

Happily Ever After

HUTTON SETTLEMENT'S MISSION
TO CARE FOR CHILDREN IN NEED

by Blythe Thimsen
photos by Adam Frangione
courtesy of Hutton Settlement

THE SETTING IS IDYLLIC: A tree-lined drive winding through grassy hills, drawing you closer to a grand brick manor at the end. Open fields surround the land, and from the look of the elegant and stately buildings dotted throughout the property, it would seem as though you've stumbled across an old English estate, the kind mentioned in fairy tales. In some ways this place is home to fairy tales, providing a happily ever after for the children who call it home. Currently over 30 children, between ages 5 and 18, do just that. This is Hutton Settlement, one of Spokane's most unknown and amazing organizations.



The main administration building at Hutton Settlement, which is attached to the large auditorium (on the left)

Unknown, because, though many people may remember hearing the name Hutton Settlement, most know very little about the work being done there. Amazing because of the influence, impact and change it has in the lives of young children.

The Hutton Settlement is a nearly 100 year-old children's home, providing a residential option for children from across the country in need of long-term care, to help them develop into responsible, healthy adults. Placements last a minimum of one year, or a child may remain there through high school. The program provides the stability that is difficult to achieve in short-term foster care. Children's lives at Hutton are consistent, with brothers, sisters, friends and other meaningful adults. Hutton gives

children a stable environment to help strengthen their growth and development.

Hutton Settlement, which is one of only a few children's homes in the country, was started by mining magnet Levi Hutton. Orphaned at the age of 6, Hutton, "never felt a part of a family." After making his fortune with the Hercules Mine in Wallace, Idaho, Hutton and his wife, Mae, moved to Spokane, where there were more business and social opportunities in which they could be involved. Not only did Levi and Mae have deep pockets, but they also had hearts that were particularly attuned to the needs of children. Never having felt a part of a family growing up, it had been Hutton's dream to build a children's home where no child would experience the isolation and

loneliness he had endured. Hutton decided to use his wealth to help the youngest of those in need in our society. He insisted the home "was to be a 'home,' not an institution. It had to be a secure place where families could stay together and not be shifted about."

In 1919, Hutton opened the Hutton Settlement Children's Home in the present-day Spokane Valley. For nine years, he regularly visited the settlement and was an intricate part of the lives of the children. Because many of them did not have a father figure in their lives before they met him, he became known as "Daddy" Hutton to the children.

A wise businessman with ample assets, Hutton had the foresight to ensure that Hutton Settlement could continue for



Children return home to Hutton Settlement after being dropped off by their school bus

years to come, through an endowment he established. While funding needs are always present, the organization has been able to operate without government assistance or funding for nearly 100 years. The current requested contribution for care of a child at Hutton Settlement is \$200 per month. However, no child is turned away because of a parent or family's inability to financially contribute.

Today, Hutton Settlement looks much the same as the original home that Hutton built. That aforementioned tree-lined drive leads up to the same administration building that greeted visitors so many years ago, and which, along with all of the buildings, was designed by Spokane architect Harold Whitehouse, who was also the architect for

St. John's Cathedral on the South Hill, as well as Levi Hutton's personal residence. Perhaps his experience designing St. John's influenced Whitehouse's design of Hutton; many mistake the tall bell tower on the administration building as a church. While administration offices fill the building, this is not off limits to the children. In fact, most of the campus is open to the children, providing a sense of ownership in their home.

"We want it to be accessible to the children," says Monique Cotton, Director of Community Relations and Communications, describing the administration building and the entire Hutton Settlement campus.

The tower that looks so much like a church from the outside actually soars above an auditorium. With its high vaulted ceilings, brick walls and original woodwork, the auditorium gives a glimpse into the past while playing an active role in the present. This space is put to use for talent shows, parties and gatherings for all of the residents of Hutton.

Because the children are indeed *residents*, it lends to some confusion about the nature of Hutton Settlement. Is it an orphanage, or a home for children with no families? The answer is no to both. Adoptions are not arranged through Hutton Settlement, and most of the children who live there do have families, but they are not in a place to care for them. Children at Hutton typically face one of two circumstances: they have been removed from their families by the state, or their own families have chosen to remove them from their home.

"Hutton is not for bad kids or broken kids," says Hutton Settlement's Campus Director, David Milliken. "At Hutton, kids are not seen as needing to be 'fixed'. Certainly we focus on healing past wounds and reconciling relationships, but we do so from an approach that pays less attention to one's deficiencies and more on one's strengths and capacity for human flourishing. Regarding families, Hutton is not about taking kids away from families, but partnering with families to provide a healthy, safe and nurturing environment for the child. This involves the parent or guardian having regular visitation with the child, staying connected with the staff on a consistent basis, and participating in services and learning opportunities. A child's family is crucial to making their stay at Hutton a success. We don't take the place of family, we make a larger space for family to express itself."



One of the four houses in which children at Hutton Settlement live



photo by David Crary

Campus Director, David Milliken, with two of the four houses behind him



photo by David Crary

House parents make time for family activities, like reading to the girls who live in their house

Hutton Settlement goes to great lengths to keep families together, something that is not usually an option in a foster care system. Seventy percent of children in foster care have siblings, and most of the time they are separated; Hutton Settlement is one of the few places where siblings can stay together.

While the children are at Hutton, they live in one of four large homes situated on the 319 acres of land on which the settlement is built. Each home currently has up to eight children and is under the care of house parents whose full time job is living in the house and taking care of the small family that is cultivated within the walls. That means gathering around a dinner table together for meals, working together to run the house, and living, laughing and loving as a family unit.

For Shaun and Liz Smith, who have been house parents in one the girls' houses for almost two years, serving in this role was an answer to a call to do something to help children in need.

"We met in South Africa while working with an orphan care organization, so this was something in our hearts from before we met," says Liz Smith of their decision to live and work at Hutton Settlement. "Since that time, we have married and held normal jobs and we have been open to having children, but none have come our way. We have always talked over the years about returning to Africa to work in orphan care, or opening our home to foster children, or adopting. When we learned about Hutton Settlement, we were excited that we could devote ourselves full-time to caring for children in need right here in Spokane."

Many of the children who come to Hutton Settlement struggle with a deep sense of loss, grief and insecurity, due to the events and family dynamics they have experienced in their short years. One of the goals of Hutton Settlement is to create a home environment where the children feel wanted and loved, "because that is their deepest area of need," says Smith.

House parents help the children deal with their grief and sense of loss by filling the role that parents usually play: being the people children can trust and a shoulder on which they can cry. Through helping them with homework, working on projects and chores together, and encouraging them in extra-curricular activities, house parents help Hutton children to continue to move forward in life despite their pain and loss.

For most of these children, the notion of a healthy and functioning family is something that has been missing from their lives, or has not been modeled for them. Creating a healthy family setting is something the house parents know is important.

“Families are miracles, right from their very beginning,” says Smith. “That a husband and wife can be joined as one, and that new people can come out of their unity is astounding. That children can be grafted into that family tree successfully through a bond that is not biological is a miracle as well. What we are doing here at Hutton takes nothing short of a miracle either, and we do see it taking place.”

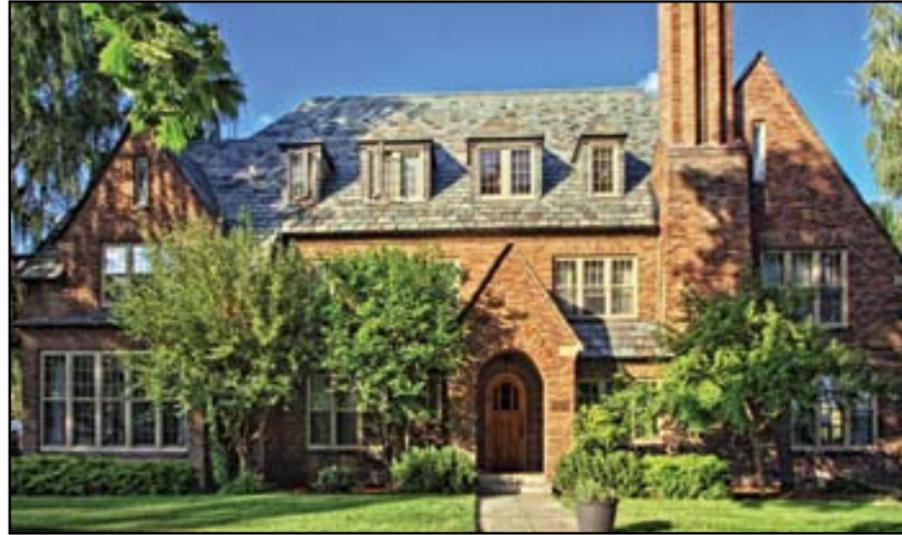
The miracle can be difficult to reach, and it takes a great deal of work to get there, as Liz and Shaun know. “All of the girls are caught in a sort of middle ground: they are not being allowed to live full time with their birth families, but they are also not in a situation conducive to adoption either,” says Smith. “Living in that is not easy, but what Hutton provides is a tremendous resource to children who find themselves caught in that middle ground – and there are many. We try to fill the parental void by being as relationally available as we can with the girls. We show them that they are wanted; that we care to invest in them, and that it is okay for them to develop attachments here while still hoping that their own family situation might improve in the future.”

For house parents, living at the Hutton Settlement is essential to the work they do. If they were able to just clock out and go home at the end of the day, the sense of family would be so much more difficult to cultivate.

“It’s a blessing, but living here does certainly affect our lives,” says Smith. “It is harder to get together with our families and friends. We sometimes take the girls with us to family functions or just to meet up with family members, but typically we try to get together with our family and friends on our days off so that we can give the children we care for our undivided attention. When we are at work, we usually have a lot to do, so some of our personal tasks get put on hold.”

Though there are sacrifices for house parents, Hutton Settlement feels like home to them, and they’d have to think long and hard about having it any other way. “Yes, we do feel a sense of home here,” says Smith. “Home is where the heart is and our hearts are with these children.”

While the goal of Hutton Settlement is to create a family setting, there is the inevitable



Founder Levi Hutton wanted the settlement to look like a home, not an institution



photo by David Cray

Communications Director Monique Cotton talks with one of the residents as she walks her from the bus stop to her house after school

flip side to the coin: this is indeed a business that needs to be run well. Since 1997, the man responsible for melding those two worlds and making it all work has been Milliken. In his role as campus director, he is responsible for implementing and supervising all campus operations to include personnel, social services, direct care and buildings and grounds, while at the same time recruiting and retaining high quality staff, and ensuring that Hutton’s values are strategically put into daily action.

After serving in the U.S. Army for three years and working in youth camp settings, he earned his undergraduate degree in psychology. “I found the highly involved work at Hutton to be a good fit for my personality and experience,” he says. “Later

I earned a graduate degree in organizational leadership at Gonzaga University and attended numerous executive development programs to better prepare me for increased leadership roles.”

Much like the house parents who work at Hutton, Milliken’s job provides him an opportunity to work with children who each have very different needs, in a variety of situations. “My days take lots of twists and turns,” he says. A recent day included counseling an upset child, conducting a performance review for a staff member, attending a family meeting to discuss a child’s placement at Hutton, giving a tour to a Boy Scout group, visiting a community leader for a future partnership, resolving a room arrangement issue with a staff member, and presenting a major strategic initiative for campus scheduling. “The challenge is giving full attention to the issue at hand, while constantly changing my focus throughout the day. The other obvious challenge and frustration is not being able to provide the necessary care and help for every child that we meet. Whether it be a crisis referral from a family in need of special services, or a current resident who has moved into mental health issues that are beyond our capabilities, it is difficult to come to the realization that some kids need a higher level of care than we can provide. It hurts to see a child leave to a more restrictive place.”

Though the work can be tiring and draining, Milliken is the first to admit the joys are numerous. “Watching a Hutton child grow in security and trust over the years, and eventually begin to arrive at a space where they can explore their interests



The original 1919 auditorium is still a vital part of the campus, used for activities, parties and performances

and passions is a definite highlight that you only experience when you do the work long-term,” he says. “Seeing a family reconciled through a Hutton partnership is always a joyous event. Having alumni (children who have lived there in past years) evolve into lifelong friends, watching our kids look outside of themselves and serve others in our community, and watching the children gain insight to the wonders of life and our diverse world are certainly joyous times.”

The alumni of Hutton Settlement are just as important a part of the on-campus Hutton family as the children who are currently living in the four stately brick manors. For any child who struggles with their family identity, those issues don’t automatically resolve when they turn 18. Though that is the age at which they are considered legal adults, it is really nothing more than a date on a calendar; they still need just as much love, support and a safe place to land. Though the children move on from Hutton when they are 18, the connection remains strong. One such example is Bryan Hall, an alumnus who still keeps close ties with his Hutton family even as he studies Communications at Western Washington



Playtime is important at Hutton Settlement, and this playground is well used by the children

University.

“Simply going back and getting the kids wound up before bed and then leaving to let the house parents deal with it,” is one of his favorite things to do when he comes home to visit, he jokes. “Ha ha! But in all seriousness, I just go back and visit,” he says of one of the ways he stays close with the family he created there.

Hall lived at Hutton Settlement because

his mother could not provide him with the proper care that she wanted to give him. With time and perspective, he has realized that despite the struggles of being apart from his mother for much of his childhood, living at Hutton Settlement had a profound impact on his life. “It has made me a stronger person overall and has shaped the way I view the world,” he says. “It was hard to go to school knowing that you were different



The kitchens in each house are large enough that everyone - house parents and children - can help when it comes to cooking meals and doing the dishes. Eating together around the table is an essential part of family life in each house at Hutton Settlement.

from everyone else, but at the same time it was a blessing because it made me more dependent on myself."

Hall recognizes that the unique nature of Hutton Settlement was a blessing in his life and is very different from the way other children's organizations work. "It's not a foster home," he says, emphasizing one of the most important factors about Hutton Settlement, "it is a family. There's a big difference in the meaning of those words."

A program like Hutton Settlement, which is so different from foster programs, is a necessary resource, at least according to those who have been through and experienced the program. "There is no connection, family-wise, between you and the foster kids and parents," says Hall. "At Hutton, you experience a true sense of brotherhood and sisterhood and form relationships that last a lifetime."

Those relationships are not just felt by the children who call the place home, but also by the staff and administration that have made the work of Hutton Settlement part of their personal mission and their lives. For some of the employees, especially those who live on campus, the line between work and personal lives are sometimes blended beyond recognition.

"My wife and I realize that the state of our health and well-being will effect the work we

do and the children and families we serve, so self-care is critical," says Milliken. He and his wife have a daily spiritual practice that keeps them connected to their Hutton vocation and their faith community. "We practice yoga, spend time in the outdoors and seek solitude to re-charge for the important work of Hutton. These personal practices help us intentionally cultivate the four things that I believe are most needed to succeed in this work: compassion, patience, flexibility and a sense of humor. Without those four, life in residential care would be an incredible challenge."

Milliken believes his vocation at Hutton is an expression of his life. There certainly is no such thing as a work-life balance at Hutton; your work and your life are one. "This is tough to comprehend for those who work a normal work schedule and even more difficult to adapt to when you first come to work at Hutton," he says. "But over the years, you gain a deeper sense of the sacredness of the work being done, and it takes on a whole new meaning. You no longer see it as work, but a life fully lived with deep purpose. I don't believe I could go back to working the fragmented life."

A fragmented life is not desirable from the work standpoint, but what about the children who are enduring a fragmented life by leaving their families behind and living

at Hutton. What resources are there, aside from the people, to help them through the difficulty? Apparently, there are many.

Education is a top priority, with on-site technology and tutors, as well as access to remedial services if needed. The children at Hutton Settlement attend the West Valley School District, and participate in all aspects of their schools, from the classroom to the athletic teams and extra-curricular activities.

Extracurricular activities are provided through Hutton as well, with three specific programs offered to help the children learn and do their best. Journeys is a creative arts program which provides the opportunity for young artists to express themselves through photography, painting, drawing, and more in the on-site creative arts studio. S.A.L.U.T.E (S.ervice A.nd L.eadership U.nited T.hrough E.ducation) is a weekly 4-H and service learning program. Odyssey is an adventure-based Scouting program that strives to develop self-confidence, personal resilience and leadership through outdoor challenges that require teamwork, trust and perseverance.

"It is very important to empower kids and teach them that they can give back, and that it feels good to give back," says Cotton. One way Hutton Settlement is taking this from an idea to an action is through their gardens. The children take an active role in tending



A Christmas tree farm on the property allows children to be a part of the growing process, as well as providing business experience when they sell the trees each Christmas

vegetable and flower gardens through all phases, from planting, watering and caring for them, to harvesting the fruits - or in this case vegetables - of their labor. The vegetables are then donated to the Women's and Children's Free Restaurant in Spokane, and the flowers are hand delivered to the Veterans Home. This provides the children a sense of ownership in their work, and allows them to give to other groups of people who are experiencing different troubles.

The children also work each year, selling pre-cut Christmas trees, which are planted and grown on some of the 319 acres of Hutton Settlement's property.

Cotton says that they used to have the children work to raise lambs for 4H, but it was too difficult for the children when they had to sell the animals. Now, in order to fill that need for a loving soft animal, there are housedogs for each of the four houses, allowing the children to bond and attach to a pet, without having to say goodbye to it.

"The sense of community that is felt on our campus between staff and kids is like no other place I've experienced," says Milliken. "Living and working in this caring Hutton neighborhood where people collectively possess a sense of purpose and act with compassion makes for a fun and fulfilling place to be."

The greatest need for Hutton Settlement

at this time is identifying and reaching out to the families who are in need of hope and compassionate care. With recent budget cuts and services being cancelled due to current economic woes, families in crisis are left with less support and networks of care. As a longstanding child welfare organization in our community, Hutton Settlement wants to reach those families who desperately need some hope in their lives but don't know where to turn. They are licensed to have up to 50 children living there, and their goal is to have every bed filled, knowing that they are providing comfort, stability and hope for the little ones who will fill those beds.

"The best thing the community can do, from my perspective, is come visit us at the Hutton Settlement," says Milliken. "See what we are about and see first hand the incredible work being done here. You don't truly get a sense of the Hutton Settlement until you drive down our lane and visit us on our campus. From that experience, stories are shared and networks are formed, strengthening our ability to reach those invisible families in need of hope, healing and reconciliation."

According to the Hutton Settlement website, in 1918, Levi Hutton "was recognized at a Shrine convention by the national Imperial Potentate who said, 'If one man could build and do for children what



photo by David Crany

House dogs, like this one, provide a loving pet with which the children bond and learn the responsibilities of caring for an animal

Mr. Hutton has done, what could 500,000 Shriners do?' Consequently, at the next convention, a plan was initiated to start the Shrine Hospital for Crippled Children."

Likewise, if Hutton Settlement can do for the children what they have done, what could the contributions of more from this community do? They might just be able to help provide a happily ever after to some of the most deserving children. **■**