Spencer, Age 6, our oldest Born Free child. “How long do I have to hold up this stone wall?” Anyone familiar with life at the Angel House came out of Angies car! “Kerri, do you know how I was borned?” This question came from preschooler Jayden, to one of our long-term volunteer workers. Without giving her the opportunity to come up with an age-appropriate response, he supplied his own. “The doctor gave me a shot in my leg, and mommy said, ‘Come Jayden,’ and I came out of Angies car!” Anyone familiar with life at the Angel House would probably be able to piece together how he reached such a nonsensical conclusion. In case you don’t fall into that category, let me fill you in! I’m the above mentioned ‘Angie’. I’ll start with the history of the Angel House and the Born Free Ministries. In 1991, a Lexington (KY) pastor involved in prison ministry became aware of an incarcerated woman who was expecting a baby. Women in such a situation have their babies under guard at a local hospital. Then, when discharged and returned to prison, if there is no family member or friend able to take custody of the infant, the mother’s rights are terminated and the State gets the child. So this pastor, already aware of the ministry of the Galilean Home, called up Jerry and Sandy. He inquired as to whether they could temporarily care for the child, so that the woman upon release from prison could have a second chance at being a mother to her baby.
They said, “Yes!” Now, 600 plus babies later, the rest is history!

Initially in baby cribs in every corner at the Main House, Born Free babies now reside in the Angel House. It was built in 1995, with an addition in 2000. We could technically house about 40 babies now. Although we typically care for about a dozen children at a time, depending on need, we have had as few as one and as many as 24! We have had babies whose mothers are doing prison time in federal institutions across the country, but our current five babies and three toddlers all have mothers incarcerated in state. The Kentucky Correctional Institute for Women (KCIW), located just outside of Louisville, allows special visits for the moms to have bonding time with their infants and young children. What that means for us is that every Thursday morning, we load up a van with babies, bottles, diaper bags, and workers, for the two-hour one-way trek. The mom’s two hour visit is held in the prison chapel area, which has a sweet nursery area just for bonding visits. It is the highlight of the week for the mothers, and gives them a reason to move forward. When and if the women get transferred elsewhere (i.e. another state prison, county jail, halfway house, or drug treatment center) we work out visits when possible.

During these weekly visits at KCIW, expecting women just arriving there have the opportunity to come to the chapel, observe a little of the visits in progress, and speak to a Galilean Home representative in regard to their own baby coming to us. They ask questions, and we find out their due date, etc. If the mother does choose to have us take temporary custody of her baby, proper paperwork gets filled out. Later, when the baby is born, we are notified by the prison, and bring the baby from the hospital to the Angel House.

So begins life for each new Born Free baby. They are cared for by a crew of dedicated young ladies and women, some are long-term volunteers; others are paid staff from the community. We have shifts, as you would expect in say, a nursing home. First shift comes in early every morning. As babies wake up, they are bathed, dressed, and fed. Then there are the toddlers, who better not wake up too early!

Usually the children have been able to go home with their mothers before they have even learned to walk, but occasionally they stay a little longer. Also, if our workers have young children, they are able to bring them to work. So then, when breakfast has been prepared, you’ll find toddlers and preschoolers in high chairs, with gravy on their fingers, and syrup in their hair!

Once cleaned up, the toddlers go to their play area downstairs. Weather permitting, they can even go play outside. Even in the winter, when the weather is allowing outdoor activity! Even the older babies get excited when they see a stroller or wagon, because they know they are about to go for a walk, and maybe even get to see the chickens and pigs behind the main house!

Upstairs, they’re changing, feeding, rocking babies, and eventually putting them down for naps until time to do it all again. Everything gets charted so we can keep track. For the most part, everyone takes turns and pitches in to do the laundry, dishes, cleaning, and meal preparation. Second shift comes in the afternoon, and it’s the same kind of thing until bedtime. By the time 3rd shift arrives, all but the very youngest babies are asleep for the night. Those babies are fed as needed through the midnight hours, bottles are made, and some cleaning is done.

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Morning comes, and the cycle repeats itself, sometimes, with slight variations of course. When babies are sick, or due for immunizations, a supervisor takes them to the doctor’s office in town. Sometimes a baby, whose mom is somewhere other than the KCIW prison gets to go visit their mother. Did I mention that the Kentucky Colonels donated a vehicle to the Home for Angel House use? It’s much better than a 15-passenger van, for transporting just one or two babies from the hospital at birth, to doctor appointments, or to visits with their mothers.

Anyone familiar with the Angel House knows that, while not always perfect, babies are certainly precious! They don’t grow in a cabbage patch, and are not delivered by a stork. It’s quite obvious, really (that is, if you take the facts and scramble them together)! The babies may have band-aids where they’ve just had shots, and they may have just gotten back from seeing their mother, but they sure always seem to come out of that car Angie drives!

Our prayer for these children is that not only will they receive help for the here-and-now, but that there will be seeds planted in their little lives, and in the lives of their mothers, which will bring forth fruit for eternity. We are just a small part of the big picture. Thank you for being a part as well!

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.” Matthew 25:40.

A little note of encouragement we received recently

Your work for the Galilean Home is truly inspirational. Without your help in most circumstances these children would not be given love, an education, and medical care. Most importantly, you have given the children a safe and stable environment for them to reach their fullest potential. You are doing God’s work by protecting God’s beauty inside each child. In caring for these children, you have been blessed as well. You have been blessed with the gift of love. You love these children as if they were your own and you do not treat any of them differently. You are so beneficial to these children and we really do appreciate it. We would like to encourage you to keep promoting the good work that you do and we as individuals can begin to help people recognize your work. We do understand that these children will have to deal with the effects of FAS for the rest of their lives, but without you, they may not have a good handle on it. Keep up the great work!