

Taking Kids to the Top

The YouthZone Foundation



YouthZone
Foundation 

The YouthZone Legacy: A Message From Debbie Wilde, Director of YouthZone



Debbie Wilde

Imagine if our community didn't have YouthZone. What would it look like?

We know well what it looks like, thanks to frank discussion and dialogue with communities where

the YouthZone model doesn't exist. These communities, large and small, struggle with youth offenders circulating through the court system without much effective intervention, only to be released back into the community where the chance of reoffending is high.

Without YouthZone the courts are a revolving door of offending youth. These kids drain the court system, tax the Sheriff and Police departments, and strain the health and human service organizations. The cost to tax payers to support the increasing number of children in the system is staggering. When YouthZone is involved, kids are rehabilitated, making our communities a safer place to live—at a reasonable cost.

For 33 years, YouthZone has been helping kids through pregnancy, addiction, abuse, legal problems, and family issues. We've given help, uninterrupted. We extend a loving hand and a warm heart; we help them succeed when they want to. We pick them up when they're down and we show them a new way.

We change lives every day. Sometimes 30 people come to us in a day. We help kids

make new and better choices in their lives. Teach them to become givers, not takers—to see they are a part of the community, not separate.

Kids leave changed.

We are proud of our distinguished past. Because of our tried and true approach, we believe we are the premier organization of our kind in the nation. Our results demonstrate that! We are unrelenting in our commitment and dedication to the youth and families of our communities.

While our past success is impressive, it is the future we look toward for our greatest achievements. What we envision is beyond what we have done in the past. We want to reach more kids. Spread our wings across the country by marketing our assessment tool and the way we do business to other organizations. We're prepared to train others in the YouthZone way.

As you see, our work is never over. We're just beginning to reach our potential. We want to reach every child and family who wants to reconnect and redirect their lives. The need keeps growing and we want to be there to meet it. Our healthy communities are at stake.

I invite you to be a part of the solution by joining the YouthZone Foundation family with a financial contribution that truly is an investment in our community.

— Debbie Wilde

The Heist

"Hey Caitlyn, do you know how easy it is to steal from Claire's?" says 14 year old Alison to her friend Caitlyn as they head to the mall.

"No." says Caitlyn with curiosity.

"I'll show you how easy it is." Alison gloats.

"Okay." agrees Caitlyn. And with that, Caitlyn walks nervously into the store for her first time to steal.

Alison expertly instructs her on the art of stuffing merchandise up her sleeves, unaware of the fully-trained, eagle-eyed salesclerk watching as they stroll through the store.

Up goes a wig in Caitlyn's sleeve. Next, a pair of earrings. Total stash: \$23.00.

The girls saunter casually out of the store as if nothing has happened.

"Wait girls," the clerk bellows from the store, furious. Here we go again, she thinks. These young, punky kids are stealing from me and I'm not going to let them get away.

Hearts pounding, the girls stop. They've been caught red-handed. Terrified, they comply with the clerk.

She confiscates the merchandise and calls the police to have them arrested.

An officer arrives and arrests the dismayed girls. Their "easy" steal just turned into a criminal case with lots of consequences and they are now in the hands of the juvenile criminal justice system.

Fast Forward

The phone rings at YouthZone; it's a court clerk. She's looking for someone to help these two young thieves. Local courts know that YouthZone's expertise in Restorative Justice is a far better solution than the court system for kids in this kind of trouble. Experience has shown again and again that it's cheaper and more effective, too. After taking down the details, YouthZone staff assigns a counselor to the girls' case.

Caitlyn and Alison meet individually with their counselor who teaches them about the rights of property in our system and how these rights have been violated, not only for the store, but for each girl and the greater community. They talk about what each girl needs to do to restore wholeness back to the store, to themselves, and to make amends with the community.

Caitlyn and her counselor agree to the following plan:

1. Caitlyn will start by taking YouthZone's computerized assessment tool. The assessment will show the case manager if there are emotional problems, drug



addiction, abuse, truancy, or suicidal tendencies that might have influenced her decision to shoplift.

2. Caitlyn will meet with her case manager once per week.
3. Caitlyn will work with her case manager to capitalize on her strengths while working to understand that she is not a bad person, but someone who made a bad choice.
4. Caitlyn will participate in a restorative

justice session (described below).

5. Caitlyn will apologize in writing to the store and to corporate headquarters.
6. Finally, Caitlyn will work to earn the money to cover the hundreds of dollars in fees that she is incurring from this incident.

A hefty load for a two minute, \$23.00 heist, but Caitlyn is lucky to be supported by YouthZone. YouthZone's research shows that if Caitlyn follows this program, her chances of re-offending are less than 4%.

Restorative Justice

A critical piece to Caitlyn's success is a restorative justice session. Caitlyn and her mother must attend a two hour meeting with two YouthZone trained facilitators, a member of the community, the store owner, and a police officer. Caitlyn will experience first-hand how her quick decision to steal eroded many people's trust in her and degraded the quality of the community.

Two weeks after her offense, a nervous Caitlyn and her angry mother arrive at YouthZone for their Restorative Justice session. They meet the arresting officer, the still simmering store clerk, a member of the community, and two trained facilitators.

Caitlyn hears first from the officer how her choice to steal takes him away from other pressing situations in the community when he had to come arrest her. As a result, the police department has to employ more police officers to cover our community and keep it safe—an expense that is passed onto the taxpayers. Caitlyn was unaware of the additional cost for extra staff to the police department.

The still visibly angry store clerk then has her chance to share with Caitlyn. She feels violated when teenagers steal from her; she has lost trust and is angry. Not only does the theft affect her, but the store must also mark up its prices to cover loss due to theft. The price increases are, of

course, passed on to all customers. Additionally, the store clerks must be trained to detect stealing, an added expense that further drives up prices. Caitlyn is beginning to see that her \$23.00 snatch is much more—its actual cost to the community is thousands of dollars.

The Restorative Justice session isn't over yet. Caitlyn hears from a community member who has lost her trust in teens. She expresses how frustrated she is that prices keep going up and part of that is due to theft. She wants to live in a safe community, but is not sure she does when teenagers are stealing, often leading them to commit more crimes.

Caitlyn gets it! She now has a clearer, broader picture of how her actions affected so many people. She apologizes to everyone in the room. There is more work to be done—she's agreed to do a lot of work to make amends. Caitlyn agrees to perform 25 hours of public service (she will be educating fellow students about the consequences of stealing), working to pay off her expenses, attending school with no unexcused absences, and she has been banned from the store for life; a lasting consequence for a split-second decision!

Caitlyn, like more than **96%** of YouthZone Restorative Justice clients, did not re-offend and now at eighteen, she is still crime-free!

It's More than Shoplifting

Tina is another YouthZone client. She had a tougher time as a youth and came to YouthZone with deep-rooted issues. Tina's home life was very unstable, and by fourteen, she was pregnant. She struggled with drug addiction and was in and out of the juvenile court system for crimes ranging from shoplifting to minor in possession of drugs.

Luckily, the juvenile courts know YouthZone's success record and intervened on Tina's behalf. The courts recommended diversion allowing YouthZone counselors to take the lead in Tina's rehabilitation.

Fortunately, the courts have come to recognize what many do not: juvenile offenders do not have to be punished in order to learn from their mistakes. Using the YouthZone assessment tool,

Tina's counselors were able to address a long history of concerns and were there when Tina needed intervention the most. If only YouthZone had been called in earlier, her success may have come sooner.

Now, at eighteen, Tina is sober and has a sponsor through AA. She's doing well and raising her child. She still remembers the compassion and support her YouthZone counselor gave her and she is now ready to give back. She wants to share her story with other YouthZone teens to help them before it is too late.

Tina and Caitlyn live in our community. There are hundreds more like them from Aspen to Parachute, each with their own story.

The Threat to Our Communities

Imagine that you were one of these kids: pregnant, breaking the law, addicted to drugs, maybe even abused. Your life would seem rather bleak, wouldn't it? You've probably learned to act out of your fears because you don't know any other way. You'd spiral downward, feeling hopeless.

That hopelessness you'd feel, and that many youth in our community do feel, can spread. Desperate kids corrupt our communities. By engaging in delinquent behaviors—stealing, drug abuse, assault, and suicide – troubled youth poke holes in the fabric of our community. They drain our court systems, human services departments, and law enforcement departments. Despite our high-glitzy, resort-valley appearance, we are not immune to this sort of desperation and degradation within our Valley.

Still don't think we have a problem? Take a look at the headlines lately in our local papers:

"Aspen High higher than most schools" Aspen Daily News, January 27, 2009

Aspen was cited as having double the national average in teenage drinking problems.

"Sophisticated Juveniles Suspected in Basalt Liquor Store Burglaries" Aspen Times, March 6, 2009

Three juveniles were arrested for breaking into a Basalt liquor store.

"Busy Day in Court for Accused Juveniles" Post Independent, March 12, 2009

The article highlighted a number of juveniles in the court system for assaults and burglaries.

Delinquent behavior is on the rise in the Roaring Fork Valley. We must all work together to redirect these behaviors in order to maintain and thrive in our communities.

Changing Kids' Lives

Who can lead us in these efforts? YouthZone. YouthZone is our community asset for changing kids' lives. YouthZone works with youth who want to succeed and parents who want to raise more responsible kids. Helping communities raise their kids – that's what YouthZone is about.

YouthZone builds strong kids. They connect families, push the boundaries of limitation and advance self-confidence. Whether a kid is in trouble with the law or wants some help getting along with peers or family members, YouthZone is there.

With offices in Aspen, Carbondale, Glenwood, and Rifle YouthZone is the "Zone" for kids—a safe, caring place with people dedicated to helping kids and families in difficult times. They believe that all kids have strengths—even when they're acting out. It's just a matter of discovering those strengths and using them to their benefit.

Most of the kids referred to YouthZone come from

the court system. These kids have been arrested for shoplifting, underage drinking or drugs, assault, burglary, or DWI's. YouthZone has an interlocking partnership with the courts, developed and nurtured in the interest of reconnecting teen offenders to positive life choices. As mentioned, this relationship is rooted in the belief that kids don't have to be punished in order to learn. Thoughtful, effective consequences that engage youth in their own remediation will have a lasting and positive effect on kids, being behind bars will not.

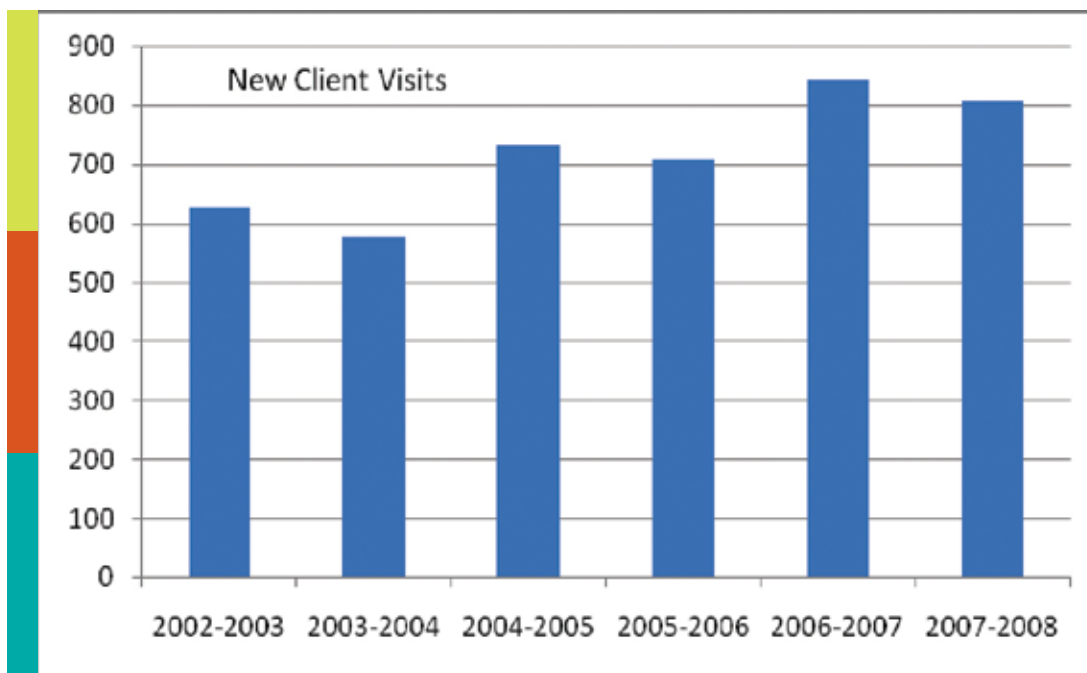
A YouthZone representative is present at every juvenile court hearing. Often the judge will turn to YouthZone to manage the child's court program because YouthZone is equipped not only to handle this process, but is also able to provide assistance with underlying issues such as substance abuse counseling, family counseling, self-esteem building, and one-on-one counseling to help the child see her strengths. Our court system is not equipped to reconnect kids; YouthZone is.



Small Cost, Great Gain

The juvenile detention system cost for offending youth can be almost \$63,000 per year. We know there's not a lot of hope for restoration to a healthy life in this system. Detention is a holding period for youth, not a growth period. Compare those costs to what it cost YouthZone to intervene and restore a child to a healthy life-- \$1,000, and YouthZone's success is not assumed – it is documented.

In 2008 over 800 new clients walked through YouthZone's doors and 409 carryover clients were served. That's a lot of people seeking help. Look at the rise in new clients reaching out to YouthZone over the past six years.



Of the 807 new clients, 67% were Anglo, 28% were Latino, and 5% were of other races.

With a staff of 11 loving and skilled youth and family specialists, YouthZone knows kids. After nearly 33 years of working with youth and families, they know what works, and what doesn't. YouthZone has developed a process for working with kids that restores them and sets them on a healthier path in life.

Instead of punishing kids and making them feel guilty, the YouthZone staff creates a trusting and deep connection with them. The staff asks the kids about their dreams, helps them explore their strengths, and shows them how they can participate in the world around them.

Jaclyn P. Gisburne, Ph.D, has great things to say about YouthZone and their ability to connect with kids:

"Initially, I became interested in YouthZone after reviewing some of the marketing materials addressing "connection." I was curious as to its efficacy after reading some of the informational columns on dealing with youth, contributed to the local newspapers by Debbie Wilde, Executive Director. Having done considerable research on youth aggression, addiction and violence, I was cautious when it came to marketing rhetoric promoting "connecting" with youth, being well aware of the importance of any program that could actually (re)establish connections for at-risk youth. My skepticism

was further grounded in an extensive review of the literature on "best practices" for working with at-risk youth, i.e., what works and what doesn't.

However, after meeting and interviewing the staff, reviewing programs and participating in the organization's activities, I am pleased to report that this organization has experientially figured out what works and how to provide the community with meaningful programs and services."

Measurable, Focused Impact

YouthZone has a valuable asset in their online assessment tool (developed in-house by staff and independent evaluators) that assesses each child as they walk in the door. Thousands of children have taken the assessment tool which quickly detects addiction, emotional problems, abuse, depression, thoughts of suicide, and similar behaviors. A child might have been arrested for stealing but the tool will reveal existing underlying problems. YouthZone aims to address the whole child, not just the presenting behavior.

After reviewing the assessment, the child and counselor develop a plan. Just like Caitlyn's individualized plan previously outlined, each client's plan is a comprehensive strategy reminding him/her of his/her strengths—building self-esteem while creating an understanding of appropriate behaviors. For example, a child's plan may include being matched with a YouthZone PAL (an adult mentor, like a Big Brother or Big Sister), some counseling, and participation in a Girls' Circle.



When leaving YouthZone, youth take the assessment again to measure progress they have made under YouthZone's guidance. Approximately two-out-of-three kids show significant improvement upon completion of YouthZone's program. This effective and efficient assessment tool has become a cornerstone of the YouthZone's impressive outcome results.

In fact, so impressive are the results that other organizations around the country are clamoring to use the tool. YouthZone is in the process of marketing the assessment tool to state and local governments, other nonprofits that work with kids in the court system and community agencies that want to measure their results scientifically. YouthZone's vision is to touch and transform the lives of every kid in our country that needs help.

Terry Wilson, Chief of Police in Glenwood Springs, enthusiastically endorses the work that YouthZone does:

"The biggest advantage of YouthZone is their combination of being proactive and providing early warning support for kids through mentoring, counseling, and education.

YouthZone is a HUGE time saver for the police and court system through their interfacing and screening of the youth and family. The police are spoiled because YouthZone is so good at what they do. They assist with the worst cases and have a very solid relationship with the courts, probation, and detention. They know from the screenings what to recommend to the courts."

Parents Need Help, Too

YouthZone doesn't just work with kids in the court system. They work with parents, too. YouthZone offers parenting classes from Aspen to Rifle, as well as one-on-one counseling for parents and kids. Sometimes families need mediation and YouthZone's trained staff facilitates family sessions as well. But parent education isn't exclusively for those in crisis--YouthZone's parenting classes and parent coaching sessions are designed to help families create lasting relationships. We know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

"YouthZone was very professional, compassionate, supportive, attentive and knowledgeable. All our experiences with YouthZone were positive. The counseling was exceptional and realistic. Their support was there from the beginning and it keeps on going!" A grateful parent.

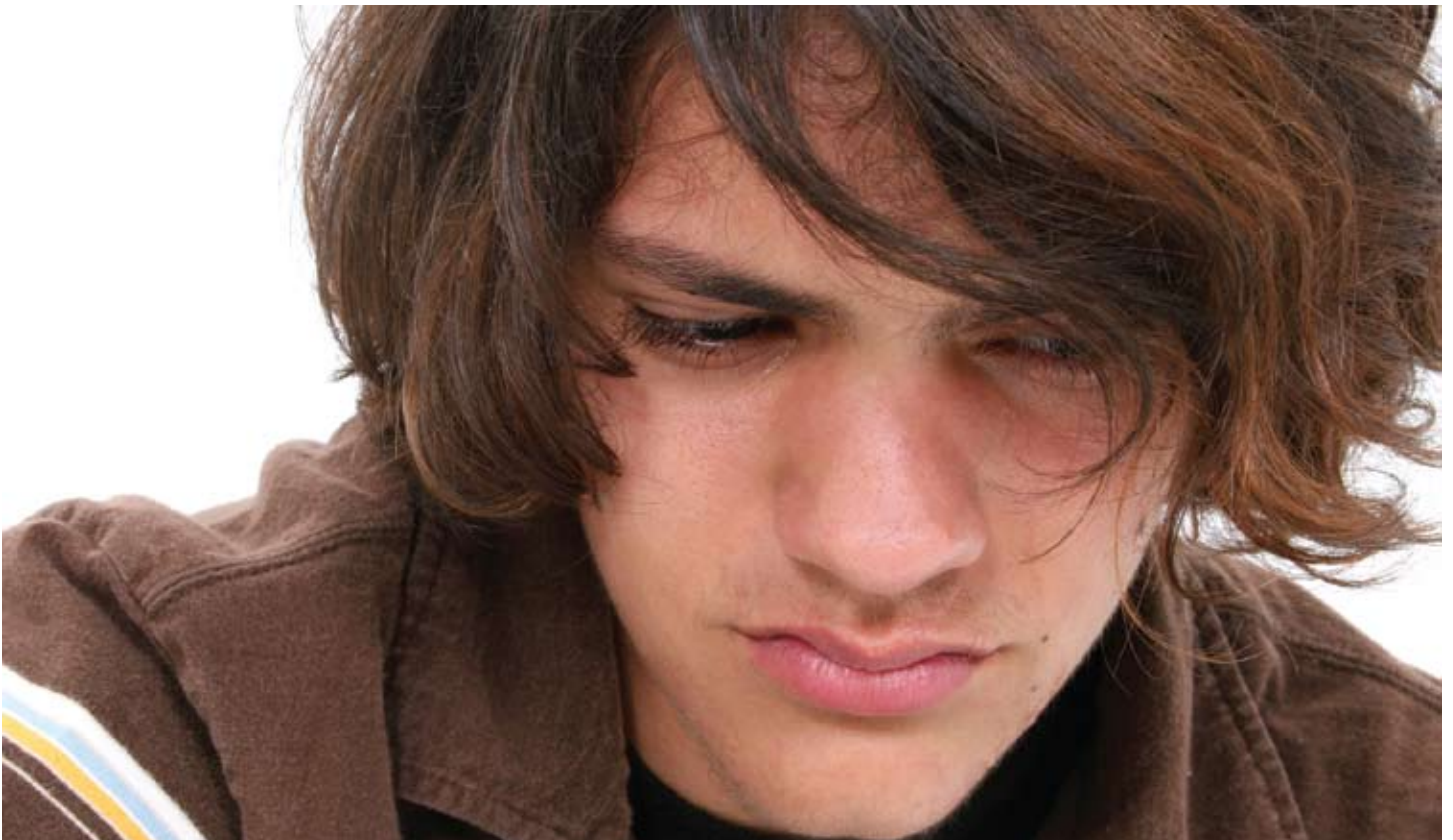
"I can't thank you enough for the wonderful parenting class. I learned so many new skills – I feel like I have my happy kids back!" Mother of two, ages 5 and 3.

Reaching Lives in Many Ways

In addition to families and courts, YouthZone also works in the schools to reach kids before they get into trouble. They offer Girls' Circles to build self-esteem, drug and alcohol prevention groups, parenting education and coaching, community justice for kids in the court system, and more. Educators in schools from Aspen to Parachute know they can call on YouthZone to develop unique programs as needed.

YouthZone is committed to work with every family and child who asks for help.

"I wasn't even in trouble and YouthZone helped me." Teen Circle Group member, age 15



Results

YouthZone understands that it's not enough to say they do good work, they have to prove it. To show all of us how great an impact YouthZone services can have, they track their success. For the past twelve years, they have tracked each child who enters the "Zone." Through a pre- and post-assessment YouthZone can track how the kids are progressing.

Here are the results YouthZone achieves with its program, determined by independent evaluator, Jerome Evans, Ph.D:

Recent results from a three-year independent evaluation (2003-2006) shows that YouthZone programs are making statistically significant improvement in the following six measured areas:

1. Decreased underage drinking.
2. Decreased use of illegal drugs and delinquency.
3. Increased school involvement.
4. Increased resiliency.
5. Increased social support.
6. Increased resiliency to sexual/emotional/physical abuse.

Quotes from Jerome Evans' report:

"Across Colorado, no youth-serving program has worked more successfully in the interests of their youthful clients and families. Not only is YouthZone able to say, 'Here is who we have worked for and here is how hard we have worked,' but equally important they are able to report, 'And here is what we have accomplished together.'

"The most important conclusions from evaluative study of youth change with services are that clients of many types and backgrounds enjoyed gains through reduction of problem behavior and attitudes, substance abuse, and the promotion of developmental assets. Communities and families can have confidence that in approximately two-out-of-three instances, any youngster for whom they seek help is likely to be in a better position by the end of their services."

The bottom line is YouthZone has a system that works for kids and families that want to succeed.

Success

Many other have recognized YouthZone's success, too:

1. 2004 & 2007 YouthZone was voted the best nonprofit by the community.
2. The El Pomar Foundation in Colorado Springs meticulously reviewed YouthZone and has nominated it twice as a finalist for its state-wide Award for Excellence in the Youth Category—a very prestigious honor!
3. 2007—published in the book Information Gold Mine - Innovative Uses of Evaluation. YouthZone was chosen from 40 organizations to be the featured organization demonstrating the use of

evaluation to further an agency's work in a variety of ways.

Clearly, YouthZone has developed a successful way of setting kids on a better course in life.



How You Can Help

In 2001, government funding to YouthZone was dramatically cut causing the organization to scramble to raise funds for its services. Recognizing the value of a steady funding source, the YouthZone board established the YouthZone Foundation to ensure long-term, generation to generation, stable funding for YouthZone.

The YouthZone Foundation established a campaign goal to reach a fund balance of \$1,000,000 by the end of 2012. At the end of 2008 The Foundation is nearly halfway there! Our ultimate goal is a \$5 million endowment.

The Charlson Foundation, based in Minneapolis, has supported the YouthZone Foundation from the beginning. From 2001 to 2008, they have contributed \$155,000 to the Foundation. Mary Rippy, a board member of the Charlson Foundation and of YouthZone, says:

"We invest in the YouthZone Foundation because it provides an immediate benefit to YouthZone and our community. YouthZone's results speak for themselves. Kids don't become repeat offenders and they develop into capable, young adults."

"YouthZone has made it through many economic cycles and is here to stay. The Foundation ensures the longevity of YouthZone."

You can be a part of the solution of supporting YouthZone sustainably. By making a gift to the YouthZone Foundation, you join an exclusive group of businesses and individuals who value healthy kids, healthy families, and healthy communities.

Giving Levels

The young children you know are possibly the next Isis Johnson, Brandon Keefe, Heather DeWitt, or Ashley Rhodes-Courter. They may become like Ryan Hreljac, or the next Craig Kielburger or some other great, if young, humanitarian. The world's children and teens have so many wonderful, positive and practical projects for saving the world—and each other. With a little help, they just might accomplish all that they set out to do. In honor of our world's young humanitarians, the YouthZone Foundation has matched an accomplished youth philanthropist with each of our giving levels.

\$100,000 and above—Craig Kielburger, age 12, organized his classmates to become child-rights activists after reading about a 12 year old Pakistani boy who had been a slave in a carpet factory since the age of 4. He now leads Free the Children, a nonprofit agency of children to make sure all children have basic human rights and freedoms.

\$50,000 to \$99,999—Ryan Hreljac, age 6, earned \$2,000 to build a well for clean drinking water in

Uganda. He then traveled to the school in Africa to meet the children and to see his well.

\$25,000 to \$49,999—Ashley Rhodes-Courter, by the age of 12 she had been in 14 foster-care homes when she was finally adopted. She didn't want to leave the system behind; she wanted to fix it. She has spoken to thousands of people, sharing her story. She helped raise over a million dollars for the Danny Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

\$10,000 to \$24,999—Heather DeWitt, age 16, started a conservation program for the Channel Islands in high school. The iceplant was an invasive species which started choking out native agriculture. Heather organized students in her school to develop a way to remove the iceplant. The environmental club was able to travel to the Channel Islands and remove the iceplant.

\$5,000 to \$9,999—Brandon Keefe, age 8, started a student-to-student solutions for literacy. Brandon, with the help of his of classmates,

collected 847 books to fill a library at a children's home. Soon the entire community was involved in building a library for the home. Brandon's work inspired the model for Bookends, a nonprofit organization that recycles books through student-run book drives and places them in schools and youth organizations in need of books.

Under \$5,000—**Isis Johnson**, age 8, started to feed hungry people in New Orleans. In her first year, she collected over 1,000 food items and by her third year, she collected over 4,000. She still works to help others and during Hurricane Andrew she collected and donated 1,648 pieces of clothing.

For donations of \$1,000 or more, you will receive a thank you plaque that acknowledges you for your donation.

Fleur and Curt Strand (former CEO of Hilton Hotels) give to YouthZone:

"We give to YouthZone because it saves so much money. The cost of putting a child in detention for a year is \$63,000. The cost of a child working with YouthZone in rehabilitation is approximately \$1,000. The cost of YouthZone versus detention is quantifiable and the outcome with YouthZone is powerful."

The Bottom Line

Families that come to YouthZone are our neighbors, community members, and friends. Chances are you know a family who has reached out to or been referred to YouthZone. YouthZone families are wealthy or struggle financially; they come from all ethnic backgrounds; the parents are married or divorced; live anywhere from Aspen to Parachute; some have addiction problems while others don't. In reality YouthZone families are just like yours. You see, YouthZone families are just like you! They are a microcosm of our community.

In the past few years, the severity of the cases is staggering. Typically children who were referred to YouthZone would have one offense and be in their mid to later teenage years. Now the children are younger and have three to four offenses, some with serious drug addiction, suicidal tendencies, or abuse. The children require many more resources from YouthZone today than in the past.

You can be part of the solution. With your generosity and desire to help our kids, you can invest in the YouthZone Foundation to ensure the sustainability of YouthZone in your community. There continues to be a growing need for a safe and effective place to go. Through your donation you can ensure YouthZone will always be here.

