

## **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **AFFCF EXPANDS KEYS TO SUCCESS PROGRAM TO INCLUDE HOUSING ASSISTANCE THROUGH MERCY CARE GRANT**

*Organization Uses Partnership to Create Robust Support System  
for Foster Youth Aging Out of Services*

(PHOENIX, AZ) — Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation (AFFCF) is pleased to announce it is a recipient of a Mercy Care grant. Funds from the grant will allow the non-profit organization, through its Keys to Success (KTS) program, to assist youth aging out of foster care with the costs associated with securing and maintaining housing as well as emergency funds in the instance that participants experience short-term financial challenges that would cause them to lose housing stability.

Today's young adults aging out of foster care have the deck stacked against them. According to the National Foster Youth Institute, an estimated 20 percent of young adults who are in care become homeless the moment they're emancipated at the age of 18. Further, a study published in the American Journal of Public Health reports between 31 percent and 46 percent of youth exiting foster care experience homelessness by age 26. Compounded by today's affordable housing crisis, there is no wonder why the child welfare system is sometimes referred to as a highway to homelessness.

Through its Keys to Success program and the recent partnership with Mercy Care, AFFCF aims to change those statistics. KTS is committed to continuing to increase the quantity and quality of program services in order to meet the needs of participants and promote their successful transition to adulthood.

"Youth in the Keys to Success program are at an important stage in their development, straddling the worlds of teenager and adult, and case management services specific to establishing housing stability need to reflect an understanding of this unique transitional stage. It is important to remember that most young adults are not financially independent from their parents until the age of 26 and many continue to live at home well beyond that age," says Luis De La Cruz, President and CEO of AFFCF. "KTS participants will benefit from a combination of services that include an emphasis on support and guidance while also being treated with the expectations and respect appropriate for a young adult. We are grateful for the Mercy Care grant and for the opportunity to partner with this organization to further assist young adults aging out of foster care in becoming successful, independent members of society."

The grant funds also provided the opportunity for AFFCF to hire a dedicated housing specialist for the KTS program. The main objective for this position is to provide wrap-around case management and life skills to participants to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge to make good decisions about their housing options and to be successful in their new homes.

The AFFCF launched its Keys to Success program in 2014 to better assist youth aging out of foster care and support their transition to independent adulthood more successfully. KTS serves to increase self-sufficiency through educational attainment and improvement of job skills and experience needed to gain meaningful employment at livable wages.

Keys to Success pairs youth aging out of foster care (approximately 1,000 in Arizona annually) with a dedicated, caring, experienced and qualified support team that works one-on-one with each youth, engaging them in career, education and employment exploration and planning as well as workforce training, development and placement. The specialists work together with the youth to develop a specific Individual Service Plan (ISP) based on the five key areas of career, education, employment, independent living and personal development.

AFFCF began nearly 40 years ago by making one small donation of less than \$30, which allowed a young boy the opportunity to take flute lessons. Since that first act, AFFCF has funded more than \$16 million in childhood activities for children in foster care in Arizona. These funds are intended to help youth in foster care in Arizona experience as normal of a childhood as possible despite their challenging circumstances. Awarded funds go toward assistance in school, music or dance lessons or sports equipment to ensure each child in Arizona foster care can enjoy the kind of opportunities every child deserves. Today and in addition to its Childhood Activities Program, AFFCF also engages youth that are getting ready to age-out of foster care through the Keys to Success Program and its Post-Secondary Program. For more about [affcf.org](http://affcf.org)

**About Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation:** Since 1984, Arizona Friends of Foster Children Foundation has created opportunities to build self-esteem and empower children and youth in foster care by funding activities and services to enrich their life experiences and ensure their successful transition to adulthood. For more information, visit [affcf.org](http://affcf.org).

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