Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation

Wrangler

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Thirteen-Year Journey Has Lasting Impact

Ben's thirteen-year journey at Yellowstone Academy wasn't marked by typical school milestones – no pep rallies, proms, or crowded lunch tables. Instead, his school years were shaped by quiet persistence, caring educators, and breakthroughs that may have looked small from the outside but felt monumental to those who knew him.

Ben holds a special place in Yellowstone Academy's history as the first youth to attend from kindergarten through high school graduation. While many students join later in their academic careers or return to public schools once they've gained the skills they need, Ben's path was different.

He arrived at Yellowstone Academy while in kindergarten after struggling in public school. The noise and chaos overwhelmed him, and acting out became his way of escaping to the calm and safety of home. But at Yellowstone Academy, the response was different. Rather than sending him home, staff worked with Ben to help him stay and learn new ways to manage his "overwhelm."

"Devin* was the best," Ben recalled. "He spent a lot of time with me, teaching me how to breathe deeply and stay calm. He didn't get angry or send me away – he would sit down and breathe with me."

Over the years, Ben had opportunities to return to public school, but his family chose to keep him at Yellowstone Academy.

"Yellowstone Academy had everything Ben needed," said his mother, Rebecca. "They knew how to work with his autism spectrum disorder, how to reach him and teach him. The small setting, the relationships he formed – those things mattered. Taking them away would have set him back, and we weren't willing to risk that."

At Yellowstone Academy, Ben thrived. He excelled in his classes, joined the supported employment program, and began working at Aspen View, serving its residents.

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**Devin Michaelis was a beloved paraeducator at Yellowstone Academy who passed away in 2019 from colorectal cancer at age 38. Yellowstone Academy placed a bench in his memory on the edge of the Heptner Education Center lawn.*

"It sure makes a difference when you know somebody cares."

Inside

A CHAT WITH FOUNDATION PRESIDENT BILL HRITSCO

Above-the-Line Giving: One Big Beautiful Opportunity

In an exciting development for nonprofits and generous Americans alike, the recently-enacted *One Big Beautiful Bill* includes a renewed and expanded provision for **above-the-line charitable tax deductions** for gifts made in 2026 and beyond. This means individuals and couples can now receive a tax break for their charitable giving – even if they don't itemize deductions on their tax returns.

Today, rather than itemizing, over 85% of taxpayers simply opt for the standard deduction when filing their taxes. In previous years, that meant their charitable gifts, while generous, didn't provide any direct tax benefits. With the *One Big Beautiful Bill*, Congress aims to change that by encouraging even more giving among all Americans.

What's New?

The bill allows for an **above-the-line deduction of up to $2,000** for married couples filing jointly and **up to $1,000** for individual filers. This deduction applies **in addition to** the standard deduction, making charitable giving in 2026 easier and more beneficial for a wide range of Americans.

Remember Us in Your Will and Leave a Lasting Legacy

By naming Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation in your will, you can guarantee that your legacy of caring for troubled and abused children will continue for generations to come.

FIXED AMOUNT: I give the sum of $_____ to Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation.

SPECIFIC PROPERTY: I give my _____ to Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation.

PERCENTAGE OF REMAINDER: I give _____ % of the remainder of my estate to Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation.

CONTINGENCY: In the event _____ does not survive me, I give _____ to Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation.

These samples are suggestions only. Legal documents should always be prepared by your attorney.

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation's legal address is 2050 Overland Avenue, P.O. Box 80807, Billings, Montana 59108.

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization. Gifts are tax deductible.

Congress Giveth, and Congress taketh away…

As wonderful as the above-the-line deduction will be for non-itemizers, those who itemize on their taxes will face two new limitations under the *One Big Beautiful Bill*. First, a 0.5% adjusted gross income (AGI) floor will apply – only the portion of charitable contributions that exceeds 0.5% of a donor's AGI will be deductible. Second, the value of itemized deductions, including charitable gifts, will be capped so that no more than 35% of a contribution's value can be used to reduce a donor's tax liability. These changes mean that high-income donors in particular may see reduced tax savings from their charitable giving and may want to consider accelerating gifts into 2025 or using strategic tools like qualified distributions from IRAs, donor-advised funds or charitable remainder trusts to maximize their impact under the new rules. Call on us with your questions and let us help you with planning the most tax-efficient ways to give cash in 2025 and 2026.

Your support helps ensure that youth and families in crisis receive the care, guidance, and opportunities they desperately need. And thanks to this legislation, for the vast majority of Americans who no longer itemize on their taxes, your support in 2026 and beyond may also reduce your tax burden – without the need to itemize.

We know that people give because they care – but a tax benefit never hurts. For many donors, this will be a chance to give more than they thought possible and to help more emotionally troubled youth than ever before.

To learn more or to make your contribution online, please visit YellowstoneFoundation.org, call us at (406) 656-8772, or mail your gift to: **Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation**, 2050 Overland Ave., Billings, MT 59102. Please know how grateful we are for more than 68 years of giving in support of our Mission.

A MESSAGE FROM
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER MIKE CHAVERS

A Summer of Growth, Healing and Connection

Summer at Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (YBGR) is more than sunshine and blue skies. As the days grow longer and the Montana landscapes come alive, so too do the lives of the youth we serve.

The Ranch's 410-acre campus and the surrounding areas becomes a playground for growth, healing, and connection. Whether it's hiking near Red Lodge, casting a line into Wild Bill Lake to catch their first fish, or learning to ride a horse with care and confidence in our arena, our kids engage in activities that help build trust, self-esteem, and resilience. These moments of adventure are woven into a tapestry of therapeutic care designed to prepare youth for life.

Our summer programming is rooted in the same values that guide us year-round – faith, integrity, relationships, and stewardship – but in these warmer months, therapy takes on a new rhythm. Individual and family therapy sessions often spill outdoors, where nature provides its own kind of healing. Youth also participate in psychoeducational groups that teach emotional regulation, communication skills, and personal responsibility in interactive, engaging ways.

Behind every breakthrough is a team of mission-driven professionals who embody our commitment of Caring People, Preparing Youth for Life. From therapists and direct care staff to equine specialists and nurses, these passionate individuals walk alongside our youth daily, offering support, encouragement, and belief in their potential.

Summer at the Ranch is a reminder of what's possible when caring people come together with a common mission. Thank you for being part of that mission. Your prayers, support, and generosity help us continue to provide life-changing opportunities to youth who need them most.

As the sun sets on another unforgettable summer, we're already looking forward to the seeds planted during these months and the growth that will continue in the seasons ahead. We are grateful for your prayers and support. Without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you for being Caring People, Preparing Youth for Life.

Summer Young Life Camp

The weekend started with a splash as kids zoomed down an oversized slip and slide, followed by a pizza party. Day two brought a flurry of activities – pool Olympics, bucket golf, squirt-gun tie-dye, and a temporary tattoo station. Taco Bell was delivered to the lodges for dinner as a special treat.

On the final day, kids enjoyed a movie, danced at a silent disco, and attended their banquet. As they entered the dining hall, they were welcomed by soft lighting, music, and warm smiles. Tables were beautifully set with linens, fresh flowers, folded napkins, and a first course of salads, buttered rolls, and lemonade.

Volunteers served dinner while the room filled with laughter and stories from the week. A favorite moment was the paper plate awards, with playful categories like:
- I Really Thought I Could Reach That Chicken
- Most Creative Diving
- The Longest Drive

But the most meaningful moment came when 26 youth raised their hands to declare their intent to explore a relationship with God – and six recommitted their lives to Him.

A weekend of joy, connection, and hope.

Volunteer servers (L-R) – Guest speaker Elizabeth Pearson/YoungLife Capernaum, Asst. Chaplain Rich Lutton, Javi Chandler, Shane Lovering, Linda Pierce, Ron Pierce, Jayme Roll, Russ Pierce, Maggie Chandler, Chaplain John Boeder

Tables were beautifully decorated for the banquet, a special treat for the kids.

Building Skills and Purpose: Hands-On Learning at YBGR

At Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch, hands-on projects in the woodshop and welding shop are doing more than teaching technical skills – they're helping youth build confidence, responsibility, and a sense of purpose.

This summer, youth crafted Adirondack chair and ottoman sets, taking charge of sanding, assembly, and finishing. With guidance from staff, they learned to safely use tools, follow detailed plans, and take pride in the quality of their work. Several finished pieces will be auctioned at the 4th Annual Yellowstone Chili Cookoff to support future woodshop efforts.

Meanwhile, students in the Welding Shop put their creativity to use building a feed trailer for the ring-necked pheasants raised on campus. Designed to fit narrow gates and fencing, the trailer helps transport feed efficiently – currently pulled by a riding lawn mower. With teamwork and care, youth haul and distribute feed, practicing precision and problem-solving. Their next challenge: modifying the trailer with a donated auger to streamline feeding even further.

Whether building chairs or trailers, YBGR youth are gaining more than vocational skills – they're learning what it means to build something that matters.

A finished set of the Adirondack chairs and ottoman.

A student welding the trailer together.

Steel for the trailer donated by Pacific Steel and Recycling.

Mr. Baker surrounded by the tools of his trade.

The control board and microphones in the classroom.

From Trauma to Talent: How Youth Are Finding Their Voice

Mr. Able Baker does more than teach Career and Technical Education – he helps youth heal and grow through creative outlets. In his business marketing, graphic design, and videography classes, students learn real-world skills like podcasting, editing with Final Cut and Logic Pro, and turning their talents into a potential income source after treatment.

Students editing their podcast.

Using action cameras, green screens, mics, and Macs, students create podcasts that reflect their journeys and coping strategies. One youth shared, "Being told to calm down doesn't work – but maybe hearing how I get through things will help someone else." These projects are helping kids connect in deeper, more meaningful ways.

Students also built and painted their own podcast tables, taking pride and ownership in the space. One youth who took the initiative to protect the equipment is now helping run the control board. Along the way, they're learning unspoken etiquette, teamwork, and how to accept feedback. With nearly 30 youth in the residential treatment program involved – and more expected this fall – this class is a unique blend of healing and hands-on experience.

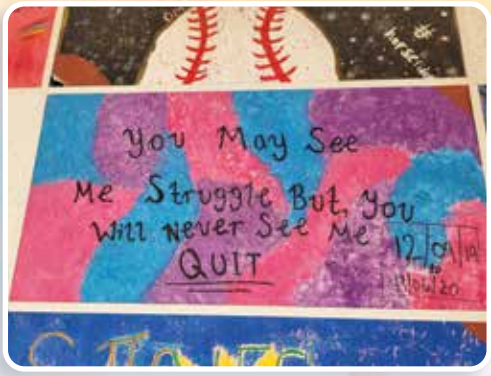
Fortin Tiles Tell a Story

During their time at the ranch, youth are given more than just space to heal – they are equipped with tools to understand their emotions, manage their behaviors, and build inner strength. The hope is that the coping skills they learn here will continue to support them long after they've moved on.

At Fortin West Lodge, a beautiful tradition helps that healing journey come to life. Hand-painted ceiling tiles – each created by a young person who completed their treatment – line the ceilings with colorful messages of hope, resilience, and encouragement. These tiles form a kind of quiet chorus, offering comfort and connection to every new youth who enters the lodge.

One warm afternoon this summer, the lodge was peacefully quiet. The girls were gathered inside, keeping cool with books, drawings, and card games. As their attention turned upward to the ceiling, they began pointing out their favorite tiles, reading the words aloud, and sharing what they meant to them.

One girl said softly, "When someone feels anxious or really angry, they can just sit there and focus on the ceiling." It was a simple statement, but one that captured how these messages offer more than decoration – they offer calm in the storm.



Many youth find strength in a tile that reads, "You may see me struggle, but you'll never see me quit." That message, painted by someone who once stood in the same place, becomes a guiding light for others still finding their way.

As staff members joined the conversation, they too shared their favorite tiles. It was a moment of connection – humble, heartfelt, and healing.

Then, a girl with gold-rimmed glasses and cat-eye makeup gently closed her book, marking her page with a worn photo. She looked up and shared that she deeply resonated with the tile that reads, "Learn to be alone, because not everyone will stay." Her voice trembled slightly as spoke about her sister, whose picture she always keeps close as a bookmark. She spoke of her foster care journey, her many foster siblings, and then quietly revealed that she had recently lost her sister to suicide.

But her story didn't end there. With a hopeful smile, she shared that her current foster family is working toward adopting her – proof, she said, that some people do stay, and that she is not alone after all.

In that moment, surrounded by the quiet strength of their shared stories, the girls found comfort – not just in the ceiling tiles, but in each other. Despite the difficult paths that brought them here, they could see their own courage reflected in the art above them.

Since 2012, every girl who completes her treatment is invited to leave her mark by painting a ceiling tile – a piece of her journey, a legacy of hope. These tiles remind everyone who walks through the doors of Fortin West that healing is possible, and that even in the hardest times, they are never truly alone.

Thirteen-Year Journey Has Lasting Impact

Continued from page 1

"I like helping people and getting to know them," Ben said. "The residents smile when they see me – I bring them joy. That's my favorite thing: bringing and seeing joy. Some of them were in the military and talk to me about that. That's also why Mr. Eckroth is my favorite teacher – we talk military stuff, and he always has great book recommendations."

Now that he's graduated, Ben plans to continue working at Aspen View, learning from the residents and spreading joy wherever he goes. He's also excited to dive into more reading – especially anything military-related.

Ben's impact on Yellowstone Academy is lasting. His peaceful presence and quick smile left a deep impression on both staff and students. As the school welcomes students back this fall, the hallways will feel a little quieter without him. But the joy and calm he brought to campus will live on – an indelible mark on the hearts of those who knew him.

Youth Explore Identity Through Tradition at the Ranch

Sometimes healing begins with connection – shared stories, steady hands, and a quiet return to something long remembered.

Over the summer, kids at the Ranch helped raise a traditional tipi along Canyon Creek. Just 19 miles from the Crow Reservation, the land has long been a place of movement, ceremony, and connection for the Plains Tribes – a natural corridor between nations.

With support from Josie Brady, Native American Services Coordinator, Clint Valandra of Willow Creek LLC, and teachers at Yellowstone Academy, youth worked together to raise the structure, with each stake handcrafted in woodshop class. What began as a cultural project became a moment of meaning, identity, and belonging.

Not far from the tipi, something new is growing. This year marked the start of YBGR's first Indigenous garden – five small beds filled with corn, beans, squash, bergamot, tomatoes, pumpkins, and mint. Led by Josie, every seed was started by hand. The garden reflects crops long grown by Plains Tribes in the region – food rooted in history and community.

Before long, they'll make tea from the mint, roast squash, and bake pumpkin pie.

Tradition, when nurtured, grows.

NAS Coordinator Josie Brady in the Indigenous Garden.

The corn, squash, pumpkins, and other herbs and vegetables are thriving.

The youth helped raise the tipi poles to form the traditional conical structure.

The completed tipi nestled at the trees edge on the Ranch campus' northeast corner.

Safe Spaces, Strong Futures: Gratitude for Our Security Project Donors

For the past three years, YBGR has been engaged in campus safety preparedness. The increase in violent incidents in schools and communities locally and nationwide has necessitated an increase in security at YBGR.

Phase One of the YBGR Campus Security Project included security upgrades to the Yellowstone Academy Casper and Heptner Education Centers, the Nutter Dining Hall, and the Uihlein Recreation Center. Phase 1 was completed in the Fall of 2023. Thank you to all donors of Phase One with a special thanks to the Alice Lee Lund Charitable Trust, Chakkera Family, Darlene & Marvin Hartze, and Dottie Bracken.

YA therapist Jasmine Hansen buzzes in at the Tom and Joan Scott Clinic which was part of the Phase 2 of the Campus Security Project upgrades.

Phase Two included security upgrades for the DeHaan Administration Building, the Robbie Chapel, and the Tom & Joan Scott Clinic and was completed in the fall of 2024. Grants from FEMA through the Montana Emergency & Disaster Services funded Phase Two.

Memorial Listings

May 15, 2025 – July 15, 2025

A special word of thanks to all donors listed here who support Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation through their memorial and honor gifts.

FRANCISCO ALBA
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Memorial and Honor Gifts Form

Mail form to: YBGR Foundation, P.O. Box 80807, Billings, MT 59108

Amount: $ _____ Given by _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

IN MEMORY OF:

Name _____

City _____ State _____

IN HONOR OF:

Name _____

City _____ State _____

Occasion: _____

SEND CARDS TO:

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Memorial gifts can also be made online at YellowstoneFoundation.org

Phase Three includes the remaining 17 buildings on campus that include youth residential lodges and the remaining campus buildings that house facility maintenance and creative and experiential opportunities for the youth in residential care and day school. Phase Three is fully funded, and work has now begun. A big thank you to our Phase 3 donors:

MJ Murdock Charitable Trust
Dean and Connie Studer Foundation
Alice Lee Lund Charitable Trust
Charles M. Bair Trust
Gertrude Kamps Memorial Foundation
Darlene and Marvin Hartze
Helen M. Sloan Donor Advised Fund
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William and Margaret Wallace Foundation
Dave and Charleen Hamilton
Phillips66

The total cost of the Campus Security Project came in at $1,027,167, and again, a big thank you to all the donors who made YBGR a safer place to learn and grow.

How Can You Help?

YBGR brightens futures and kindles hope for over 2,000 children and families each day, and it is supporters like you who make this lifeline possible.

From educational programs to therapeutic services, your contribution can directly enhance the quality of care and opportunities we provide to these deserving children. Join other supporters in making a real difference! Your gift can be directed to the immediate needs listed below or it can be used for other essential needs.

School Supplies

Like kids across the country, Yellowstone Academy students are back in the classroom, but the need for school supplies isn't only in the fall. Students come to YA throughout the school year and need supplies. Supplies can be dropped off at the Foundation Office (2050 Overland Ave.) or mailed to Yellowstone Foundation at 2050 Overland Ave., Billings, MT 59102.

YA Vo-Ag Program – $10,000

Yellowstone Academy's Vo-Ag program teaches students hands-on skills like welding, woodworking, small engine repair, aviculture (pheasants), apiculture (bees), and horticulture while building confidence and career readiness. Your support provides essential supplies – wood, metal, tools, bird feed, and more – ensuring these life-changing opportunities continue for students facing unique educational challenges.

YA Math Curriculum – $15,000

Yellowstone Academy students deserve a specialized math curriculum that meets their unique learning needs. Traditional methods often fall short. Your support helps provide tools that build skills, confidence, and a love for learning – making math accessible and empowering for every student. Help us invest in their success today.

CBS Emergency Fund – $40,000 annually

The CBS Emergency Fund provides urgent support – food, clothing, utilities, and more – for families in crisis. Staff work directly in homes, identifying immediate needs like a microwave or eyeglasses. Your gift helps bridge the gap, ensuring children are safe, warm, and fed while long-term solutions are secured.

Uihlein Rec Center Locker Rooms Refresh – $527,500

When the UC was completed in 1972, YBGR served only boys so their locker room is twice the size of the girls' locker room. Currently, twice as many girls as boys are in the residential treatment program. Updating the UC locker rooms will create safer, more functional spaces for youth and staff. Renovations include new showers with anti-ligature fixtures, upgraded toilets, ventilation, lighting, tile, and repainted surfaces. In addition, the girls' and boys' locker rooms will be swapped to accommodate the current census. Your support will help us create clean, secure, and respectful environments that meet today's standards.

Please consider donating by visiting **YellowstoneFoundation.org/Wrangler-Appeal** or returning the enclosed form. If you would like to select one of the projects, simply note that on the form or the online donation form. Together, we can continue building a bright future for every child at Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch!

Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation
Wrangler

To update your mailing address, please call 406-656-8772 or email us at info@yellowstonefoundation.org.

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Montana Roundup

MISSOULA

Adam's Story

At just 11 years old, Adam has already faced more than most. His early years were marked by separation and uncertainty – with his mother caught in addiction and his father involved in the justice system. Foster care became his reality. But in March 2024, Adam entered YBGR's school-based services in Missoula – and things began to shift.

"When Adam started with us, he was anxious, withdrawn, and afraid the people he cared about would leave," shares Jill Brischli, Administrative Supervisor. "He had panic attacks, nightmares, and struggled to trust. But over time, we've seen him begin to heal."

Today, Adam lives with his dad, sister, and beloved cat. Since being reunified in June, he's graduated from school-based services, thanks to consistent support and therapeutic work. His anxiety has eased. So have his behaviors.

YBGR will continue walking alongside Adam and his family through case management services – building a foundation of stability for continued healing and resilience.

BOULDER

Paws, Purpose, and Progress

What started as a project to help build a new animal shelter turned into something much bigger.

For over a year, youth from YBGR's Therapeutic Group Homes in Boulder have volunteered with Animal Shelter and Care of Jefferson County (ASCJeffco). It started with a project to help prepare for a new shelter and dog park, but, even after construction ended, the kids kept showing up.

Each week, they now volunteer – walking dogs, cleaning kennels, and comforting animals still waiting for a home. "It's the highlight of their week," shares Shelby Moffett, Treatment Coordinator. "They don't just show up – they care."

YBGR's partnership with ASCJeffco gives youth the chance to give back while building responsibility, confidence, and connection. And with the steady support of their Boulder team, that impact goes both ways.

Making Montana SMARTer

Charise Lemelin, YBGR's Clinical Director of Community-Based Services, crisscrossed Montana with a mission: to bring SMART Rooms to life in community care settings across the state.

SMART (Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment) is a therapeutic approach that uses movement and sensory input to help kids regulate emotions. It's especially powerful for youth impacted by trauma, offering support beyond what traditional talk therapy can provide.

"Some kids need to swing. Some need to push, pull, jump, or curl up with a weighted blanket to feel safe," Charise explains. "SMART Rooms give them a place to do that – a space designed just for them."

These rooms are now open in YBGR's Community Offices across Montana, equipped with tools like resistance bands, swings, fitness balls, and cozy blankets. For youth experiencing overwhelming emotions, they offer something simple but powerful: a chance to reset and feel in control.

While some kids receive care at YBGR's Ranch campus in Billings, the majority – more than 3,600 annually – are supported in their home communities. Thanks to Charise's work, SMART Rooms are now part of that journey.

WOLF POINT

Dakota's Story

At just 12 years old, Dakota had already faced more than her share of loss. After her grandmother, the person she was closest to, passed, grief settled in. Depression took hold, showing up in behaviors that led to multiple out-of-state placements, far from home and everything familiar.

When Dakota entered YBGR's Community Based Services in Wolf Point, she carried deep hurt and disconnection – not just from others, but from her culture and herself.

With support from her care team, that began to shift. Her case manager, Wendy Fleming, walked alongside her, helping her take steps toward healing and reconnection. She linked her to a therapist at Indian Health Services, connected her to a therapeutic youth mentor, and introduced her to traditional sweat lodge ceremonies – offering space for strength and reflection.

Dakota's grief hasn't disappeared, but she's finding new ways to carry it. She's beginning to feel proud of who she is and where she comes from.

GREAT FALLS

North Skyline Group Home

Tory and Ryan, ages 15 and 17, recently completed their treatment program at one of the Ranch's rural Therapeutic Group Homes, a cause for celebration! They arrived carrying the weight of trauma, academic setbacks, unstable housing, and years of feeling discouraged. But with consistent support from staff and a safe place to reset, things began to turn around. They earned spots on the Honor Roll, built resumes, practiced interviews, and slowly began to believe in themselves.

Near the end of their program, Ryan faced a tough disappointment after missing an opportunity with Job Corps. Instead of giving up, he chose to keep moving forward.

Tory watched it all unfold – seeing that real change takes time and steady effort.

Today, both young men are preparing for a new beginning at a transitional living program that offers more than shelter. It provides stability, job training, and a path forward.

They haven't forgotten where they started, but now they can see what's possible. As they take the next step, they do so with confidence, determination, and a clearer vision for what comes next.