

Q & A with MCH president Bobby Gilliam

Bobby R. Gilliam, the ninth president in the 113-year history of Methodist Children's Home, began his work at the Home on April 28, 2003. Following are excerpts from a recent interview with Mr. Gilliam.

While a student at Baylor University, you worked at Methodist Children's Home. How did your experience at the Home influence your career?

The biggest thing was that I thought the kids at the Home were the neatest kids. They were so resilient, having overcome so much adversity in their lives. I realized that God gave me skills to work with children who have special needs and deficits. Working with these kids became my passion and set the course for my career.

You have held a variety of positions at Methodist Children's Home and other child care agencies. Most recently, you served as director of Mooseheart Child City and School in Illinois. How have these experiences prepared you for your work as president of Methodist Children's Home?

There are two things I gained from my past experiences: one, I learned a great deal from working with other recognized programs and, two, each move made me appreciate Methodist Children's Home even more. My experience at Mooseheart enabled me to return to Methodist Children's Home as a more complete administrator. One of the benefits for Mooseheart was that a lot of things we did there, in terms of finances and programs, were related to what worked well at Methodist Children's Home.



Residents at Methodist Children's Home benefit from the love and support provided by child care staff. "I have always believed that the most powerful change agent in a person's life is relationships," says Bobby Gilliam.

What does it take to be an effective child care professional?

Most importantly, you must have a true love for kids. And, you have to be an eternal optimist, knowing that you may not be a part of the harvest but that you are tending the field. Even though progress may seem slow, you have to believe that God is working in the lives of kids.

Where do you find the most fulfillment in your work?

I really get excited when we have staff members who are confident that they are carrying out the mission that God intended for them to carry out — knowing at the end of the day that this is what they're supposed to be doing. I appreciate staff members who have a passion for this ministry and work at it to the best of their abilities each day.

What is the most difficult aspect of your work?

The most difficult thing for me to deal with is when we throw kids a

lifeline — when we offer something that they can be good at — and some of them don't take hold of it. I know that they can do great things but they choose not to. It breaks my heart to see them throw the lifeline back. I still haven't been able to figure out how to prevent that from happening.

What is the greatest need of children who come to the Home?

We're losing a whole generation of kids who are looking for the same thing — a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, they're trying to find it in the wrong things. Many of the children who come to Methodist Children's Home do not have a sense of belonging within their family or community. I have always believed that the most powerful change agent in a person's life is relationships. We must continue to find ways to enable our kids to build relationships so they can gain a sense of belonging at the Home.

How does the Home encourage the development of relationships?

Research shows that resilient kids – those kids who overcome serious challenges in life – have at least one significant adult relationship. Everything we do at Methodist Children's Home is an opportunity to enable kids to form relationships, whether it's through the horse program, Alpine Tower, Youth Enterprises, basketball, music or therapy. Many kids quickly gravitate to a smorgasbord of activities and to a smorgasbord of adults. For some kids, we have to find ways for them to be successful and find adults who share the same interests.

How important is it for residents to build a relationship with God?

Resiliency literature shows that kids who come from horrible backgrounds often overcome their adversity because they see the silver lining behind the clouds;

they know there's something bigger than themselves. It is our belief that we cannot help kids without dealing with their spiritual needs. The most effective way to teach kids about God's grace, forgiveness and love is by daily living out our faith and theology. In addition to our religious education program, we have a seasoned group of managers who are open about their own spiritual development with our kids.

In addition to quality staff, programs and facilities, Methodist Children's Home has been blessed by strong financial support from donors. How does this affect your approach to providing care for children?

Because of the tremendous support of Methodist Children's Home donors, children and families receive services regardless of their ability to pay. The generosity of our donors is a sterling example for our children.

After you admit a child, how can you judge the Home's success in making a difference in that child's life?

This is the question I'm most often asked but it's difficult to answer. We can document fairly easily how a kid is progressing in our program through incident reports, caseworker notes, test scores and grades. We can determine if residents are better or worse than when they entered our program. The real issue, though, is looking at the success of these kids as they move into adulthood. Are our kids successful in school after they leave the Home? Are they successful in their families? Do they have to go to a more or less restricted environment? Judging success gets difficult at this point but we will continue to find ways to document the success of our children.

How do you view the Home's success compared with other agencies?

I am very proud of what is being done at Methodist Children's Home. I would compare what we're doing with our campus program, Boys Ranch, structured program and foster care with any agency in the country.

What do you see in the future for Methodist Children's Home?

My goal is to continue the Home's commitment to residential child care as we provide the most dynamic, redemptive environment for children in the nation. Many programs across the country are still trying to recruit the "healthy-well" child. In society today, that's not really who needs their help. As kids continue to bring a wider array of problems and difficulties, we must find ways to meet their needs. And I am confident we will do that at Methodist Children's Home.



The Boys Ranch recently hosted a canoe race with one of the home units from the main campus. The purpose of the activity was to help build relationships among residents from both campuses. "Everything we do at Methodist Children's Home is an opportunity to enable kids to form relationships," says Bobby Gilliam.