

## **Helping Miracles Happen**

### **Milligan OT grads change lives at Johnson City pediatric therapy clinic**

MILLIGAN COLLEGE, Tenn. (December 20, 2016) – Many give generously during the Christmas season. But Kelli Scott, a pediatric occupational therapist and 2003 Milligan College Master of Science in Occupational Therapy graduate, has made helping others her lifelong commitment.

In 2013, while working at a local pediatric clinic and feeling limited within the confines of a big corporation, Scott started “Mini Miracles Pediatric Therapy” in Johnson City, Tennessee, so she could not only meet families’ medical therapeutic needs, but their spiritual and emotional needs, as well.

Her work took root in the Southwest Virginia region, considered one of the poorest and neediest areas in Appalachia, serving babies and toddlers in their homes. Lee, Scott and Wise counties had been without consistent access to occupational therapy for years.

Her practice grew rapidly, and soon she sought assistance from fellow M.S.O.T. graduate Melodie Perry (’09). She had direct knowledge in missions from serving for years in Africa prior to becoming an OT. In a short time, they were each making the 90-minute drive regularly from Johnson City to Southwest Virginia to serve children with special needs and their families. Scott and Perry spent their days in homes, teaching parents how to help their child achieve skills in play, feeding, sensory processing and motor development.

Within a year, they rented a small office in Johnson City and received school contracts with Bristol, Virginia, public schools. Before long, Scott had hired four more therapists, adding physical therapy and speech therapy to the services provided.

By April 15, 2015, she moved Mini Miracles into a new 5,500 square-foot warehouse in Johnson City. The move enabled the entire dream of the ministry to be realized.

“It was a huge leap of faith to purchase the building,” said Scott. “That’s when things just exploded.”

Mini Miracles went from serving 50-100 children and their families to more than 650 children.

A year later, there are 17 therapists, including occupational, physical, and speech therapists, as well as counselors, office staff and interns from Milligan and East Tennessee State University at Mini Miracles. In addition to Scott (B.S. ’01) and Perry, other Milligan alums like Tara Hensley (M.S.O.T. ’10), Whitney Benton (B.S. ’12, M.S.O.T. ’15) and Melonie Hazelwood Sarver (B.S. ’01, M.S.O.T. ’03) joined the practice to serve children through the now seven therapy contracts within Southwest Virginia and the Tri-Cities.

“We knew about it because we had friends who had liked it on Facebook,” said Becky Norvell, who takes her son Tristan for therapy, while their other son, Jack, takes handwriting classes at Mini Miracles.

Becky and her husband, David, both earned their Master of Divinity degrees from Emmanuel Christian Seminary at Milligan in 2011. “Mini Miracles has a welcoming and loving

environment for children. It has a laid-back atmosphere—not like a doctor’s office or a clinic,” said Becky.

Becky said that more than once she has left Tristan’s sessions in tears, “good tears.” She has felt accepted by Scott’s therapists and knows that Tristan is receiving the assistance he needs.

It was in the new space that Scott added counseling services and the “Imagine Ministry,” which provides extracurricular programming for children with special needs after school and during the summer. The community’s response to the program has been incredible, according to Scott, especially in regards to donations and fundraising. The ministry’s extracurricular activities for children include yoga, art, dance, sports, group games, nature and gardening, and music. This past summer, 88 children participated, and some families drove nearly two hours to bring their child to Mini Miracles.

The program also includes counseling with a focus on helping families to work through the struggles, sorrows, and joys of raising a child with special needs. In addition, Imagine offers four support groups a month, special needs tutoring, an equipment donation/lending program and camps.

Scott said Imagine was born out of serving four missionary families that were here on furlough over the summer.

“We are working to develop a program to provide much-needed therapy to children of missionaries while they are overseas,” said Scott. “Melodie and her husband, Eric, will soon be traveling to Ethiopia to take the initial steps in piloting this program.”

Scott says that her passion for servant leadership really came into focus during her time at Milligan. Not only that, but she believes that being able to have fellow Milligan grads on her therapy team, as well as other therapists who share the same Christ-centered mindset, has helped seed her business’s growth.

“Milligan’s always been like a family,” said Scott, “so it’s really special when you can carry that over into your work life and carry that passion for Christ into your work team. All of the therapists and staff see their job through that lens. Productivity and revenue are rarely talked about, which is a lot different than the typical medical environment.”

Of course, Scott and her team often deal with some very difficult situations.

“People ask, ‘isn’t it sad?’” said Scott. “I don’t think so. There are gifts that these kids have that no one else could give you. Their love is pure and unconditional. Ultimately, there are more success stories than tragedies. We have kids who are very fragile, medically speaking, but we have a front row seat for a lot of miracles that occur in the process.”

For more information about Mini Miracles, visit [www.minimiraclespllc.com](http://www.minimiraclespllc.com).

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