

Family Place graduate fulfills her calling at Parkway Place

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HOUSTON—Working with a patient at [Parkway Place](#), Melody Costello speaks in measured, direct, even firm tones. Every word seems to infuse confidence into her patients.

In many ways, that's part of the speech therapist's healing formula. Patients begin to believe they can recapture what they once found easy. Then she provides practical help for their issues and a plan through which they can overcome the obstacles they face.



Melody Costello Residents at Parkway Place—a ministry of [Buckner Retirement Services](#)—often are living through a time of change as they move from personal homes to a community setting. They may need to regain their mobility, speech or ability to swallow.

Transitions can be difficult, but Costello knows firsthand with a little help, individuals can make it through the changes.

At 17, Costello gave birth to her son, Travis. Seeking a good life, she

enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, knowing education would be her avenue to a solid financial situation. Then she received the news—the school no longer had family housing for her and her son.

Scrambling for another option, Costello learned about [Buckner Family Place in Lufkin](#). When she arrived in August 2005, she dreamed of becoming of a speech therapist, said Brenda Dunn, clinical program manager at Family Place.

'Never veered from her goal'

"The first time I met Melody, she was simply a teenager full of life," Dunn said. "She knew from the start exactly what she wanted to do and never veered from her goal."

Within two weeks, Family Place provided a home from which she and Travis could launch their lives. The program provided a way through which they were positioned to grow—academically, personally and emotionally.

"Buckner gave me that transitional step from me being at home with my parents helping me with my son to being a single mom taking care of everything on my own," she said. "The counseling helped a lot. They had classes on topics like budgeting and parenting. They try to structure things where you're going to be successful."

A listening ear

Costello bonded with Dunn, who was her counselor. Dunn provided a listening ear, encouraging word and helpful hand. When Costello needed someone to turn to, Dunn and other Family Place staff members were available.

"They supported me through everything," she said. "You didn't have to

worry about rent or that it was taken out of the funds you received. Your main focus was school and your family.”

Family Place provides the environment where individuals can thrive, but it’s up to clients to put in the work that makes transformation possible, Dunn noted.

“I always try to tell people that even though we provide many services—affordable housing, utilities, childcare, counseling, parent education and life skills—here, the parents still have their plate really full with trying to attend a full load of classes, study and spend quality time with their children as single parents,” Dunn said.

“When they accomplish their goals, you have that maternal pride, but it’s really their motivation and their determination that have made it happen.”

Passionate about helping people

Costello went on to earn a bachelor’s degree from Stephen F. Austin in May 2009. After exiting the Family Place program, she earned a master’s degree in speech therapy. Working at Parkway Place, she’s doing what she’s passionate about—helping people, just as they once helped her.

She’s particularly encouraged as she helps patients learn how to swallow again. When people lose the ability to swallow, they often feel isolated. Many social events occur around food. When people can’t eat, they feel awkward at those occasions. Through rehabilitation, Costello helps bring friends and family closer together.

“I prefer working with geriatric patients,” Costello said. “When you’re able to work with adults, you’re improving their quality of life.”

Preparation wasn’t easy

Costello’s life experiences have prepared her to make such an impact, she

believes. The journey hasn't always been easy, but it's one she's navigated.

"I feel like God put me on a path for a certain reason," she said. "The way things happen, they happen for a reason. I don't believe in coincidence."

Transitions aren't easy. But people can survive them with a little confidence, God's grace and help along the way, she said.

"I wish more single moms knew about Buckner and the assistance they provide," she said. "Single moms, they feel like there's nowhere else to go. I wouldn't be where I am today without Family Place."