

Vicki Davis

Volunteer sees lives transformed at Generations Group Homes

By **Abe Hardesty** • City People writer • December 16, 2009

The couple, who moved to Greenville with two young sons 13 years ago, once devoted that morning to immediate family. These days, though, they've felt compelled to spend it at the Generations Group Homes — where, in a remote corner of southern Greenville County, they get a first-hand glimpse of a family of a different sort.

Vicki Davis, no stranger to volunteer work, calls the home “a marvelous program,” one that is known by a relative few.

“These boys truly transform,” says Davis. The group home houses 46 young men (ages 10-19) in a positive environment that differs dramatically from the settings that they were in before. The boys are placed at the homes through the Department of Social Services, Department of Mental Health, Continuum of Care, and Department of Juvenile Justice. They represent the small percentage of abused children who are now caught in the abuse cycle and acting out with inappropriate behaviors.

Davis has spent her last two Christmas mornings at the Generations Homes, where she sees plenty of smiles, all on the faces of young men who had little to smile about just a few months earlier. It's the reward for several hours of volunteer work that goes with serving as the leader of a project known as Angel Tree.

Her first look at the program, in December 2007, was memorable.

“I saw three boys who were part of the Christmas program, and you could tell they were new. You could see the worrying, the pain and the anxiety in their faces,” Davis recalls. “It was painful to look at them.

“About three months later, we were back for another production, and the same three boys were part of a skit in which they danced the Macarena. They were laughing and having a



Vicki Davis serves several volunteer roles, including at the Greenville County Museum of Art gift shop. (GEORGE GARDNER/Staff)

good time, and you could tell they were fitting in," Davis says. "It's amazing how quickly they make the transformations."

In her two years as a volunteer at the home, where she coordinates the Angel Tree project and two other events each year, Davis has come to expect such changes.

"You realize what a difference it makes when the kids feel good about themselves," Davis says.

Since 1991, with the goal of stopping and preventing sexual abuse, Generations Group Homes has offered a homelike setting that provides boys a second chance and a place to heal.

Most of the residents take advantage of that opportunity, according to Roseanne Brown, the home's director of development. She says the vast majority of the home's 700-plus alumni have turned their lives around, and she points to a 98 percent success rate.

The program has been surprisingly rewarding for Davis, who spends so much time volunteering that she fears fellow congregants at Ebenezer United Methodist Church cringe when she approaches the podium.

"Some people are probably thinking, 'Oh, no — here comes Vicki to tell us she needs more volunteers,'" says the New York native.

In addition to various activities at Ebenezer UMC, Davis devotes time each week to the Greenville County Museum of Art, Friends of the Library and Meals on Wheels.

It was through her work at Ebenezer that Davis, who holds a degree in psychology and once worked as developmental disabilities specialist, discovered the Generations Group Home. At a UMC District Women's meeting, she heard Mary Jo Moore talk about the home with great enthusiasm.

"The very next day, our pastor talked about a news story in which a child was kidnapped, and he asked, 'Where is the church? Why aren't people in the churches stepping in to make a difference?'"

A few days later, she made her first visit.

"As I drove there, I was thinking, 'This is going to be a sad situation. Do I really want to take this on?'" Davis recalls. "But when I left there, I was so excited. There's nothing sad about it — this is a place where boys are truly rehabilitating."

City People writer Abe Hardesty can be reached at 864-298-4202