

3/14/2017

To the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education,

I write to you today in support of the YDC (Senate bills 5516 & 5517), and for full and continued funding, on behalf of our organization which receives YDC funding – Friends of the Children – Klamath Basin.

At Friends of the Children, we proactively select kindergarteners in our community who face overwhelming adversity and have few support systems in place to protect them. We then commit to provide these children with 1:1 support from full-time, highly trained, professional mentors (called Friends) for the next 12 ½ years, no matter what. A Friend's primary objective is to coach youth to develop the skills they need to build resilience in the face of devastating life circumstances.

Since 2000, Friends of the Children – Klamath Basin has been serving the highest-risk children in our community through this relationship-based, 1:1 intervention. We are unique in our commitment to pay mentors, to serve exclusively the highest-risk youth, and to stay with our youth for the long haul. Despite facing considerable generational barriers, 95% of our 21 program graduates have completed a high school diploma or GED, 100% have avoided incarceration in the juvenile justice system, and 100% have avoided teen parenting.

The Klamath Basin faces challenges that rival or exceed those of more urban areas of Oregon, and economic recovery here has been slow to come.

Each youth in our program faces a spectrum of adverse childhood experiences that affect healthy development. In addition to poverty, many have faced homelessness, food insecurity, and substance abuse, domestic violence, abuse, and/or neglect in their homes. Many are in foster care or at risk of placement. Without intensive intervention, these early traumas are likely to have a lifelong impact on their ability to succeed. Of the 40 youth (aged 6 to 19) we serve in the Klamath Basin:

- 100% are eligible for free/reduced lunch
- 42% are racial/ethnic minorities, including 22% tribally enrolled Native Americans
- 34% live in foster or kinship care

Many youth living in poverty begin kindergarten already behind in basic academic skills and multiple factors interfere with their ability to engage in the learning process. Early, holistic intervention allows us to reach the highest-risk youth before these gaps become insurmountable.

YDC's support has been of crucial importance to our organization and our ability to reach more youth in need within our community. I ask that you maintain YDC's funding and do not make proposed cuts as their work is of great benefit to our community.

Respectfully,  
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