



Oregon

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NEWS RELEASE

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Note to editors: You may arrange an interview with a foster parent serving a Washington County youth by contacting foster care certifier Laura Ward: 503-672-9569 ext. 239.

Oregon Youth Authority seeking foster parents in Washington County

As Oregon's second-largest county, Washington County also has the state's second-largest number of youth offenders in the care and custody of the Oregon Youth Authority.

But if you look at a roster of OYA foster parents – who provide consistency, structure and direction to many OYA youth – you will see Washington County has none.

“These are kids who have potential but lack direction,” said Laura Ward, OYA foster care certifier for homes in Washington and several other counties. “A good foster parent models good communication, problem solving and how to deal with adversity.”

As a result of the lack of foster homes, she said, Washington County youth offenders needing foster care may be sent to distant counties. For example, Washington County offenders have been placed as far away as Klamath County.

But distant placements make it more difficult to deliver therapy involving an offender's family, make family visits harder and increase staffing costs. “There's also a disconnect,” Ward said. “A youth who has been placed out of the area has a harder time transitioning back to hometown, school, work and family.”

OYA is seeking Washington County foster parents for youth who are on probation or parole, need an out-of-home placement, may be in various stages of treatment

for their offenses, and for whom an evaluation has shown foster care to be appropriate. Ward said youth would benefit from both traditional foster parents for youth ages 12-18 and transitional homes where youth ages 18 and older learn more about establishing a bank account, preparing a household budget, shopping for food, preparing meals, job-hunting, and successfully performing other responsibilities supporting independent living.

She pointed to the difference effective foster parents make in the lives of young offenders. For example, one Washington County youth who lived in a Yamhill County foster home played sports two years, graduated from high school, earned a scholarship and attends Oregon State University. Another youth is earning good grades in high school and participating in theater, music, Special Olympics and church. A third worked part time, graduated from high school and now is waiting to be accepted by the Job Corps.

Qualifications to serve as an OYA foster parent include being at least age 21 (or 25 for transitional foster parents), a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, financially stable, and able to pass a criminal history check. Prospective foster parents should be emotionally mature and have an understanding of how to help youth build positive relationships and live independently.

For youth who have mental health or drug and alcohol issues, Ward said, foster parents receive specialized training in addition to weekly contact, monthly visits and any other support they need. A monthly maintenance payment reimburses foster parents for services they provide to youth; the agency prefers to have only one youth per foster home.

Washington County residents interested in learning more about OYA foster parenting may contact Ward at laura.ward@oya.state.or.us or 503-672-9569 ext. 239.

Placing appropriate youth in high-quality foster homes helps fulfill OYA's mission to protect the public and reduce crime by holding youth offenders accountable and offering reformation opportunities in safe environments. OYA supervises approximately 1,100 offenders on probation and parole in communities throughout Oregon, and has custody of approximately 900 offenders ages 12-24 in correctional and transitional facilities in Albany, Burns, Florence, Grants Pass, La Grande, Salem, Tillamook, Warrenton and Woodburn.

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