

Murry Hill Center Open House Remarks from Mark Cunningham, Executive Director
Wednesday, June 13, 2018

Good afternoon. I am thankful you are here to celebrate with us the formal opening of the COBYS Family Services Murry Hill Center.

I became executive director about nine years ago. For the first five years, there weren't a lot of changes in the organization. Some programs would be up, some would be down. Then after a while those that were up went down and those that were down went up.

Then about four years ago, things started to change. All programs started growing. And for a while, we kept adding staff in all the programs to meet those needs. And things were going well.

Then in 2016, we started feeling some pressure. We were starting to run out of office space. We were putting three people where two should be. The pressure started to affect all of us. Admittedly it didn't affect me so much, I had my own office the entire time, but it was clear that the overcrowding was affecting the organization.

Also, the family life center that we bought in 2012 was doing so many classes that we were struggling to find times and places to hold classes. Lots was happening.

So we were in this situation where we were growing so rapidly that at times, it just felt like we were hanging on, going for a ride. We were being reactionary, which is necessary to a degree because of funding and state issues.

But we were being reactive in ways that I would have preferred to be proactive.

All this while, we never once had the discussion about how we can grow. My goal has always been to be receptive to the needs of the communities we serve; specifically relating to the kids and families we serve. It has never been my goal to see if we can grow, or to see how big we can grow. That was never part of the discussion or equation.

So, we were at a place, I was at a place, that I didn't know what to do. My head was spinning. We were at the edge of where we could go without rethinking the way we do things. To get to the next step, we would have to be structured a bit differently and think differently. About that time, I happened to go to a leadership event and heard a speaker that was excellent. I thought that I should have that speaker in to give that exact same speech to our leadership team.

But as I rolled around that thought for a few days, it morphed into the idea of hiring a consultant to help us think through our growth and to possibly help us think in ways that we haven't before.

So, in January of 2017, we hired True Edge Performance Solutions. It is a small consulting company, but they are strong Christians and understood where we were. We went through a process with them to assess our organizational strength and our readiness to take the next step. Thankfully, they found us to be strong enough to take the steps forward that we needed to take. There were a number of suggestions they made, but clearly the biggest one was for us to buy

another building to help ease the overcrowding. It was nice having a neutral voice confirming the need to purchase.

We began looking for a location that would house administration and family life education staff. We actually signed a letter of intent to purchase a building for that purpose. But we also kept looking. At the urging of executive team members, we toured the building we are dedicating today.

As we thought about the possibilities this building affords, it became clear that to allow for maximum growth, it made sense to move foster care, and adoption staff rather than administration. Family life education was still going to move, but we began thinking differently about who else would move.

I am a little embarrassed and humbled to share with you that I was the last person of the executive team that was convinced this would be a viable option for us.

But after touring the building, considering our recent growth, and having numerous conversations, I became convinced. And the board of directors all along the way from hiring the consultants to purchasing the building were supportive and encouraging.

So, on January 12, we bought this building. On January 15, the United Way Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, 59 volunteers began renovations, tearing out carpet, removing lights, prepping and painting, and more. By the end of that first day volunteers had contributed 220 hours. By the time the project was finished, about 80 volunteers had given nearly 700 hours, valued at thousands and thousands of dollars. On February 22 and 23 we moved foster care and adoption into this building, and on March 28, family life education made this building their new home.

So a lot has happened in the past 18 months.

Here are three things I take away from this process.

1. We serve a great God. I am fully convinced that God's hand was in this process the entire way. A lot of things had to happen for us to be here today. And I say with great regularity that God is not a God of coincidences. So first and foremost, thanks be to God for this building and this opportunity.
2. We have tremendous staff. Many factors have played a part in our growth. One major factor is that our staff does their work in such a way that counties and other referring agencies want us to provide more and more services. Organizations don't grow like this unless they do quality work. Our staff does quality work.
3. Our contributors have put us in a place financially that we were able to take this step. Without your support, we are not standing here today. Without your support, COBYS programs and services look very different. Your generosity allows us to do things that other organizations are not able to do. One of which is buy a building that is meeting our current needs and gives us room to grow and serve more children and families in the future.

And now, what I see for the future. I wish I knew. I do know this: With God's help, quality staff, and your continued support, COBYS will do the best we can to continue to serve kids and families in our communities.

And now nearly five months to the day of purchasing this building.

After investing thousands of dollars in renovations. . .

After receiving the blessing of hundreds of hours of volunteer time. . .

After more than three months of staff doing their regular work along with packing, unpacking, decorating, and adjusting to a new setting. . .

It is our privilege to formally open Murry Hill Center. In so doing we proclaim anew our desire to serve our community to the best of our ability. Motivated by Christian faith, we renew our commitment to educate, support, and empower children and adults to reach their full potential.