



THE SALVATION ARMY
White Shield Center
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Diane J Brandsma, MA
Executive Director

WILLIAM BOOTH
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Our Mission: Empowering adolescent girls to lead healthy and productive lives in their families and communities

February 22, 2017

Re: Ways and Means Sub-Committee on Public Safety – Oregon Youth Authority

Dear Committee Members:

As the Executive Director of The Salvation Army White Shield Center (WSC) and board member of the Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs and Coalition of Advocates for Equal Access for Girls, I would like to take an opportunity to respectfully urge your support of the Oregon Youth Authority's 2017-19 budget as submitted in the Governor's Recommended Budget. For context, I'd like to provide an overview of our program and services. The Salvation Army White Shield Center (WSC) is a residential treatment program in NW Portland serving adolescent girls (ages 12-20) and their families from across the State of Oregon, nearly half who are referred and placed by OYA. Approximately one-third of the population served at WSC are teen girls who are pregnant or parenting a young child that resides with them at the Center. All girls who enter the doors at WSC have experienced significant trauma through adverse childhood experiences, averaging an ACE survey score of 6.8. Some are still in the throes of these experiences, as often it is a result of intergenerational, collective, systemic and historical nature. An ACE survey score of 4 or more is recognized as the level where the impact of trauma can significantly impair cognitive functioning - affecting the learning process and executive functioning (judgement, planning, working memory, self-control, mental flexibility) and is manifest through emotional regulation and behavior issues, including high-risk and criminal behavior. Long-term health outcomes are also negatively impacted by unaddressed ACEs.

WSC is the only all-female gender-specific Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) programs left in the state. It is in a unique position to incorporate both intervention and prevention services in the lives of the girls and young women participating in the programs, as well as the lives of their infants and toddlers. Prevention and intervention strategies are critical. Research shows that investment in adolescents through positive youth development opportunities, can yield tremendous outcomes that reduce poverty, welfare dependence, violence, crime, and incarceration in adulthood. While adverse childhood experiences cannot be undone, building resiliency to mitigate the long-term impact makes a difference. It is no small task, but together we can work on behalf of these youth to change the trajectory of their lives.

It is important to highlight - of the girls and young women placed at White Shield Center by OYA:

100% are employed or regularly attend school, earning credits toward a high school diploma, GED or an Associate's Degree.

100% participate in skill development such as social skills, independent living skills, emotional-regulation skills, and parenting education.

100% are engaged in mental health therapy and/or addictions counseling.

The State of Oregon is blessed to have an agency such as Oregon Youth Authority whose vision and mission and strategic direction for youth reformation is head and shoulders above many other states

across the country. Your support for OYA and the associated programs is a sound investment for our children and our State.

I'd like to highlight a young woman whose life would like quite different if it were not for the work of OYA and the community-based programs with whom it contracts:

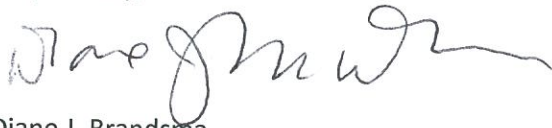
Marta is a nineteen year old in OYA custody placed at WSC. She recently gave birth to a son, Carlos. Her family is deeply involved in gangs and gang culture. For Marta, placement at WSC is her opportunity to change the story for herself and her son. She is determined and she needs the support and structure offered at WSC to learn the skills, including parenting skills that will allow her to develop and strengthen her capability to successfully live independently. It is a challenge for her, no doubt, and she sees the destructive path of her and her family's past. Her placement at WSC is a two-generational approach – two lives whose trajectory is changed toward productive and safe participation in the community.

The budget submitted by OYA is the result of a 16-month process by three state agencies, youth, advocates, CCO's and providers where a 30% rate gap was identified between current rates and what it costs to serve these youth. The Governor's Recommended Budget has included a rate increase for OYA providers. It is important to note that 23 Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS) contracts have been given back to OYA and DHS in the last 48 months because of the cumulative impact of low rates, exacerbated by extremely challenging regulatory oversight and risk management for highly traumatized children and their behaviors.

Oregon cannot afford to lose more programs due to underfunding. These programs make a difference in outcomes for young people who are the most marginalized, and whose potential is the same as their counterparts who have not endured such tragedies in their lives.

Thank you for your faithful service and for working so diligently for your constituents, vulnerable citizens and the State of Oregon.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diane J. Brandsma". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Diane J. Brandsma

Cc: Janet Arenz, Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs