

Window on the Next Door

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People and Programs: Honors and Awards

Mental health champs

In May, three employees of The Next Door and our board chair were honored by Mid-Columbia Center for Living, a local mental health provider, as Champions of Children's Mental Health.

Heidi Crane, Families First Supervisor; Bill Marick, Independent Living Program Coordinator; Joanna Vega, Youth and Family Services Coordinator; and Kelly Beard, Board Chair, were recognized for their work and advocacy for children.

Innovation honored

The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials honored our Oregon Trail Youth Project with the **Award of Merit for Program Innovation**. This award gives national recognition to housing and community development organizations that find innovative solutions to housing problems.



The Oregon Trail Youth Project offers a community solution to an unmet need for safe alcohol- and drug-free housing for homeless youth who lack the skills and resources to find a home and live independently.

Oregon Trail provides a temporary structured living arrangement with direct on-site case management to teach personal responsibility and the life skills needed for youth to find and maintain jobs and housing.

"The best crew ever!"
Nuestra Comunidad Sana managed the Oregon

Youth Conservation Corps jobs this summer. This program helps youth acquire job skills, build work habits, get and keep jobs, and build confidence.

25 youth ages 16-20 worked for 8 weeks. They maintained and rebuilt trails, restored a bridge, lead hikes, painted, cleaned campsites, built an amphitheater, conducted fish surveys, and removed ivy and blackberry bushes. For their final project they removed 250 tires from a wilderness site using canoes.

Advisors were amazed at the amount and quality of their work, and said they were the best crew they've had in 18 years. These young people are now ready to work. ☞



Staff Diversity Survey Surprises

A staff survey last month showed how we reflect our Gorge communities:

Female-75%, Male-25%

Black or African American-2%

American Indian or Native Alaskan-6%

Hispanic or Latino-18%

Caucasian-68%

Bi-racial or multi-racial-7%

Individual staff members consider themselves

to be culturally competent in a wide variety of cultures including Japanese American, Latino, White, African American, Mexican, American Indian, Filipino, Malaysian, Lakota, Puerto Rican, Middle Eastern, and Hawaiian. They also mentioned less recognized cultures: deaf, poverty, middle class, rural, blue collar, white collar, physical/emotional/mental disabilities, military, immigrant and homosexual.☞

Big Brothers Big Sisters Improvements reported

Locally, 56 children are matched with a caring adult. Here's a sample of the kinds of improvements "Bigs" and parents reported about their "Littles" this year in response to our survey:

Higher self-confidence	81%
Better personal hygiene	42%
More sense of the future	57%
Improved grades	57%
Better attitude at school	54%
Trusts parent more	60%
Family relationships better	42%

Independent Living

Bound for college

The Independent Living Program saw all three of our 2008 high school graduates enter college this month. Nationally, only 5% of foster youth attend college, so our group really beat the odds this year. Independent Living Programs near their colleges will continue providing them with needed support. ☞

New Parent Services & Families First

Families helped

Regular, supportive home visits to high-risk, high stress families are proving effective. New Parent Services completed 970 home visits in Hood River County in the fiscal year that just ended. All of our Hood River County families remained free from substantiated reports of abuse and neglect. Families First provided 519 home visits in Wasco County over the same period, and 94% of our families were free from substantiated reports of abuse and neglect. ☞



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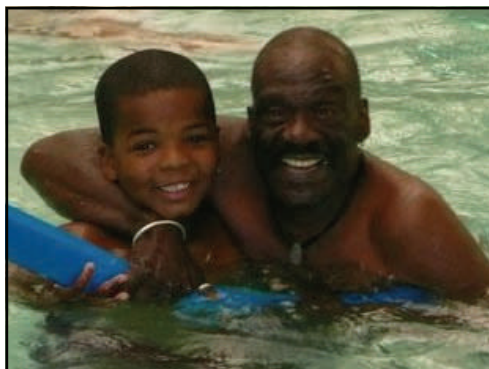


This Big Brother is Almost Like Family

by Monte Dickenson, Big Brothers Big Sisters Match Coordinator

James,* 6, and Will, 62, have been matched since July 2008. James' family has become small, just James and his mom. His dad has disappeared from his life again, and in December his grandfather passed away.

Will and James hit it off from the start. After several months, at bedtime, James



said to his mom, "Mom, I think I love Will. Is that alright?" His mom wisely answered, "I suppose it is since a Big Brother is almost like family."

I shared this story with Will, who said, "Well it all makes sense now. He never calls me by name. He always calls me Brother. When he tells people I'm his brother and they see the age difference, I get to explain about the program!"

Big Brothers Big Sisters works with parents to foster good communication between the parent and "Big" and to see how the "Little" is doing at home and in school. These conversations give us a chance to help with challenges and celebrate milestones.

One single parent whose daughter has a Big Sister told us, "I don't have the words to say all that Sandy means to my daughter, Lexie. They are so close. Lexie will tell her Big Sister Sandy things that she doesn't share with me, and I am so thankful for her to have that special person she trusts in her life. They practice school work together, play games, color, bake and watch movies. They see each other every week and sometimes more than one time. If Sandy



is out of town, Lexie gets sad and just misses her Big Sister so much. Sandy is like my Big Sister, too. She is so good to take a little time with me to hear me when I'm happy and help me with problems when things get tough."

We are lucky to have Sandy as a Big Sister – along with many more like her – to offer children and families friendship and support. Big Brothers Big Sisters receives no governmental funding. Donors make these relationships possible. *names are changed to protect identities, photos are not the featured Bigs and Littles 