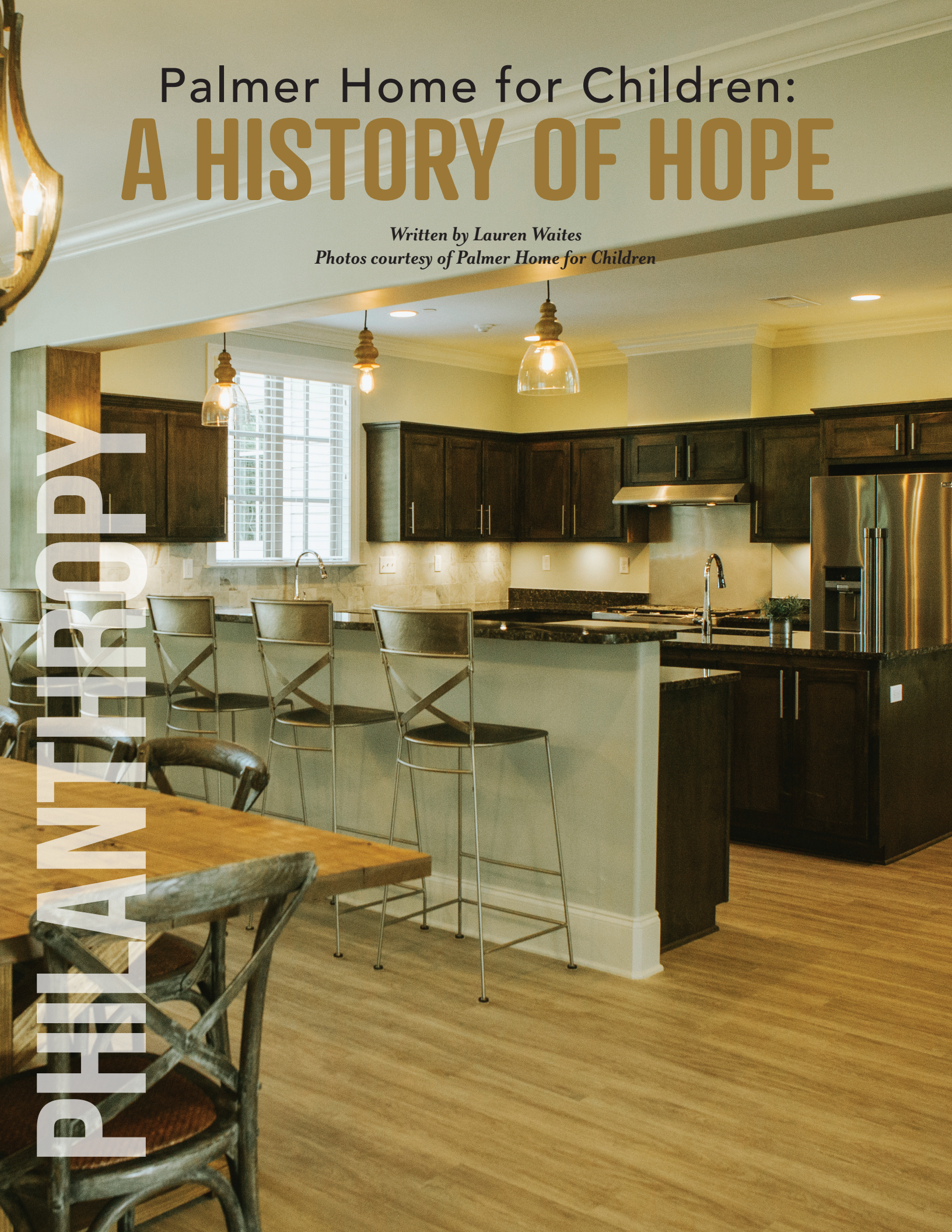


# Palmer Home for Children: A HISTORY OF HOPE

Written by Lauren Waites  
Photos courtesy of Palmer Home for Children



In 1895, much of the United States was still reeling from the devastation of the Civil War. The landscape of the American South was in ruins, and in its wake were thousands of orphaned children. William States Jacobs, a recent seminary graduate, arrived in Mississippi the year before and felt called to provide a home for children in need. With support from his congregation, the organization that would become Palmer Home for Children was established.

What began as a small orphanage has evolved into a multi-faceted ministry that serves hundreds of children each year; current President and CEO Drake Bassett estimates that the organization has cared for more than 10,000 children in some capacity over its 125-year history.

Bassett joined Palmer Home in 2012 after a successful career as a corporate executive with The Nielsen Company. “I began to examine my life and ask myself, ‘Where is the gospel in what I am doing? I took an honest look and realized I don’t actually see myself living it out.’”

His business skills translated well to the nonprofit sector, and Palmer Home has embraced a new strategic direction under his leadership while staying true to its mission.

“The needs of children today are different than they were in 1920 or even 1970. We have children coming out of very complicated situations – neglect, abuse, any number of different factors. All of these existed 50 years ago, but are far more prevalent today,” says Bassett. “However, our purpose remains the same: to provide superior care for children while introducing the love of God through our service to each individual child.”





In 2014, Palmer Home established Whole Child Initiative, a model of care designed to address each child’s unique and varying physical, educational, spiritual and emotional needs. This propriety approach provides a trauma informed, holistic, and relationally centered foundation and guides how Palmer Home cares for each child. Palmer Home believes that by helping a child work through their trauma, they are better equipped to thrive at home, in school and in community life.

“This is an environment where people understand the impact of trauma,” Bassett says. “We’ve brought together people who have skills and abilities to directly intervene in the lives of these children at the earliest point possible. Children then begin to cope, untangle the past and eventually begin to overcome.”

As Palmer Home approached its 125th anniversary, the organization widened its scope of services to offer four specialized care settings – Campus Care, Family Care, Foster Care and Transitional Care – designed to best serve the needs of each child at their stage in life.

CAMPUS CARE

Surrounded by 150 acres of natural beauty, the Palmer Home campus provides a restorative environment where kids can be kids as they learn, grow and play. Located in northwest Mississippi, the campus functions as its own neighborhood including six cottages, a chapel and lake.

On campus, children live in a Christ-centered family atmosphere, grounded in the Whole Child Initiative and designed for extensive support. Stable home environments allow children at Palmer Home to connect with trustworthy caregivers as they grow and develop. Each child receives a Bible, bike, new clothing and a furnished room upon admission.



The interior of a Palmer Home cottage is like any other family home except for its scale. Equipped to host up to ten children, each cottage features a massive dinner table, commercial-sized pantry, and twin sets of nearly every appliance including ovens, refrigerators, dishwashers and laundry washers and dryers.

House parents have a monthly budget to help run their household. They have the freedom to choose their meals, cleaning products, clothes and toiletries to make the home feel normal for the children in their care.

FAMILY CARE

Family Care provides nurturing care to infants of incarcerated mothers with the goal of reunification. Palmer Home recognizes the significance of a child’s biological mother and works to restore that key relationship.

Caregivers commit to raising a child, but also support mothers during their incarceration and after their release. While the mother is in prison, caregivers provide consistent communication and connection, and promote the birth mother’s involvement in her child’s life.

“Keeping the bond between mother and child is one of the most critical aspects of the work family care does,” says Bassett. “Dedicated caseworkers ensure that a cohesive relationship between mother, child and caregiver is possible.”

Through their partnership with Family Care, birth mothers experience growth both as parents and as individuals. As they build confidence, mothers are further equipped to successfully care for their child as they grow.

FOSTER CARE

Palmer Home’s foster families provide a loving two-parent household to children in need. Palmer Home believes each child benefits from a safe, stable, nurturing family that provides supportive relationships and a sense of belonging. Foster families commit to partner with Palmer Home while working toward reunification with each child’s birth family.

Palmer Home’s foster care program was established in 2016 and today has a staff dedicated to growing the network and providing families with the best training and support available. Palmer Home foster parents must meet minimum requirements and be able to provide adequate resources to care for a child; unlike traditional foster care systems, Palmer Home does not pay foster parents. Palmer Home foster parents also participate in permanency planning for the children in their care, ensuring the best possible outcome.

“Foster care allows us to serve more children,” says Bassett. “Sometimes, we get referrals for children that may not be an appropriate fit for our campus setting. However, if we have a foster home available where an individual family can provide one-on-one care, we can take in a child or sibling group that we couldn’t before.”



“In addition to our 125-year history, we receive no government funding, we emphasize reunification, we are committed to keeping sibling groups together, and our foster families partner with us in faith, and receive no stipends. The work we do at Palmer Home is incredibly unique.”

Drake Bassett, President and CEO of Palmer Home for Children







## TRANSITIONAL CARE

The transitional program provides continued guidance and coaching for young adults between the ages of 18 to 24 years old who otherwise would have “aged out” of traditional state-run foster care systems.

“Our goal is to prepare each child for independence through career and vocational development, as well as other life-skills needed to succeed as young adults,” says Bassett. “We provide housing, life skills training, educational and employment support services, and encouragement to empower them to achieve self-sufficiency.”

The transitional program connects each child with a case manager a few months prior to their 18th birthday. The case manager serves as a mentor, providing guidance and support as the child navigates decisions such as whether to enroll in college, pursue a career or train for vocational development. The case manager also provides instruction for important life skills such as paying bills, managing finances and setting goals for the future.

Palmer Home maintains two transitional group housing facilities available to any Palmer young man or woman who needs it. Both homes are overseen by house parents who provide a structured living environment while allowing the residents the freedom to learn to live independently. If a child elects to live outside of the housing facility, either on a college campus or independently, their case manager continues to check in frequently.

## A PROMISING FUTURE

As Palmer Home continues to grow, the organization has ambitious plans to serve a larger number of children and provide enhanced educational and developmental opportunities.

Construction will soon begin on a \$7.8 million Wellness Center on Palmer Home’s campus that will serve as the hub for children, families, employees and community members. Named in honor of longtime Palmer Home board member, the Dr. Hugh Francis,

Jr. Wellness Center will house all aspect of children’s services, classrooms, counseling suites, a gym, pool, patio, meeting rooms, commercial kitchen and more.

“Some children come to Palmer Home after living for years in the backseats of cars, rundown motels and tough neighborhoods,” says Basset. “They’re not ready to jump into traditional school. Instead of having to leave campus for their tutoring and counseling sessions, they’ll be able receive specialized, individualized care on campus at the Wellness Center.”

The campus will also soon be home to a large garden and herd of cattle that will provide ample learning opportunities for the children in Palmer Home’s care. Children ages 12 to 16 will have the opportunity to tend the garden and cattle as part of a campus work program to gain hands on experience and learn life skills.

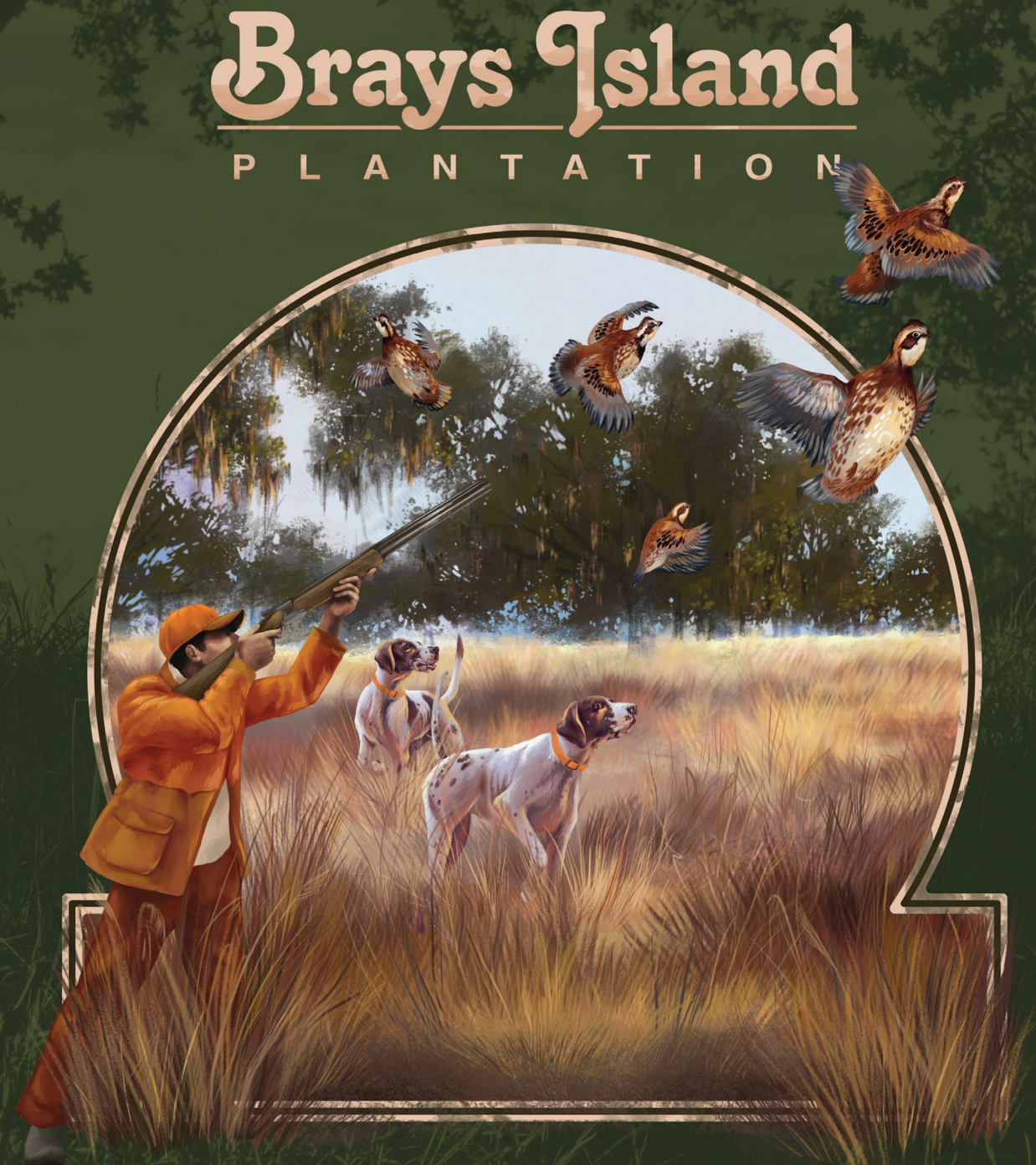
In addition to these updates to the campus, Palmer Home is working toward foster care certification in new states such as Alabama so it can help place more children across the South in loving homes.

Palmer Home has withstood some of the country’s most difficult times in history, including World War I, when 15 of its young men were called off to war; the Great Depression, when funding was scarce but the need to care for displaced children was greater than ever before; and World War II, when 54 Palmer alumni served their country and several more alumnae worked as nurses.

The COVID-19 pandemic will be another chapter in Palmer Home’s history. The organization has already experienced a marked increase in referrals for its services since March 2020 and is preparing to serve 30% more children in 2021.

“Many families were already on the brink of personal disaster, and unfortunately many of these fragile situations will crumble because of the pandemic and the hardships it’s creating,” said Bassett. “Palmer Home stands ready to help. God’s hand is steady, and, with His providence, ours will be as well.”

Palmer Home is entirely donation-based; the organization receives zero state or federal dollars. To learn more about Palmer Home, please visit [PalmerHome.org](http://PalmerHome.org). **P+P**



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