

Season for Sharing: The kids who wait for a home

Georgann Yara, Special for the Republic 8:53 p.m. MST November 21, 2016



(Photo: David Wallace/The Republic)

She raised three children and has two grandchildren, so Kathy Brady has the laundry routine down pat.

Every Wednesday morning, Brady begins her four-hour volunteer shift at the Whiteman's Safe Haven for Children — Child Crisis Arizona's Mesa shelter for young children — by doing laundry. And, with at least 42 pairs of socks, underwear and outfits needing to be cleaned daily onsite — it's a necessary task.

"What the staff here does is amazing. They do so much with the little time they have, there's no way they can do this too," she said, standing in a small walk-in closet surrounded by hangers with girls' blouses and jeans in sizes for ages 4-6. "It's a good place to start."

At least once a day, each child walks into one of the communal closets and chooses an outfit for the day, from underwear to shoes. After taking a load from the dryer and hanging clothes in the closet, Brady goes room to room. The next task is making unmade beds and tidying up those that aren't completely done while the children are either at school or, in the case of the younger ones, on the playground.

There are three to five beds in a room. Brady effortlessly tucks in the ends of sheets, places pillows in their intended spots and shakes out blankets. It's obvious she's a veteran.

"This one has a lot of blankets. ... It is getting colder now," Brady said, neatly stacking three blankets on the bed where she found them. "Some like a lot of pillows," she nods at a neighboring bed.

With neatly coiffed short hair and a slim build, Brady resembles a sweet grandmother doing light housekeeping at home as she alternates between breezing through the children's bedrooms, the laundry area and walk-in closets. She usually gives the floor a sweep, but on this day, her co-volunteer has taken care of that.

Brady has volunteered at the shelter for nearly six years. In that time, she's done nearly every task from story and lunchtime duty to laundry and playground activities. A former preschool teacher, Brady also worked as an office manager and a children's book illustrator — a job she continues today. She also spent many years as a stay-at-home mom.

When her children were young, Brady often passed by the shelter as she drove them to and from games and other events. She had never been inside but knew what service it provided. Brady would point to the building and tell her children, "When I retire, I'm going to volunteer there."

"I'd look at my kids, their friends and the kids of people we knew, and I knew that not all children were as fortunate. I wanted to help," she said.



SEASON FOR SHARING

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Two shelters become one

Child Crisis Arizona has been in its current model since 2015. But the two entities that form the non-profit organization have been caring much longer for children who, for various reasons, have been displaced from their homes.

Since 1981, two emergency shelter facilities have provided temporary accommodations for children who were victims or at risk of becoming victims of abuse, neglect and other forms of mistreatment. One was Child Nursery in Phoenix, which was established in 1976, and the other was Child Crisis Center, which opened its doors in 1981 in the Mesa location where Brady spends her Wednesdays.

Both organizations worked cooperatively but also competed for the same resources in the community they served. They merged in April 2015 to create Child Crisis Arizona, allowing them to work in concert and make the most efficient use of funding and other resources.

Children end up in one of the 78 beds between the two locations for reasons ranging from physical abuse and parental substance abuse to unsafe living conditions. Some children have siblings housed in the same facility.

Child Crisis Arizona is the Valley's only emergency facility for newborns to age eight, the average stay is four months, said Child Crisis Arizona CEO Torrie Taj.

"The hope is that we are able to return children to their homes," said Taj. Others enter the foster care system.

Taj bends over a 4-month-old baby who responds to every facial expression and adult squeal with a smile and giggle. He's in a Halloween onesie that reads, "Want to see something really scary? Check my diaper."

Taj said he's small for his age.

It's not unusual for children to come in underdeveloped and underweight. Being overweight because of a diet reliant on cheap fast-food burgers or kiddie meal combos is an equal problem. Giving children healthy and balanced meals yields results.

"It's amazing to see the physical and health strides that kids make while they are here," said Taj, as she stood in front of wall that has charts taped to it that track the babies' developments.

At mealtime, children sit around a circular table. Food is served family style, and each child passes the bowl of rolls or fruit to the person next to him. For some, sitting in a chair and eating at a table — instead of in a car or on the rug in front of the TV — is a new experience. It also can be a lesson in trust. It's not unusual for newcomers to take three or four rolls and put them in their pockets with the intention of hiding the extras in their room for later.

"We tell them that they don't have to do that. There will always be food. You will always have food," Taj said.

Not just about the dollars

About 60 percent of the shelter's funding comes from some kind of government contract. The remaining 40 percent is raised through philanthropic support and amounts to more than \$6 million a year, Taj said.

Funding generated by Season for Sharing benefits a variety of programs, including Early Head Start. **A look at the Child Crisis shelter** . [Fullscreen](#)

"If we were to only staff by the state's compliance, we wouldn't be able to provide the services we do. It's not just about the dollars," she said. "When that information is shared, that alone is huge for us because those individuals become part of the philanthropic efforts. Not just for us, but for non-profits throughout the Valley."

About Season for Sharing

Last year, 144 local agencies received \$2.73 million from Season for Sharing to help at-risk children and families and provide services for educational initiatives and to help the elderly. Since 1993, almost \$60 million has been distributed through the annual campaign. To donate, go to [sharing.azcentral.com](http://www.azcentral.com). (<http://www.azcentral.com/topic/20f2c790-6b86-478a-8813-cadc89a4f37e/season-for-sharing/>)

Signs are posted on doors whenever a virus or contagious condition circulates. On this day, a stomach bug is responsible for the warnings. A common one is pinkeye. In the baby room, a volunteer rolled up her sleeve and showed a pink blotch on the inside of her forearm: ringworm.

"Oh, we're all used to it," Brady said. "We're always washing our hands and the hand sanitizer is always out. It's part of the job."



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[A Phoenix shelter where Arizona children in state care wait for a home, help](#)

[\(http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-investigations/2016/08/28/arizona-children-state-care-dcs-phoenix-shelter-child-crisis/85271564/\)](http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-investigations/2016/08/28/arizona-children-state-care-dcs-phoenix-shelter-child-crisis/85271564/)

Maintaining professionalism is also part of the gig. Brady doesn't know the background of any of the children or why they're there. She doesn't want to. It's already hard enough to say good-bye after seeing a child for weeks.

As Brady simultaneously pushed two children on the swings, she talked about the tradition of good-bye parties, which includes an "I wish" component.

"All the kids tell the one who's leaving about all the good things they want to happen to him when he leaves. They say, 'I wish for you to be happy. ... I wish that you can see your friends. ... I wish that...,'" Brady said, as her voice trails off.

While she speaks, a 4-year-old boy with long brown hair sprinkled with highlights and a hint of wave, runs over and wraps his arms tightly around Brady's waist. He's been there for three weeks. He sees her pushing the kids on the swing. After he releases Brady, he walks over to another boy in a swing and starts to push him. The volunteers speculate that he's used to looking out for younger siblings.

Brady recalled the day when another 4-year-old boy arrived at the shelter. He told Brady that her face was crinkly. She agreed with him. His response: "My grandma's face is crinkly." After a pause, he said, "Can I call you grandma?" She told him that, of course, he could.

"I still get chills when I talk about it," said Brady, who beamed and stretched out both arms to show them covered in goose bumps. "Stories like that, you never forget."



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About Season for Sharing

We'll send 100 percent of your donations to local non-profits.

Who is helped?

Last year, 144 agencies received \$2.73 million to help at-risk children and families, improve educational skills, aid victims of domestic violence and serve older adults. Since 1993, almost \$60 million has been distributed through Season for Sharing.

Where does the money go?

It all stays in Arizona. One hundred percent of your donations and the matching funds go directly to non-profit agencies in the Valley and around the state. All overhead and fundraising costs are paid for by The Republic/azcentral.

How do my dollars help?

The Gannett Foundation and our community partners The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust and the Arizona Community Foundation, will multiply your generosity by matching your gives 50 cents on the dollar until donations reach \$450,000. If you donate \$50, for instance, it becomes \$75.

Who makes this possible?

The Republic/azcentral and the Gannett Foundation. Season for Sharing is a donor-advised fund of the Arizona Community Foundation. To donate, go to [sharing.azcentral.com \(/topic/20f2c790-6b86-478a-8813-cadc89a4f37e/season-for-sharing/\)](http://sharing.azcentral.com (/topic/20f2c790-6b86-478a-8813-cadc89a4f37e/season-for-sharing/)) or use the coupon on 4A of The Republic and mail your donations to P.O. Box 29250, Phoenix AZ 85038-9250.

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