

STABILITY IN The LOFT



Photos by Christopher L. Ingersoll

by Kathy Oxborrow, for *The Bulletin Special Projects*

It was a cold winter afternoon when a LOFT (Living Options for Teens) employee saw a young man standing by himself near Lava Lanes in Bend. The employee stopped and asked the youth if he needed help. Turns out the teen, who was 16 at the time, needed a lot of help.

“What we found out was that this young man’s mom had come to Bend seeking psychiatric services” remembered Pat Gundy, program manager at The LOFT. “She ended up being hospitalized for pervasive mental illness, so we had a

16-year-old kid here who had nothing.”

The LOFT, a program of J Bar J Youth Services, is the only homeless shelter for youths in Central Oregon. It has the capacity to serve 12 male and female youth ages 16 to 20.

During an assessment, the staff learned that the young man, Nick, hadn’t been to school regularly for a number of years and had some special needs, but wanted to complete his high school education.

While he lived at The LOFT, he attended school and graduated from Summit High School after which he entered the Job Corps program in Troutdale. There



Program manager Pat Gundy

he completed a culinary program and, at 19, is now seeking his first job.

Nick’s story is just one of the many success stories at The LOFT, which partners with other social service agencies and law enforcement agencies to keep the growing

number of homeless and runaway youths safe.

Young runaway and homeless girls and boys are the most vulnerable to those seeking to profit from sexual exploitation. We would all like to think the sex trade industry doesn’t exist in Central Oregon, but it does.

“A young person who runs away from home is likely to be contacted by someone with bad intentions within the first 24 to 48 hours of being on the street,” said Gundy.

That’s why a program like The LOFT is so important to provide caring adult support and supervision. Youths can live at The LOFT for 21 months, but they have to follow the rules.

Gundy said the staff is



to put 75 percent of their income into a trust account for them to use when they transition out of The LOFT. Eight of the 12 youth presently living at The LOFT have “self investment” accounts.

The youths reside at The LOFT voluntarily.

“A parent can't put a kid here. The kid has to want to be here. If they want to run we just say, ‘Can you talk to me for five seconds? I just want to make sure you have some place safe to go tonight. I'd love it if you'd call me next week and tell me you're okay,’” said Mel Parker the operations manager at The LOFT.

The situations of the teens who end up at The LOFT vary widely, but the common factor is that they are living in an environment in which they are not getting their basic needs met.

If you would like more information about The LOFT or want to donate call 541-318-3436.

strict with the kids and provides a lot of structure that they are not used to. There is a curfew, drug testing, a requirement to volunteer in the community and either attend school or seek employment. The youth also receive intensive individualized services based on their needs.

Youth with jobs are required

Last year, The LOFT:

- Provided 4,089 nights of emergency shelter
- Received 6,593 hotline calls from youths and their families
- Sheltered 27 youths

Troubled youths

- Average age of a runaway is 15
- 53 percent are female, 46 percent are male, one percent are transgendered
- 63 percent of runaway and homeless youth are never reported missing or sought after by their parents or guardians
- 12-17 year olds are at more risk of homelessness than adults
- One in eight youth under the age of 18 become homeless and in need of services
- 80 percent of youth report suffering abuse at the hands of an adult

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