



CHRIS Kids renamed CHRIS 180 to better reflect nonprofit's work

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What's in a name? The nonprofit formerly known as CHRIS Kids would say the name should reflect the work of the organization.

That's why it has changed its name to CHRIS 180 – to both let the community know it doesn't just serve kids, but it also changes the direction of the lives of the people it serves.

"Our name was not representative of all the people we serve," said Kathy Colbenson, president and CEO of CHRIS 180. "We work with every age. Over 33 percent of the 5,000 people we held last year were 18 and older."

But the real significance in the change was adding 180 to the name. The nonprofit helps people make a 180-degree change in their lives by addressing the root of the issues.

"Part of the reason of our success is that we are getting to the root of the problems and not just providing housing," said Colbenson, who added that most of the people they serve have experienced serious trauma in their lives. "We are helping them heal and recover."

CHRIS 180 serves people who often fall between society's cracks. Many of the children, young adults and mothers they serve are homeless. They also focus on providing housing for young adults who have aged out of the foster care system but have not yet found a solid footing in their lives.

At any one time, CHRIS 180 provides safe housing for up to 114 individuals – varying from younger children to teenagers to young adults and formerly homeless mothers.

"The need is far, far greater than CHRIS 180," Colbenson said. "Most homeless people have experienced significant trauma in their lives. All our services are behavioral health."

That's why CHRIS 180, after going through a strategic planning process, decided to emphasize the CHRIS Training Institute, which helps train other nonprofits and government agencies on how to understand and treat people suffering from trauma.

"We can only touch so many people," she said. "Through training we are able to impact other organizations. We are providing a training for the state as well as providers. That's how we can increase our impact in helping people change the direction of their lives."

Through various tools, including social media, CHRIS 180 has tracked its former residents and found that "two years after leaving us, 97 percent are safely housed, and 90 percent are working," Colbenson said.

Interestingly, the name change is not new.

The nonprofit began in 1981 by the Atlanta Junior League, in collaboration with the Menninger Foundation, when it was called CHARLEE (Children Have All Rights – Legal, Educational, Emotional) and had three group homes for neglected children.

In 1992, it changed its name to CHRIS Homes. CHRIS is an acronym for the nonprofit's core values (Creativity, Honor, Respect, Integrity and Safety). About 10 years later, it became CHRIS Kids. And now CHRIS 180.

“We thought, it was very important to have a name that reflected what we do,” Colbenson said. “We help people change the direction of their lives. It implies a change of direction and ending up in a different place from where they started.”