

Fall 2021
Jackson, Wyoming



Caring Compass

Newsletter from Teton Youth & Family Services



Helping children and families find their way to fulfilling and constructive lives.

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Stay Connected:



A Letter from Sarah

A Story of Stuggle and Healing

Here's what's happening - the needs of children and families are exploding right now. Many children we are seeing are struggling with self-harm and depression and their **families are scared and do not know where to turn.**

The good news is that **you can help!**

Your year-end gift will help one child by providing funds to ensure trauma-informed care is available to help children and families when they need it most.

I want to share a story with you. This past spring, Alexis was placed at the Group Home due to self-harming behaviors and being out of control of her mother. **She showed up withdrawn and significantly traumatized** by a life of family violence and sexual abuse.

While working with her art-therapist, Alexis began working on building a "little food pantry" to provide food for neighbors in need. She spent a month designing, constructing and painting the pantry while **talking through her trauma and processing her pain.**

Towards the end of August, Alexis completed her project, mounted it to the fence surrounding the Group Home, and stocked it with free food for any passer-by. One day she came to get me to show me her completed project.

I was surprised to see her and was moved as **she had been transformed from a wounded child in the spring to a confident teenager in August.** The pride she had showing me the pantry came from deep within, from a place of healing and growth.

Since the completion of the pantry Alexis has returned home to her mom. She is **excelling in school** and joined a sports club that has kept her connected to peers and coaches.

Alexis is one of **over 400 children we serve each year** and we can do this because of you. If one child, like Alexis, doesn't get help the risk factors will likely continue to get worse. Without help, children like Alexis may have to visit the hospital before they get the right kind of help and suffer further pain and trauma.

I don't want that to happen, and neither do you.

I know you care about children and families when they are in need. Your gift will help support our next Alexis and **ensure her story is not unique.**



Executive Director, Sarah Cavallaro with her daughter.

Serving Children & Families Since 1977

While you have my letter in your hand, would you send in a gift? You'll love knowing that **you helped a child**, like Alexis, perhaps during their greatest time of need.

Thank you for being a part of helping the most vulnerable in our community **find a path towards healing and hope.**

With Gratitude,



Sarah Cavallaro
Executive Director, Teton Youth & Family Services



A Student-led Service Project

Alexis moved from violence and trauma toward helping others in need. She created this "little food pantry" during treatment.

The "little food pantry" stocked with food and supplies



OUR WISH LIST

Van Vleck House

- sleds
- ski helmets
- weighted blankets-twin
- winter gloves
- winter hats
- vacuum
- Art Supplies, i.e. bracelet making, clay, paint brushed, paint, painting paper

Hirschfield Center

- Day or Annual Activity Passes
- Gift Cards for Gas
- Gift Cards for "Take a Kid to Lunch" (Quiznos, Whole Foods etc.)
- Dominoes
- Tempura Paints
- Mixed-media paper

Red Top Meadows

- bathroom towels
- ski poles- any sizes
- juggling balls
- yoyos
- fidget toys
- broomball sticks
- winter boots-any sizes (Sorel or similar)
- disc golf baskets (very popular)
- industrial sized salad washer

Little Food Pantry

- basic toiletries
- socks
- pasta/rice
- one box meals
- spices
- food that won't freeze and explode in the winter

Make a Difference for a Child

Items donated to TYFS are tax deductible

Red Top Meadows

How is Growth Mindset integrated at Red Top Meadows?

Wesley T. Gabel-Patterson, Director of Education

Red Top Meadows (RTM) is celebrated as the only residential treatment for adolescent males in Wyoming that provides therapeutic wilderness programming. But did you know that every student who comes to RTM report struggling in their own school? Students come to RTM from all corners of Wyoming due to ongoing struggles in their community. From our experience, we find that these kids are often misguided due to the fact they have suffered from multiple exposures to trauma in their lives. If not processed correctly, trauma can spill out in the classroom setting and their respective communities.

What does this look like in the classroom? Students struggling with trauma have a limited toolkit to problem solve, to be adaptable and flexible to change, which can set them apart from their peers. They are often perceived as off-task and challenged. This makes it difficult for them to succeed in a natural school setting. Therefore, RTM staff play an essential role to help students develop cognitive and emotional skills, or a Growth Mindset that our students take forward the rest of their lives.

What is a Growth Mindset? Let me share a story about Jake who graduated from RTM in the last year. Jake came to us with low self-esteem. His confidence in school was extremely low, he was failing most of his core classes and testing 1-2 years behind in grade level. He didn't take any accountability towards his behavior outbursts, and naturally, he pushed away any or all therapeutic approaches. In his own mind, he actually believed himself unable to learn. When Jake came to Red Top he wasn't able to make any changes himself, so we did it for him. We changed his educational goals by focusing on meeting him where he was and not where he was supposed to be. His goals were scaled and became seemingly attainable - on a daily and weekly basis. This resulted in a transformation for Jake within the classroom setting. Where we once saw frustration and resistance, we later saw confidence and genuine interest bloom. He began to see himself as capable.

With time, Jake began to apply this mindset to other aspects of his life. He began to take ownership of his behavior and actively participate in individual and family therapy. After nine months, Jake graduated from RTM at grade level and reunited with his family. When he returned home, Jake was faced with the challenge of returning to the public school. He wanted to drop out. But after some encouragement from RTM staff, Jake gave school another try and he earned straight A's his first term back. Jake now plans on staying in school and graduating with his class. He even sought out another therapist to help continue in his personal growth.

These examples of having a Growth Mindset at RTM are critical to the long-term success of our students. They provide the initial framework to develop a student's capacity and learn how to accept success and failure as two natural, symbiotic components to finding themselves capable. Because of your generous support, you're helping inspire RTM students to find joy in learning.



Van Vleck House

Trauma-Informed Care

by Jeremy Silcox, Director of Van Vleck House

When child behavior escalates, does the age-old thinking of “what’s wrong with you” actually apply? What if I told you that interpersonal trauma, things like childhood abuse, neglect and domestic violence are actually more common than you think? What if I told you these types of trauma have occurred in the lives of almost every single client that we see at Teton Youth and Family Services (TYFS), would that change the way you might perceive a child struggling? Maybe instead of thinking something is wrong, we should strive to understand what happened.

Trauma informed care, as a 20-year emerging concept, is a crucial shift as to the reasons why someone may be acting out or struggling. Trauma leaves many lasting effects, but it’s effect on the brain is critically important. The brain is the center of all our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. If someone has been exposed to trauma, especially during early childhood, their development can get stuck in the most primitive and reactive parts of their brain. Brain development is essentially compromised. They have a limited ability to self-soothe or delay gratification; instead the anxious brain may lash out instinctively, self-medicate, or even resist attempts to change out of fear. This in turn makes it incredibly difficult for the individual to function because they can’t access these higher functioning parts of the brain to problem solve and interact on an interpersonal level.

Because of your support, TYFS is able to provide a trauma informed approach to every individual who walks through our door. Being trauma informed means we start by asking “what happened to you”, validate the experience, and work collectively to understand how the trauma impacted the person’s life and development. We identify healing from trauma as a treatment goal so the client’s voice is heard and seen. We provide a safe and supportive environment and strive to understand the importance of our client’s cultural context. We also seek input from our clients on how we can improve our programs. When our community supports a trauma informed approach, victims of trauma are better able to begin their recovery with less fear.

No one deserves to be a traumatized or live in fear of being further traumatized. However, your generous support ensures every victim of trauma is offered respect, information, connection, and hope. And for that, you give every child a chance to overcome challenges and lead happier lives. Thank you!



Van Vleck House

Van Vleck House provides early intervention, crisis, and residential services for youth in our community.



Hirschfield Center for Children

Using Art to Strengthen Parent and Child Relationship

Jen McNaughton, Family Advocate/Therapist

As a parent, you can't always shield your child from a traumatic experience, but it doesn't mean that every child needs services to overcome challenges. Sometimes, when your child is struggling, all they need is quality time to connect with someone that cares for them. This really helps because children don't always know how to regulate and process difficult emotions. When they spend time with someone who cares for them, they feel safe. This in turn creates an opportunity and an environment where they can borrow tools to help learn how to self-regulate themselves.

So, what are some helpful activities for parents to connect and engage with children?

Making art is a great activity to create connection. It can be a playful way to engage and strengthen family relationships. When we make art together, we are engaging verbally and non-verbally. A parent and child can talk while they create together, and on the flip side, the creation itself offers another type of communication and reflection. These multi-types of communication offer parents and children many ways to connect. Continuing to build moments of connection offer a great way to strengthen these relationships and teach children how to process emotions effectively.

While a final product of an art making session may help you remember a fond memory, for most of us the connection that we can build using art as a process, allows us to be freer. This freedom gives parents and children a way to think of art as play. If you can play with shapes, colors, art materials and each other, the process is the most important part.

The following is a simple art activity that promotes bonding, connection and fun using simple supplies that most families already have.



Secret Creature Drawing

Try this simple activity by folding a piece of paper accordion style into three to five sections. This can be a back and forth project. Have your child draw a head on the first part of the folded paper. After they draw the head, have them cover their drawing and the parent can use the second fold to draw a body without knowing what kind of head the child has drawn. Hide the torso and finish up the drawing by having the child draw the feet without seeing the body. It can be beneficial to mark the paper to denote where the next person should begin drawing. For example, the child can draw the head and continue the lines of the neck on the second section of the paper so the drawing has some continuity. After all the drawing is complete open the paper to see what you and your child have created. Consider coloring the page together, naming your creature or begin again if the drawing part was most engaging to the child.

Gratitude

So Much to be Grateful For:



Thank you to our **324 individual donors and incredible co-challengers** who generously supported TYFS through Old Bill's Fun Run this year.

Thank you to **Astoria Hot Springs** for hosting our TYFS Takeover

Thank you to **Robert and Marna MacLean** for the donation of puzzles and art supplies

Thank you to those who gave gifts **in honor of Lisa Lord Clementi and Paul Clementi's marriage**

Thank you to **Azadi Fine Rugs** for their donation of turkeys for our clients

Thank you to Mark Barron and Ruth Ann Petroff, MJ and Dan Forman, Paula Currie, Melissa and Shannon Owens, Jack and Carole Nunn, Serenity Ranch, and Anne Ramsay for the **donation of 4-H meat to help feed our youth.**



3 CREEK CARES

A special thank you to Macye Maher and the 3 Creek Cares supporters for joining hands with TYFS to support our critical services. 3 Creek Cares has supported us in providing therapy for children and families at-risk of abuse or neglect, wilderness therapy programming for youth in residential treatment, and over 5,000 safe bed nights for youth in our residential programs.

"The Club at 3 Creek is grateful to learn more about how Teton Youth and Family Services affect our community in an upbeat manner, providing positive ways to increase the relationships of schools, parents and children when vulnerability strikes. Our donors, including many new members at the Club at 3 Creek, found themselves giving generously through the Community Foundation to TYFS. We hope our gift will provide positive ways to power opportunities for youth and families across the Teton community." - Macye Maher, 3 Creek Cares Champion

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Helping Children and Families Find Their Way

Your year-end gift will help a child by ensuring trauma-informed care is available to help children and families when they need it most. please visit **tyfs.org** to learn more.