

Caronport High School has a long history of challenging its students to make a difference in the lives of others. Here we chronicle the stories of two CHS students—one who has been using what she learned at CHS for 25 years and another who is about to start.



## Alumni: CHS Then...

Shannon (Carlson) Stewart, CHS 1983

### Shannon Stewart Provides Hope to New Moms

Shannon Stewart's face shone as she described her involvement in Basically Babies, a charity that provides hope for needy new mothers who don't have the means to buy clothing or other necessities for their newborns.

She said, "Imagine...a young woman [who is] probably about your age. She's terrified. She's fleeing for her life from an abusive husband, she's just given birth to twin girls, [and] she's moved into an abuse shelter. [She has] a couple of items of clothing, a couple of personal items, and that's it.

"When she's called down to the front desk one day, there's an enormous gift for her—two of them, in fact, each tied up with ribbons and bows. They're piled high with beautiful clothes, toys, and little outfits for her precious little girls for the upcoming year. It's a practical gift that provides hope.

"This is what we do at Basically Babies. We clearly recognize that we're not solving all of their problems—not even close. But we are [showing them]...that somebody cares about them."

Stewart has come a long way since her time at CHS, where she spent four formative years in residence and graduated in 1983. "All of my learning was from here," she said.

Having started at the incredibly young age of 13, it was "enormous for confidence-building... The environment was amazing... There was protection there, and it helped [me] make better choices."

She went on from CHS to develop her leadership abilities at NAIT and the University of Alberta, and at present, she and her husband live in Sherwood Park, AB, with their four



## ...and CHS Now

Jessica McLeod, CHS 2008

### Jessica McLeod Will Provide Hope to Kids

I've dreamed of becoming a pediatrician for about a year now. I love kids, I love helping people, and I can't stand seeing anyone get hurt. This love of helping has developed through the many opportunities that I've had to serve others as a CHS student. I've set up for events, gone to soup kitchens, and given up my

Easter break to sing and share God's message of love and forgiveness with others. For some, this would be a sacrifice, but I love it.

As I began to share my dream with my family and friends, I got many different responses, mostly positive ones—except for when I told my mom. She didn't think that

medicine would be the best fit for me because I'm too empathetic, because it would involve too much schooling, because raising kids would be difficult...she gave me countless other reasons for rethinking my plans. In some ways, she was right, but I felt that I needed to follow God—my dream had come from





children. They do business consulting together.

Her true passion, though, comes out in her involvement with Basically Babies. “My skills combined with a passion for meeting the needs of others...have equipped me to serve

through...Basically Babies,” she said. “I’m at a point in my life where I can’t take time for things that aren’t critical—it’s that important to me.”

The organization helps needy new mothers by anonymously giving them “layettes”, which consist of 80-100 new and gently used baby items that have been carefully washed, mended, and sorted by size, season, and theme and then packed attractively into a plastic laundry basket. Nearly everything a mother needs in her baby’s first year is included, right down to a small snowsuit for a newborn born in the winter and a larger snowsuit for when he or she is nearly a year old.

The women her organization helps are often “terrified, alone, and abused,” said Stewart. Many are immigrant women with little or no income, marketable skills, or family or spousal support. “We’re coming alongside [these mothers] at a difficult time in their lives. We’re saying, ‘Your life has value and the life of your baby has value. Here’s a gift to help you

celebrate this time.’”

Basically Babies began nearly 14 years ago. At first, they were distributing 30 or 40 layettes per year. Now they distribute ten times that many.

While they work closely with many churches, they’re not considered a para-church organization. That’s by design, said Stewart. This way, they’re able to work closely with many different organizations to meet the needs of women—no matter what their backgrounds are. “The fact of the matter is that the baby has arrived regardless of how [his or her mother] got there. [They need to] know someone cares about them,” she said.

Meeting needs is their ministry strategy. Although they often pack a children’s picture Bible and a Jesus DVD “to give them some hope for their future” in the layettes, they don’t focus on following up with the mothers. “We know that someone else might be able to continue the ministry,” said Stewart. “God can use anything to work.”

him, after all. So one night, just before Christmas, I told God that if he wanted me to do this, he needed to convince my mom that it was okay.

Soon after this, we went to my grandparents’ for Christmas, and one afternoon, my mom handed me a book. She said, “I just finished reading this and I think you should read it. It made me realize that you should be a pediatrician.”

When I finally sat down and read the book a few weeks later, I knew right away why it had changed her mind. The book was called *The Christmas Blessing*, and as I read, I saw myself on the pages. The main character was a medical student who, like me, was struggling with whether

he should continue on the journey he’d begun. In that moment, I knew that my dream was going to become a reality.

As I was falling asleep that night, I asked God why I should become a doctor. He brought to mind three children who have changed my life—each of them has been able to do so because of the care of a pediatrician.

The first is my brother, Michael, who had heart surgery when he was two. He’s been the one I look up to, and I’ve had countless talks with him about everything from boys to my relationship with God. The second is a baby girl named Melina, who is 18 months old and has a heart defect. She brings me so much joy—every

time I see her little grin, I can’t help but grin myself. The third is a baby boy named Jose, whom I met in Mexico at an orphanage last August. Before I met him, he spent six weeks in intensive care recovering from domestic abuse. He has made me realize how blessed I am to have a family who keeps me safe. I realized that God wanted me to be a pediatrician so that other children could touch lives just like these three have touched mine.

I am so excited for what God has in store for me and I know that I will have challenges, but I can’t wait to walk with him every step of the way.