based Services begin in Charlottesville.

2012 - Community Based Services begin in Richmond.

2016 - Staunton Day School opens.

2017 - Community Based Services begin in Staunton.

2009 - Community Based Services launch in Powhatan and Goochland.

2011 - The Elk Hill Charlottesville School opens.

2014 - Elk Hill's residential and community-based programs achieve national accreditation through the Council on Accreditation (COA).

2019 - Community Based Services begin in York County.

2020



Alex Sullivan is the longest currently serving employee. He arrived at Elk Hill in January 1980.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD



Staci Briggs | Therapeutic Day Treatment Counselor, York County

**"Just keep swimming."
— Dory in "Finding Nemo"**

When I was younger I spent time in the foster system and with other family members. I attended six different elementary schools and two different middle schools, and finally had the support, encouragement, and strength to fight for only one high school.

Despite changing schools almost as often as the seasons, school was the one constant in my life. I always knew there would be the same subjects, a similar atmosphere, and more people to encounter with each move. I sought connection, attention, love, and friendship from teachers and peers. The connections I made with past teachers, friends who became family, administrators, and school counselors helped me foster the resilience I needed to become the person I am today: one who is kind to every individual, who believes in second (or third or fourth) chances, who lives and breathes empathy and understanding.

Every day, I assist children in the classroom with emotion management, staying focused and on task, providing prompts to follow directives, and behavior redirection. In individual and group sessions outside the classroom, I help children build social skills, raise self-esteem, build connections, build emotional awareness, and learn coping skills for everyday use. I visit the classrooms of each child on my caseload and help them in the moment, during their struggles and successes.

What I love about my work is that every day is different. Each day is an opportunity to learn something new from each child. Each day is a new day to work towards goals and discover new objectives. The most important thing I can offer these children is **patience**. I've learned that young bodies and minds need time to process their big thoughts and emotions. The more patience I have, the better I can help them. ■



With Courage and a Caring Counselor, She Found Success

Ten-year-old Jasmine just could not go to school.

She did well academically and had few behavior problems, but an unstable home life had given Jasmine severe anxiety. Her parents had separated twice, and in five years she'd moved five times. It was all too much. "Sometimes she had big emotions, and they would overcome her," explains counselor Kathy Wiles.

After Jasmine missed more than 60 days of fourth grade and the truancy counselor became significantly involved, her school referred her for services with Elk Hill. Mrs. Wiles, a supervisee in social work, counseled Jasmine through the summer, teaching ways to help manage her anxiety. But when fifth grade began in September, Jasmine's truancy problems returned. Almost every morning, a wave of anxiety would hit her, causing painful stomachaches and a fear of abandoning her primary caregiver, which led to refusing to go to school.

"You can talk and practice as much as you want regarding different behaviors and patterns leading to the severe anxiety, but learning how to actually use these tools is challenging," Mrs. Wiles says. So, she met Jasmine where she most needed help: at home.

Two days a week, Mrs. Wiles came to Jasmine's house, spending an hour with her before school and two hours afterward. They practiced grounding techniques, which help counter anxiety by

refocusing on physical sensations — how you're breathing, what you're sensing.

Mrs. Wiles conducted therapy with Jasmine's family, helping them understand anxiety and working with her father to establish structured routines and expectations. Wiles also set firm boundaries for Jasmine. There were only three reasons she would be allowed to miss school: vomiting, fever or a pre-set appointment. She made sure Jasmine had the supports she needed at school, so that she could check in with the school counselor or trusted office staff each morning when she felt anxious as she arrived. Jasmine looked forward to seeing her safe adults at school, providing a positive start to her day.

By December, Jasmine was attending school full time. Her symptoms shrank to small inconveniences instead of powerful determinants of her morning. She was able to identify her fear and independently, kindly care for her "big feelings."

When Mrs. Wiles discovered that Jasmine had never baked homemade holiday cookies, she brought over some dough for their last session. Together, they baked and decorated while talking about the year's accomplishments.

With ongoing support from an Elk Hill therapist and natural supports at the school, Jasmine has been able to recognize, understand, and utilize coping skills for her anxiety. As a result, she can attend school regularly with confidence and excitement. ■



The first cook for Elk Hill was Mary Hanks. She lived on campus and prepared meals for up to 30 residents & staff.

Holiday Celebration at Elk Hill

For many of our youth and families, the holiday season is a stressful and often emotional time. Thanks to CarMax, Capital One, the Richmond Christmas Mother Fund, Aramark of UVA and many individual supporters, our youth and families had a joyous holiday season.

On Dec 17th Elk Hill hosted our annual Holiday on the Hill, where youth received backpacks full of goodies from Santa and enjoyed some delicious food with their families and their Elk Hill family. In addition to the overwhelming support for Holiday on the Hill,

many generous donors provided gift cards, toys, and cash donations to ensure families and youth were able to celebrate the holidays with meals and gifts. We are grateful to everyone involved in making this year so special for our youth and families. ■




**ELK HILL
FUN FACT:**

In 1970 Elk Hill served 8 boys. Today Elk Hill serves over 680 boys and girls each year.



**CONNECT,
COLLABORATE,
and
CONTRIBUTE**

at Elk Hill Charlottesville School's Synapse Hub. The Synapse Hub is a networking group, but it's more than just networking. The "Hub" facilitates connections between businesses and nonprofit groups for community and economic development.

To learn more, please visit www.synapsehubs.com or email jccociolone@elkhill.org

Join us on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month, from 3-5 p.m. at Elk Hill's Charlottesville Day School.

LET YOUR LEGACY SHINE: Join the Elk Hill Legacy Society

We plan work schedules. We plan home improvements. We plan for retirement. Why not plan your support for Elk Hill?

As a committed supporter, your generous gifts make a huge difference in what we're able to accomplish here. But to gain the greatest return on your investment, you may want to consider planned giving. This is a way to provide an ongoing gift, even after your death, for an organization that's important to you. **Anyone can do this.** You don't have to be a major donor to make a long-term impact on Elk Hill.

A variety of options exist through the Elk Hill Legacy Society, and each can be tailored to fit individual needs and circumstances. You will appreciate both the tax benefits and the unique and substantive ways in which your gifts benefit Elk Hill for years to come.

For more information on the Elk Hill Legacy Society, contact Jessica Cociolone at (804) 457-4866, extension 310, or email jccociolone@elkhill.org. ■

Make a Difference While Having Fun!

Are you passionate about helping youth succeed? Are you curious about nonprofit board service? Do you want to join an awesome network of do-gooders? If you answered 'Yes!' to any of these questions, you should apply to join The Friends of Elk Hill.

The Friends of Elk Hill is the next generation of supporters for Elk Hill. They're a dynamic group of individuals united by a desire to spread awareness of Elk Hill throughout central Virginia. Friends of Elk Hill aims to prepare members for Board of Director service while creatively supporting Elk Hill's mission through volunteerism, outreach, and fundraising.

To learn more, contact Erin Nord at Enord@elkhill.org or (804) 457-4866, ext. 336. ■



See what's happening at Elk Hill!

Find us on...



Facebook: [ElkHillVA](https://www.facebook.com/ElkHillVA)

Receive the Elk Hill newsletter via email:

Sign up at elkhill.org or email your name and address to libanez@elkhill.org

Using an IRA for Charitable Purposes is a Win-Win

If you are 70½ or older and you have an IRA or other qualified retirement plan, consider making an IRA charitable rollover gift to Elk Hill.

- *It's an easy and convenient way to make a gift.*
- *It allows you to give from your pre-tax assets.*
- *It satisfies your annual minimum distribution or RMD, up to the amount of your gift.*
- *It helps avoid limits on charitable deductions and may prevent you from being pushed into a higher tax bracket.*

Contact your IRA custodian or Jessica Cociolone at (804) 457-4866, ext. 311, or Jccociolone@elkhill.org to discuss the tools and strategies available to help you reach your goals. ■