

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **NEW INDEPENDENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT Now Available For Youth Who Age Out of Foster Care**

Henrico, VA [April 3, 2018] – Each year in Virginia, at a higher rate than any other state in the country, hundreds of young people leave the foster care system at age 18 before they have been connected to permanent families. Without adequate family and community supports, these youth "age out" of care and are at high risk of some dire consequences. In an effort to provide housing and support services for these youth, Virginia Home for Boys and Girls (VHBG) announced the opening of an Independent Living Arrangement (ILA) on its 30+ acre property near Parham and Broad Streets in Henrico County.

“Since youth in foster care have typically experienced trauma, VHBG’s nonprofit ILA is a natural expansion of our trauma-informed programs that include Group Care Services, John G. Wood School (a specialized K-12 school), and Therapeutic Resources,” said Claiborne Mason, VHBG President. “We have always maintained the mantra that ‘*Family is Everything*’ and our skilled staff have extensive experience helping youth transition to permanent homes. The ILA fits perfectly within our skill-set to teach resilience, and we are stepping up to meet critical housing needs for young adults in the Commonwealth,” she added.

The Virginia Department of Social Services has licensed VHBG to serve up to 12 youth in its four townhouses and one ranch-style house that have been vacant for several years. “Re-purposing these dwellings that were once used for staff who lived on our campus into homes for youth who desire to reach successful independence was a perfect solution,” said Karen Swansey, VHBG’s ILA Director. “The townhouses are an ideal size to support two youth in each townhouse and they are in close proximity to colleges, employment, healthcare, shopping, and entertainment,” said Swansey.

Youth ages 17-21 who qualify for Fostering Futures funding (*a federal funding program administered by local Departments of Social Services directly to the youth*), now have the opportunity to live in a safe place while learning independence skills. Youth who choose Fostering Futures to access ILA will be twice as likely to have completed at least a year of college by 21. They will be employed and/or in school and will have health insurance and access needed health care<sup>1</sup>.

The community believes these youth in foster care deserve help transitioning to adulthood as well. Corporate partners such as Haynes and Target have supplied furniture and accessories for VHBG’s townhouses. Individuals from Pay-It-Forward Outreach collected donations of furnishings. And, a group of volunteers from Comcast Cares have planned a cleaning day. “We owe it to these youth to ensure they leave foster care with a chance to become productive and successful adults,” concluded Mason. “This ILA will ensure they have hope for their future.”

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jimcaseyouth.org/sites/default/files/documents/issue%20Brief%20-%20FC%20to%2021.pdf>

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**MORE INFORMATION**

**The Need:**

- From 2008 to 2015, more than 5,300 Virginia youth “aged out” of foster care before they were able to be connected to a permanent family.
- According to a survey conducted by the Children’s Home Society of Virginia, 20 percent of the people who “age out” of foster care are homeless within two years, one-fourth are incarcerated, 42 percent drop out of school, and more than 70 percent of the women in this group are pregnant by age 21.
- These young men and women need a place to live and assistance in learning the skills to become contributing members of their communities. ILA is designed to provide those vital services.

**The Project: Independent Living Arrangement**

- On February 12, 2018 Virginia Home for Boys and Girls was licensed by VA-DSS to provide a highly-individualized Independent Living Arrangement (ILA) for youth (ages 17-21) who age out of foster care and no longer have access to needed services.
- VHGB’s highly individualized ILA supports youth in achieving success as independent adults by offering housing and support services.
- VHGB’s property, located on 30+ park-like acres, is a safe, therapeutic neighborhood that is centrally located in Henrico, Virginia just minutes from downtown Richmond.
- With close proximity to colleges, employment, health care, shopping, and entertainment, the area offers public transportation and a walkable commute to jobs.
- Whether they go to work, pursue further education and/or need more guidance to transition into adult roles, these youth can live in a nurturing environment while they progress toward their life goals.
- VHGB’s campus, has four townhouses that can accommodate up to eight people and potential space in two ranchers that can accommodate up to four people in the ILA.
- Karen Swansey is VHGB’s Independent Living Arrangement Director (KSwansey@VHGB.org)



**Success Measures:**

Measuring the success of our ILA will consist of three components for each resident:

- 1) Casey Life Skills Assessments (measures 113 factors related to skills, knowledge, and awareness in daily living, self-care, relationships and communication, housing and money management, career and education planning, and self-confidence and control);
- 2) progress toward Individual Service Plan goals; and
- 3) successful discharges.

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**ABOUT VHGB**

VHGB is a nonprofit organization that has been serving children in crisis since 1846. Because most of the children we serve have faced some sort of trauma in their young lives, they often have social, emotional, behavioral, and academic barriers to succeeding. Teaching life skills, including financial responsibility, is an important element of the services we offer. Using a trauma-informed approach, we provide three core program areas that incorporate the teaching of life skills: 1) Group Care and Independent Living; 2) Specialized K-12 School -John G. Wood, and 3) Therapeutic Resources.