

Angels help children who are victims of crime

Natalie Pate, Statesman Journal

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(Photo: Courtesy Photo)

After years of working as a prosecutor, Shannon Kmetic was faced with handling perhaps the worst child sexual abuse case in her career.

Kmetic's case against a man who had repeatedly raped his daughter throughout her childhood was successful. He was convicted and incarcerated.

The girl was no longer in immediate danger, but Kmetic knew she needed more help. She needed support and additional care, things the legal process wasn't able to provide.

This was Kmetic's breaking point — the last straw.

"The 'system' does a lot to get through the process, but the resources are limited," Kmetic said. "I felt like I needed to do more."

So she founded Angels in the Outfield, a nonprofit organization that helps children impacted by crime or child abuse.

The organization's mission is to "promote healing, happiness, and safety of children through the generosity of our contributors."

Services are determined on a case-by-case basis dependent upon each child's specific needs and wants, but can include counseling and tutoring, backpacks, clothes and Christmas presents, horseback riding lessons and summer camp tuition.

"Sometimes it's the run-of-the-mill stuff that my kids would take for granted," Kmetic said. This includes things like bus tickets for a student to go on a college visit, and tickets to a sibling's graduation ceremony, she said.

Since its inception in 2009, Angels in the Outfield has helped thousands of children across Oregon and parts of Washington, including more than 1,200 this year.

The organization is run by volunteers, with all money raised via grants, donations and fundraising efforts used to fulfill requests from the children.

Angels in the Outfield receives referrals from various sources, including teachers, doctors, law enforcement, counselors, Department of Human Services, and other organizations, serving children up to the age of 18.

The children helped usually reside in single parent homes, foster homes or with grandparents. Some are homeless; they are victims of crime or abuse; and are predominantly from "modest means."

Michelle Roos, a counselor at Crossler Middle School in Salem, sang high praises for the nonprofit.

"(Angels in the Outfield is) absolutely phenomenal," she said. "I can't say enough about what they can do."

Roos referred one student when she worked for another school in the Salem-Keizer School District.

When she asked the student what he wanted if he could have anything in the world, he said he wanted to go to the Kroc Center in Salem.

"That (was) his reality of wonder," Roos said. "It humbled me."

Angels in the Outfield paid for the student and his family to have a year-long membership to the center for its health benefits and the art classes available.

"To fulfill that was amazing," she said.

Nationwide, more than three million reports of child abuse are made every year, with a report of abuse made every 10 seconds.

Almost five children die every day as a result of child abuse; more than three out of four are under the age of 4 years old.

"(We hear) one horrendous story after another ... (this) helps us feel good about what's going on out there," Kmetic said. "It is making a difference."

She said that on some level, even with best efforts in play, these problems won't all be solved proactively, so she saw an opportunity to help the cases

that still happen.

"Kids in these situations are usually abused by people they know," Kmetec said. "They have to believe there's hope, that someone cares about them.

"The fact that there's someone out there somewhere ... that gives hope to not go down a path of re-victimization or despair ... it gives them an outlet ... and (can channel) all they are going through into a positive environment."

As for the girl whose case started it all, Angels in the Outfield was able to send her and her foster family to Disneyland as part of her emotional recovery.

Contact Natalie at npate@StatesmanJournal.com (mailto:npate@StatesmanJournal.com?subject=Reader%20inquiry), 503-399-6745, or follow her on Twitter [@Nataliempate](https://twitter.com/nataliempate) (https://twitter.com/nataliempate), on Facebook at www.facebook.com/nataliepatejournalist (https://www.facebook.com/nataliepatejournalist) or on the Web at nataliepate.com (http://nataliepate.com/)

How to help

Anyone can go through the process online to seek help and the organization will get back to them within 48-72 hours typically. If an individual contacts them who isn't part of an institution like a school district or Department of Human Services, a volunteer with Angels in the Outfield might reach out to schools or counselors to verify.

For more information, go to theangelsintheoutfield.org (https://theangelsintheoutfield.org/) or call 503-313-8122.

Donations can be sent to Angels in the Outfield, PO Box 2347, Oregon City, Oregon 97045.



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