



THE SALVATION ARMY
White Shield Center
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Our Mission: Empowering adolescent girls to lead healthy and productive lives in their families and communities

April 2, 2017

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Steiner-Hayward and Representative Rayfield and Committee members:

The Salvation Army White Shield Center (WSC) is a residential treatment program (Child Care Agency) in NW Portland serving adolescent girls (ages 12-20) and their families from across the State of Oregon. First and foremost – **thank you** for supporting children and families who live in the communities you serve.

As the Executive Director of 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 provide an overview of our program and services. **First, and foremost - the safety and well-being of our program participants is of utmost importance.** As you see, our mission statement is about empowering girls, young women and their children. The foundation of empowerment, however, begins with safety via the physical environment and, more importantly, nurturing relationships with adults. Our dedicated staff and volunteers use a trauma-informed lens to provide care and teach skills that will guide our youth to healthy participation in Community.

The girls and young women placed at WSC are in State custody, either through Child Welfare or the Oregon Youth Authority. 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. WSC has an Early Learning Center on site for the littlest members of our agency community, and will soon be serving the children of teen parents from the PIVOT Job Corp program housed at Montgomery Park. 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 or criminal behavior. As you are aware, the 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 teen moms 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. The recent Count Her In report by the Women's Foundation clearly shows that there are inherent risks for girls and young women as they move into their adult lives. There are many things to "Celebrate" about women's contributions in our State. And ... the issues

from the "Can't Wait" list have already affected our girls through their families of origin. They need our services to stop the trajectory of intergenerational trauma. It is no small task, but together we can work on behalf of these youth to invite change into their lives.

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

- Regularly attend school, earning credits toward a high school diploma, GED or an Associate's Degree, or they are employed with a first job.
- Participate in skill development such as social skills, independent living skills, emotional-regulation skills, and parenting education.
- Engage in mental health therapy and/or addictions counseling.

A brief story to highlight the impact and importance of our work:

Alicia is a 23 year-old former resident who was in DHS custody and placed at WSC. She has a five year old daughter who was born when Alicia was in the WSC parenting services program. For Alicia, placement at WSC was her opportunity to change the story for herself and her daughter. She was raised by her grandparents because her parents were involved in criminal behavior and struggled with drug/alcohol addictions. Alicia was determined and utilized the support and structure offered at WSC to learn the skills, including parenting skills that allowed her to develop and strengthen her capability to successfully live independently. It was a challenge for her, no doubt, but she saw the destructive path of her family's past and she wanted something different for her own family. Her placement at WSC was a two-generational approach – two lives whose trajectory has changed toward productive and safe participation in the community. Alicia earned a high school diploma, is now employed full time and she has a goal to become a police officer. She also has a healthy relationship and a blended family of which she is proud.

WSC and similar 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. Adequate funding for Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is essential to this outcome. Therefore, I am urging your support for the BRS rate increases in the Governor's Recommended Budget. Oregon has lost several programs in recent years, and these kiddos deserve the opportunity to learn and grow in safe and nurturing environments. This is our collective responsibility – it is imperative that we continue to support these girls, young women and children – to inspire and empower their future.

Thank you for your faithful service and for working so diligently for your constituents, vulnerable citizens and the State of Oregon. Please, do come visit us – you are welcome any time!

Respectfully,



Diane J. Brandsma

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