



**Boys &  
Girls Aid**

**FALL 2022**

# Connect



## *Deserving of Care, Attention, and Every Chance*

**WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT TEENS IN FOSTER CARE, WHAT** comes to mind? For many, they consider teens in foster care to be more challenging than younger kids. Several stereotypes and assumptions lead to heartbreaking stories of teens who get stuck in the system or age out with no safe place to go.

“The actual truth of teens in foster care is they are often sweet and funny kids who struggle with some lagging skills, emotionally or cognitively, often related to traumatic events or challenging life circumstances,” said Mary-Jackelyn Downing, Director of Juvenile Services at Boys & Girls Aid. “They are trying hard to fly under the radar and are acutely aware of and sensitive to the feelings and concerns of the adults in their lives and how they are perceived. They just don’t know how to manage these perceptions.”

In 2021, the foster care population in Oregon consisted of 2,616 youth ages 13–18+. Multnomah County had

the largest number in this age group with 537 teens, followed by Lane County with 296 teens, and Marion County with 228 teens.<sup>1</sup> With this large number of teens in foster care, the need for supportive programming is greater than ever. That is where Boys & Girls Aid’s

teen-specific programming becomes essential. Our therapeutic foster care services are designed to provide stable shelter and housing services for teens while assisting them in processing their physical and emotional needs.

When programs like ours are unavailable, juvenile detention often

becomes the next choice for youth, whether it is appropriate or not. We know detention-based programming does not solve problems for the youth we serve. Detention is designed for adults and does not translate well to youth who are still developing, have experienced trauma, and are in dire need of additional qualified adult support. Our residential facility and foster homes have been

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# Every child matters

*Letter from Suzan Huntington, President & CEO*

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**THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR TIME** with us and learning more about the work at Boys & Girls Aid and how we are making an impact on the lives of children in need. The work we do is difficult and rewarding. It is filled with trauma and hope. I'm proud to share our work through this newsletter and know you will feel hope and joy as you read these pages and learn about our children and foster parents.

Boys & Girls Aid serves children living in foster care and other systems of care. They have experienced neglect and abuse and, for some of our teens, they have made decisions that have impacted their lives in ways they could not foresee. If you have been investing in our work for some time, you know that at Boys & Girls Aid we believe every child has value and worth. We believe every child matters. We meet children where they are and that starts by understanding what has happened to them.

Teenagers can feel intimidating and mysterious. They can be big in stature and heart, and they can be dark and joyful all at the same time. Teenagers in foster care are just like children living with their family. These children

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We meet children where they are, and that starts by understanding what has happened to them.

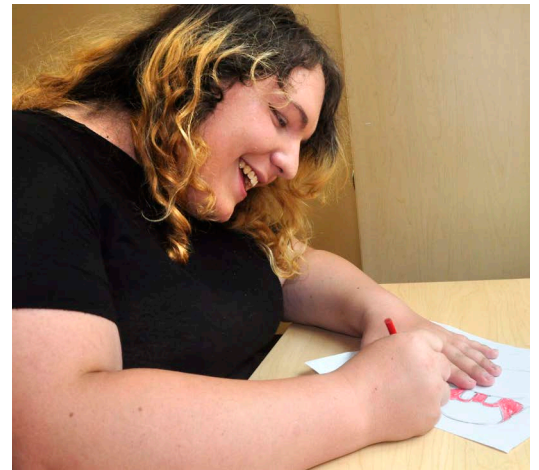
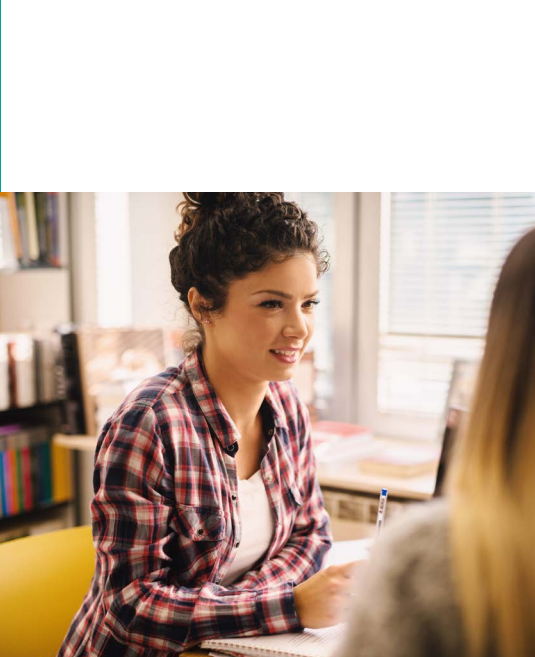
are like your teenage grandchildren, neighbors, your child or even yourself as a teen. But what sets them apart from the teens you know is they are working through the hardest days of their lives while navigating life in foster care. They long for connection and stability. We know they want to be seen and heard for their ideas and thoughts and that is our work.

As you read this newsletter, I'd ask you to suspend what you believe to be true about children living in systems of care. I'd ask you to think about the teenagers in your life now and those in the past. My hope is that at the end of these pages, you see what we see, children yearning for love, acceptance, and a place to be themselves. We can make an impact for generations to come with your support and the belief that children will always do better and have improved outcomes when they are surrounded by adults who care and love them.

On behalf of the children served at Boys & Girls Aid, thank you for your investment in the future of children. I am grateful for your ongoing support, and I wish you, your family and those you love a wonderful holiday season.

With gratitude,

Suzan Huntington, Ed.D.  
President & CEO



designed to best serve the needs of children because they are in normal and familiar neighborhood environments designed to feel like a home.

Without a permanent home, teens in foster care are at risk of aging out of the foster care system into adulthood. These youth have less than a 50% chance of graduating high school. They have a far greater chance of becoming homeless which leads to a greater chance of becoming addicted to drugs or incarcerated. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a chronically homeless person costs taxpayers an average of \$35,578 per year.<sup>2</sup> The average person incarcerated in Oregon costs the state \$44,021 a year. There is only a 3% chance these young people will attend any college, compared to their peers, of which 46% will attend at least some college.<sup>3</sup> The outcomes for teens aging out of foster care are adverse but we know having a caring adult in their lives and a safe and permanent place to live will change the trajectory of the youth we serve.

Downing shares, “Programs and foster parents like ours give teens the opportunity to be in a caring, familiar environment where they can feel safe and express their needs. It helps them feel that the community still has their backs and wants to

**These kids are smart, sensitive, and thoughtful. They benefit from having adults who believe in them and communities who support them.**

love and support them, that the community has faith and sees them as ‘a part of’ rather than ‘other than.’”

Downing sees the opportunity in the youth she works with every day in therapeutic foster care at Boys & Girls Aid. “Helping our teen clients solidify current guardian relationships or feel like they are connected to a support network of people who care about them helps them feel like there is hope and there are people who can catch them if they fall. It is also important as they build relationship skills moving forward into adulthood to feel as though they can and will know how to develop positive supportive relationships in life as they go. It gives them a sense of hope for continued community care, concern, and involvement.”

We encourage the teens in our care to truly believe they matter and are worthy of being loved and treated well. Once they know this, the outcomes can be amazing. “These kids are smart, sensitive, and thoughtful. They benefit from having adults who believe in them and communities who support them,” said Downing. “They are good

kids and are just as deserving of care, attention, and chances as anyone else. They are still growing and absorbing, and they deserve an opportunity to see that they can succeed.” 🌱

References: <sup>1</sup> State of Oregon Child Welfare Data Book, September 2022 <https://www.oregon.gov/dhs/children/child-abuse/pages/data-publications.aspx>. <sup>2</sup> [www.endhomelessness.org](http://www.endhomelessness.org), Publications, 2017. <sup>3</sup> <https://www.vera.org>, Publications, Price of prisons 2015 state spending trends.



# Spotlight on Teen Voices

We asked teens impacted by foster care what they want people to know about them and what stereotypes they have encountered.

## What do you want people to know about you?

*“We are trying our hardest to do what we know is needed.”*

“We know society judges us, we don’t need you to baby us, just listen to us.”

“We need you to hear our life experiences, not tell us you know what they are.”

“There’s nothing to be afraid of here, we’re just kids.”

**“We want to do well and have life goals outside of this experience.”**

*“We’re always battling something else, there’s always more that’s going on than it appears.”*

**“TRUST US TO TRY.”**

## What stereotypes do you think people have of teens in foster care?

*Delinquents*

**BAD KIDS**

**Dangerous**

*Inconsiderate*

**We’re messes who won’t have normal relationships**

**Every child**  
DESERVES A FAMILY.



**Sam**  
ADOPTED  
2019

“We are grateful Boys & Girls Aid is here to help families and children like Sam find their forever family!”

—Anna Held, Sam’s mom



*Give today to support a child.*

[boysandgirlsaid.org/donate](https://boysandgirlsaid.org/donate)

## Planned Giving

When you include Boys & Girls Aid in your will or trust, you make a powerful commitment to ensuring all children have a forever family and a chance at a brighter future. A charitable bequest is a simple and flexible way to make a difference for generations to come.

Contact Suzan Huntington, President & CEO for more information:  
[shuntington@boysandgirlsaid.org](mailto:shuntington@boysandgirlsaid.org)



**Boys &  
Girls Aid**

# Creating a Community of Care



It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and at Boys & Girls Aid, we could not agree more. We believe in surrounding youth with a community of care, from foster parents to staff, to support, mentor and love them— all with the goal of helping youth succeed and live their best life.

**Having a good foster parent allows youth to be able to relearn what having family support is and helps them learn healthy boundaries and how to deal with different life scenarios as they come.**

But this community extends beyond the youth. Foster families need support too, which is why Boys & Girls Aid provides trainings as well as opportunities for foster parents to collaborate with staff and other foster parents to problem solve and share advice.

## Foster Parents

Foster parents are usually the first line of support for a youth in foster care. Often kids in our programs have experienced trauma and attachment disorders and need consistent, caring adults in their lives.

For example, foster parents Weston and Bailee Votaw shared that before coming to their home, one

youth experienced nine different placements in an eight-month period. Frequent moves can cause stress and trauma for youth in foster care, which is why Boys & Girls Aid strives for longer term placements. Now, that same youth has been with the Votaws for over 16 months.

Foster parents see the youth and their struggles and help to work through them. It is important for foster parents to show youth that they matter and are worth the effort to keep trying.

Mary-Jackelyn Downing, Director of Juvenile Services in our STEP program, says foster parents and their ability to be flexible and

**Teens  
with their  
foster  
parents.**



connect with youth can make or break the experience for the kids.

“It can either give them hope or confirm their fears about how ‘hard’ they are to manage,” she said.

Cynthia Molina, Program Director in our Neighborhood Program, says foster parents show consistency, love and care, and they become a major part of the youth’s future.

“Having a good foster parent allows youth to be able to relearn what having family support is and helps them learn healthy boundaries and how to deal with different life scenarios as they come,” Molina said.

## **Boys & Girls Aid Staff**

Unlike traditional foster care, youth at Boys & Girls Aid take part in programs with staff and peers designed to work on behavioral and life skills.

Youth in all our programs take part in either day services, at home Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS), or both. During these sessions, staff work directly with youth and sometimes foster parents in a collaborative learning environment.

Staff also help facilitate mediation and communication between youth and foster parents when they need a little more help understanding each other. Downing says this helps youth see that they can talk about what is wrong and what they need as a team and know they will not get shut down.

**They [BGAI] do a great job at providing trainings to help us parent better and provide us respite to get much needed breaks.**

Staff collaborate with our foster parents in one-on-one meetings and training nights, as well as phone calls twice a week to review what has been happening with youth, what support the family needs, and how they can collaborate with one another to work towards the youth’s and foster parents’ goals. Staff and foster parents communicate regularly, and after-hours help is available 24/7.

## **Training & Support**

Foster parents at Boys & Girls Aid attend ongoing monthly training sessions to learn how to support youth in specific scenarios. Examples of past training topics include dealing with grief and loss and supporting LGBTQIA+ youth.

Foster parents use these trainings as opportunities to connect with other foster parents. But that is not the only opportunity for our parents to get together. We also host birthday parties for our NEST youth during which parents can mingle and get to know each other.

Boys & Girls Aid staff work hard to ensure that not only the youth, but also the foster parents, feel supported.

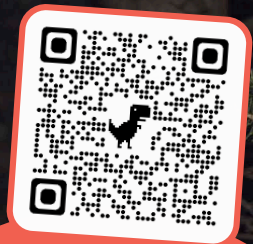
Weston Votaw said, “I feel my concerns and feelings are heard and validated. I also feel that they do a great job at providing trainings to help us parent better and provide us respite to get much needed breaks.” 🌱



# Boys & Girls Aid

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Every day, more than 50 teens age out of foster care in the United States without the love and support of a permanent family. As you consider your year-end giving, please consider a donation to Boys & Girls Aid.

**Thank you for your continued support.**

#fosterlove

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