

The Honorable Jackie Winters, Co-Chair
The Honorable Carla Piluso, Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Public Safety
900 Court Street Salem, OR 97301

Please allow me to introduce myself, my name is Tasia Mendes.
My husband Robert and I are currently OYA foster parents.
We actually started out fostering with another organization before we dedicated ourselves to OYA.
We have fostered for about 6 years now, and we truly enjoy our youth, and what we do.

Before we started fostering, we had only heard of DHS and had no idea about OYA.
The agency where we started was looking for foster parents and we decided to check it out.
We took all the required classes and training to become foster parents.
This was about a 3-4 month process from start to finish. After all was done, the agency said they needed parents for at risk youth. They had a contract with OYA and really needed foster parents.
We decided to check it out, as a lot of kids that needed help was not given the opportunity as they were older and adjudicated. We talked it over and screened some of these youth. We knew we could help these kids out through our own experiences. We worked with that agency and OYA for about a year and a half before the agency and OYA contract ended. At that point we had 3 youth in our home from OYA who was finally in a stable environment, were starting to do good in school, got their first job and proceeding in the right direction. At this point OYA was going to move them to different homes and disrupt what accomplishment they have made. This is when we decided to leave the agency and go directly with OYA. We couldn't see giving up on these kids when they have come so far in the short time we had them. Yes the agency had a lot of perks like paid respite and vacation time that OYA does not offer.

Paid respite and having more respite homes is such a huge need.
This is to help keep foster parents from losing track on why they became Foster parents in the first place.
Everyone needs a break every now and then. Having a respite home close by is essential for the youth's schedule with school and or work. Especially if there is an emergency and you need respite.
When we first started there were several foster homes in the Salem area. Now we are the only home I believe in Marion county. The need to have another full time Certifier / Recruit is important to put on recruitment events to help find more OYA specific foster families and homes.
There is a big need for OYA foster homes to help these kids learn structure, positive social skills, life skills and having a loving home environment that some kids don't have from their own families.
We have seen this first hand and it takes a toll on these youths that need it the most.

We are very passionate about being foster parents. I believe there are other people out there who are also willing to help. All we have to do is find them.
The only way that is possible is if you have troops on the ground doing events and recruiting.
Please keep this in mind as you set up budgets for OYA.
We as a community, need to support our at risk youth the best we can.
OYA has been there for us every step of the way.
We just need someone dedicated to help organizing recruitment events.

Thank you for your time,
Robert and Tasia Mendes
OYA Foster Parents