



# Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

**Oregon Youth Authority**

**Office of the Director**

530 Center Street NE, Suite 200

Salem, OR 97301-3765

Voice: 503-373-7205

Fax: 503-373-7622

[www.oregon.gov/OYA](http://www.oregon.gov/OYA)

(The *Medford Mail Tribune* published this guest opinion by Kelly Crain, OYA foster care certifier for Jackson County, on March 11, 2012.)



## **Jackson County needs Youth Authority foster parents**

By Kelly Crain

A few weeks ago Marge and Mel Scott celebrated their 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary – even though they were married 43 years ago. That is because the anniversary wasn't of their wedding, but of their years as foster parents to youth offenders who are getting their lives back on track.

During those years the Bandon couple have welcomed 400-plus foster youth into their home. After more than a decade, one still calls on Mother's Day. "When they come to town," Marge Scott says, "they come to see us."

Foster parents like the Scotts play a critical role in supporting the public-safety mission of the Oregon Youth Authority, the state's juvenile corrections agency. But of the agency's approximately 40 foster homes, Jackson County has none. This means local youth offenders who are found appropriate for foster care must be sent to another county. They still receive high-quality care, but the distance makes counseling with family more difficult and takes youth away from positive community supports.

Foster care usually puts these youth on a path to productive, crime-free lives. They benefit from living in a home where they eat together as a family, have the guidance and supervision of a caring adult, and are responsible for performing tasks that youth in most families take for granted. Typically they graduate from high school, get jobs, often enroll in college and sign up as community volunteers.

Recently one OYA foster youth became certified as a nursing assistant and got a job. Another won a full-ride college scholarship. A third was doing so well in school and in sports that he was featured in the local newspaper's sports column. One of the most remarkable stories is of a youth who came into foster care

almost illiterate, but after two years was on the high school dean's list and lettering in sports.

I encourage you to consider becoming an OYA foster parent, someone whose memory these youth will cherish decades from now. You will find these youth very much like those in foster care in the child welfare system. They often come from difficult circumstances and have acted out through delinquent behavior.

We don't expect you to have expertise in dealing with youth offenders. In fact, OYA foster parents in Southwest Oregon work in jobs such as teacher, farmer, social worker, landscaper and residential care provider. We will give you one-on-one, DVD and online training. You will have regular contact with and solid support from the foster care certifier, the youth's probation and parole officer and other professionals.

To qualify to be a foster parent, you must have a source of income apart from foster care reimbursement, pass a criminal history check, meet health and home safety standards, and be able to supervise and care for adjudicated youth ages 12-18. We also welcome transitional foster parents who can help older youth, ages 18-25, learn more about shopping, cooking, banking, budgeting and other elements of independent living.

You can learn more about becoming an OYA foster parent by logging on to [www.oregon.gov/OYA/foster.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/OYA/foster.shtml) or by going to our Facebook page at [facebook.com/OYAfostercare](https://facebook.com/OYAfostercare). Or call me.

When I talk with OYA foster parents, I hear the satisfaction in their voices. "I don't consider it a job," I can hear Marge Scott saying. "I consider it a privilege to work with these kids."

*Kelly Crain is Oregon Youth Authority foster care certifier for Jackson and five other Southwestern Oregon counties. She can be reached at 541-684-2622 or at [Kelly.crain@oya.state.or.us](mailto:Kelly.crain@oya.state.or.us), and she is available to make presentations to community groups.*

# # #