

STROLL[®]

Lake Sherwood



DELIVERING NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS



Foundations funds RaisingHope Non Profit

Solving the issue of Housing for Foster Care Kids that Age Out



What is the name of your non-profit and what do you all do? RaisingHOPE is a local non-profit organization that empowers youth who are aging out of foster care through resources and relationships. With programs such as our life coaching and mentorship program, life skills courses, housing navigation, transportation, and general financial support, we help youth go from dependence on the foster care system to confident, stable independence.

How did you get involved with Sherwood Cares? RaisingHOPE was connected with Sherwood Cares through Cindi Gortner. Cindi is part of a networking group that has supported RaisingHOPE for several years. We had a meeting with Cindi and Jim Piezynski, and we loved hearing the mission and support that Sherwood Cares

offers to those in need in our community. We were honored to be considered for a grant.

How has the funding from Sherwood Cares directly impacted your non-profit? The funding from Sherwood Cares has allowed us to serve more youth, with regard to housing in particular. Housing is the number one need for youth who are aging out of foster care. When youth age out of foster care, they often have no credit or low credit. They don't have a rental history and sometimes they have sporadic employment history. Therefore it can be a challenge to find a landlord who is willing to take a chance on them as renters. Because of this, RaisingHOPE assists with first month's rent and security deposits that are well over the average amount. Sometimes we pay double or triple the deposit



so that our youth can secure safe and stable housing. With the support of Sherwood Cares, we have been able to support every youth that has requested housing assistance this year. We have not had to turn anyone away. Dozens of youth have housing and several of them are parents of young children as well.

What problem is your non-profit trying to solve? RaisingHOPE would like to see every youth who has been through the foster care system and is aging out of the system to have the support of at least one, stable, caring adult. We want them to have the support they would have had if they had grown up in a healthy family home. We know that our support pales in comparison to having a loving, healthy family, however, we want to give them all that we can. We step into the role of parent and family in many ways by helping them to dream big and by teaching them the skills they need to achieve their goals.

Give me the best example of the way you've seen your organization's work make a difference. We met Christopher Clark when he was a senior in high school.

His social worker contacted us because he needed a suit and tie for a debate competition and for college interviews. We met him at the retail store, purchased a couple of dress shirts, suit, tie, nice socks, and shoes. As we got to know Chris, he began showing up at our events to provide support. He would share his story individually with people and we invited him to share more publicly from the stage at our HOPE4Kids event, in fact, it was the 2018 event outside the Lake Sherwood gates. We soon invited Chris to join our board of directors and the entire board attended his graduation from CLU. Chris contributed to our board in many meaningful ways but most of all by sharing his lived experience in foster care in order to make every RaisingHOPE program more impactful for the youth we serve. Chris finished his board term and married his college sweetheart. Several RaisingHOPE staff were in attendance at his wedding and when the photographer called the families up to take pictures, we realized that they were calling RaisingHOPE up to the stage for the pictures. On one

side of his wedding photos is his wife's family, and on the other side, next to Chris, is his RaisingHOPE family. Chris secured a job working at a local credit union and was recently promoted. Just a few weeks ago, Chris and his wife had their first child and they invited our executive director to be present in the delivery room for the birth of their beautiful son.

Chris' story is the perfect example of the heart of RaisingHOPE and the heart of our youth back to us. We love youth and accept them as family. Life is not easy and mistakes will be made, however we are always there for them. Our goal is to empower youth to break cycles of addiction and abuse, to dream for a

bright future, and to achieve their goals with the support of their community. We are invested for the long haul.

What are areas of opportunity for your organization? One of our goals that we are just beginning to embark on is to build a campus to eliminate homelessness for youth aging out of foster care. The campus will have apartment-style housing for individuals who are aging out of care, in addition to youth or couples with children. RaisingHOPE offices will be on site with classrooms to hold our life skills classes and additional specialty classes such as public speaking, AA/Al Anon, parenting classes, and more. Youth will receive case management that will

support their employment, education, and financial plan so that they can eventually move into mainstream housing. We dream of having a gym on site as well as a café and childcare center for our youth to work and expand their skill set and résumé. We are so excited for this project because we know it will impact youth lives on an even greater scale.

If I wanted to get to know the organization better, what are the best ways to learn more? To learn more about RaisingHOPE please follow us on social media. We can be found on Instagram, Facebook, and X (Twitter). Our website is raisinghope.org.



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