

Founder of Foster Care Charity Played Major Role in Local History

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A Look at Historical Figure during National Women's History Month

By John Hitchcock, Hillsides executive director

(Los Angeles, Calif.)—In American history women have played a significant role in making our country what it is today. In particular, women addressed a plethora of unmet needs in communities and founded countless nonprofits. Most specifically in Los Angeles County, Deaconess Evelyn Wile envisioned a world where children were safe and nurtured in their homes.

During National Women's History Month, I wanted to bring attention to Wile's vision, which has rescued over 35,000 children in 95 years. Founder of Hillsides, formerly the Church Home for Children, a Pasadena foster care children's charity, Wile saw the devastating affects of death, divorce, desertion, and disease had on children left behind.

Serving children at risk and their families in Los Angeles County, Hillsides follows in the footsteps of its founder who believed in creating safe places for children. Unlike the traditional orphanages of the early 1900s, Hillsides created a cottage concept, an open space home environment where children would experience a normal childhood, share a room with no more than three children, and be cared for by house parents.

Reminiscing, Wile described what was apparent, "I knew there was no money, land or house for such an undertaking--nothing

but five hens which a friend had promised me...” With blessings from the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, Wile set forth and purchased the first home in Highland Park in 1913, and in just four years relocated Hillside to what many children refer to as their safe haven--17 acres in the San Rafael Hills of Pasadena.

Wile continued, “Through the kindness of friends who loaned their cars, we were able to take the children out to the new homesite and allow each of them to turn a little of the sod and thus be in ‘at the beginning.’ We hoped that the lesson of the bare hillside would impress itself upon the children’s hearts and minds, in comparison with what is ‘to come’ through the generous gifts which have been made.”

Today, children continue to turn a little of the sod, tend to the weeds, and discover new life in plants and flowers. In their gardens, they find a peaceful, restful place they can visit to get their minds off of the things that may be weighing on their hearts and minds.

Children living at Hillside because of their foster care placement or severe emotional disturbances find comfort, security, and trust with our staff. Given intensive treatment combined with recreational therapeutic activities, children begin to thrive and establish connections with adults.

In addition to the residential program Wile founded, Hillside has expanded its programs and services to serve families in crisis who need support in redirecting their lives to create safe places for their children. We also provide special education and a transitional living and housing program, as well as advocate for children’s rights.

When a man was directed to the home during Wile’s day, he was surprised to hear what Hillside really was, and said he had “supposed those were two real homes--perhaps a father and son were building.’ And that’s exactly what we want them to be--real homes!” Wile recalled.

Wile truly created a real home for children traumatized by their early circumstances. After 95 years, eight homes, and an apartment building, Hillside remains a true home to 66 children and 20 former foster care youth.

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Author Bio: As a licensed clinical social worker, John Hitchcock is the executive director of Hillside, a Pasadena charity that creates safe places for children in foster care living in its residential treatment center and prevents the cycle of abuse for children at risk and their families. Hitchcock is an expert on child welfare issues and has a blog, www.createsafeplaces.blogspot.com, addressing foster care and child advocacy issues. To learn more about Hillside, visit www.Hillside.org.

Marisol Barrios-Jordan, Hillside
Work: (323) 254-2274 ext. 274
Cell: (310) 713-8567
E-mail: mbarriosjordan@hillside.org

Hillside is a non-profit children's charity/foster home.

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