

## The History of Epworth Village

Epworth Village was founded as Mother's Jewels Home in 1889 by the Women's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Women's Society determined that opening this home would be an effective way to address the need to care for orphaned and abandoned children in the central United States.

Locating the orphanage in York, Nebraska made it particularly helpful to the thousands of orphaned and homeless children brought to the central United States by the orphan trains in the 1880's, 1890's and early 1900's.

By 1900, the school and vocational training program were fully operational and the orphanage Mothers' Jewels Home served children from across the United States and other countries.



By 1959, the ministry became more focused on children and youth experiencing family problems. The orphanage style of care was no longer appropriate for the population most in need of services. The agency was renamed Epworth Village in 1959 to signify the program transformation to services for families and their children who were identified with emotional and behavioral difficulties.

In 1979, Epworth Village implemented an incentive style program. Family reunification became an even more prevalent goal of treatment. Throughout 1981 and 1982, Epworth Village responded to a growing need for services by expanding our scope to include utilizing two homes in the York community which were owned by the Village. Slife Group Home and Coleman Group Home were remodeled to accommodate the youth. Additionally, the two cottages on the main campus were home to youth needing our services.

The Epworth Village Learning Center was established in 1983 on the main Epworth Village campus to address the individual learning needs of children placed at Epworth Village for care as many of our youth did not easily fit into the public school programs. This state approved Level III Special Education Service provides individualized learning experiences for learning disabled and behavior disordered clients.

The Learning Center is currently housed at the former Edison Elementary School building. Epworth Village purchased this building in 1995 from York Public Schools. Epworth began holding classes at the site in February 1996. The increased space and ability to have all classrooms in one building has helped our students and teachers approximate a more traditional school setting.

In 1996 Epworth Village opened the first Treatment Group Home in Nebraska. Many of our youth required intermediate steps prior to

being discharged to their home, foster home, or other placement. Although we have had three Treatment Group Homes in the past, Slife, Coleman, and Cruz, the off-campus group homes have been closed. Slife Home is the only remaining home utilized off-campus and has been re-purposed (2015) for use in our In-Home Services and Foster Care Services as a home environment for supervised visits and parent trainings.

Late in 1998, Epworth Village was awarded two State of Nebraska contracts. One was to open an Emergency Shelter with space for 10 youth and the other a Traditional Group Home in the Grand Island area with space for 10 males.

The Emergency Shelter was opened in May 1999 in York. This facility was for both males and females ages ranging from infant to 18 who were in crisis. Kruse, the traditional Group Home in the Grand Island area, accepted its first youth in November 1999. This facility served males ages 12-18 who need out of home placement.

Late in 2001, Epworth Village added yet another type of juvenile service program to our already extensive continuum of care. The Juvenile Holdover Program worked in conjunction with local law enforcement agencies to provide a safe place for youth that need to be detained for minor law violations. Prior to Epworth Village offering this service, youth were detained up to 150 miles away from their home counties for violations such as truancy and minor in possession of alcohol. By offering holdover services at the Blatchford Emergency Shelter, Epworth Village saved York, Fillmore, Seward, Hamilton, and Polk counties money and allowed families to stay closer together. Due to ever-evolving program changes, the shelter was later transformed into Blatchford Residential Treatment Center.

In 2017, as the landscape in caring for abused and neglected children changed in Nebraska, Epworth Village adapted and shifted their focus to serve even more children, both boys and girls, and their families by providing in-home and foster care services. Now, Epworth Village is on the front lines in providing preventative support and tools to families in need of healing. This will also allow expanded services, better support, and stronger families in our communities.

In 2018, the Little Jewels Child and Enrichment Center opened to care for the needs of children and families in the York and surrounding communities.