



Case for Support
December 21, 2017

Introduction

Detours are no fun. We grit our teeth and sigh deeply when that “detour ahead” sign flashes past the car window.

As much as we dislike them, however, detours serve a purpose. Imagine what would happen if there was no detour available. We’d pitch headfirst into a gaping hole, or run smack dab into a bulldozer. At minimum, we would be stopped in our tracks, unable to make any progress at all.

As adults, we know that we will encounter tough spots in life. Sometimes they are out of our control. Sometimes they are due to a choice we’ve made or an action we’ve taken. Most adults know how to manage those tough spots. We have developed the coping skills and the support network to help us navigate, even when the road gets a little rocky. Occasionally, we make a bad choice, or struggle with a situation. Then we take a little detour. Fixing it or coping with it takes longer and requires more work on our part during that detour, but that’s how we keep moving forward.

So why do we think kids should be different? When a young person struggles in school, why do we so quickly reach for the “dead end” sign? When a child experiments with drugs or alcohol, why do we say, “The road ends here?” If a young person is suicidal, depressed or violent, why do we want to lock him or her up and throw away the key?

The truth is that some young people need a detour, too. They need to get off the path they are on and take a side trip to a safe place. There they can learn about themselves and find the help that will get them back on track to a meaningful and successful life. A detour, in this case, is not an inconvenience at all. It’s a lifesaver.

Many of us don’t know what to do with young people, even those we love, when a detour is necessary. That’s why The New Foundation exists. We provide a side road for kids to take when they are struggling to find their place in the world and the meaning in their lives. We help them work through their issues, understand themselves better, and develop healthy coping mechanisms for life’s bumps and jolts. Then we equip them to transition back into their home or school environment so they can continue life’s journey with joy and purpose.

The Need We Fill

Systems are useful. A well-designed system can help us accomplish a lot of work in a short amount of time. You’ve seen the factory videos, for example, where a product winds through a production line. All the perfect product moves through effortlessly. But what happens to the exceptions? In a factory, the nonstandard products get thrown out. There’s no chance to tweak or adjust...if it’s not perfect, it’s trash. End of story.

Our society has a system for raising and educating kids and launching them into independence. And that system works reasonably well for a lot of kids. But what happens when it doesn't? What happens to young people who live in unhealthy family environments, or whose self-image has collapsed to the point that life does not seem worth living? What happens to those kids who dip a toe into the cesspool of drugs or alcohol, and get sucked in before they know what's happening? What about the caring parents who are utterly defeated by their child's behavior or mental illness? They have exhausted their resources and grasped at every straw, seeking to help and heal. Where do they go when they don't know where to turn?

Schools and jails do not have the answers for these kids. Caring families don't always have the answers for these kids. Sometimes family dynamics are even part of the problem. We do not have a net to catch the kids for whom the system is not working. And we're not talking about a small number of kids, either. Arizona has one of the highest rates of incarceration in the entire country. The National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates that approximately 1 in 5 youth age 13-18 experiences a severe mental disorder at some point. Teen suicide in Arizona is up 81 percent since 2009. We are losing too many young lives and too much unrealized promise because our system has holes.

Kids are not products. We shouldn't throw them out just because of their experience challenges as they go through the maturing process. Suspending them from school is not the answer. Jail is not the answer. The answer involves a detour to a different set of circumstances. A safe space, unconditional love and a supportive structure can nurture these kids outside of the environment where they are destined to fail. The New Foundation provides a comprehensive and safe environment where kids age 11-17 can get life back on track. Kids who take the side journey to The New Foundation find residential and outpatient care, an on-campus school, and mental health counselors who can help them regroup, rethink, and re-engage in a healthy lifestyle.

What We Accomplish

When the human psyche is damaged, there's no quick repair. However, we have found that kids possess astonishing resilience. When we can get them out of their usual environment and wrap our arms around them, three important things can happen.

First, we identify the root cause of the behavior. As one very wise and experienced school administrator noted, "There are very few problem kids. But there are a lot of kids with problems." It's shocking to realize that approximately 42 percent of young people (under 18) have had five or more traumatic experiences in their short lives. Those could include things like death of a loved one, abandonment, abuse, or violence at school. If a young person is being bullied, beaten, neglected or isolated, it shouldn't be surprising when he or she responds with violence, apathy, withdrawal or anger. Escape through alcohol or drugs might also look like a good alternative. Quite frankly, those responses are not much different than what you might see from an adult! Behavior is a way for kids to express what they cannot put into words. By removing kids from their everyday environment at the time of crisis, we can often separate them from the trauma that is driving their behavior. We can help them feel normal, like they belong. That, for many kids, is a first. Our staff spends a lot of time exploring *why* the behaviors are happening. One staff member notes, "Many of the behaviors documented in a kid's transcripts don't show up here. The behavior stems from the circumstances. When those

change, so does the behavior.” It’s often the situation, not the child, that is causing the problem. We identify the causes so that we can eliminate them where possible, or teach coping mechanisms where needed.

Second, we help kids change from the inside out. This is a treatment facility, not a boot camp or correctional facility. Families and young people choose this place. That means we do not force kids to change. Instead, we allow them to *choose* change. Many of our kids have cycled repeatedly through broken promises, shattered expectations and crushing disappointments. Their self-preservation instinct is to test how much we care. Do we stick with them, or will we abandon them? Once they figure out that we’re not going anywhere, then they are willing to start opening up. That’s when lives are transformed. We help them understand what is happening around them, the impact of their choices, and the options for different ways to cope. They need these skills, because kids in crisis will never survive without self-motivation. They need a better way to process and deal with the trauma they have experienced or the behavioral health challenge they face. By developing new skills, kids change their own self-perceptions and how they view the world around them. One student, for example, went from refusing to do school work to asking, “Can you help me find out where I can get my GED?” They learn to express themselves instead of keeping their feelings tamped down inside. They learn about love and trust, and how to be genuine. That’s when they and their families can heal. And that creates lasting, inwardly-motivated change.

And third, we change the trajectory of a child’s life. It’s often said that a society’s third grade literacy rate is a benchmark for how many jail cells will be needed. How sad to think that we are evaluating an entire life’s potential by age 8-9! Here’s another surprising statistic: approximately 30 percent of dropout students are actually gifted and talented. They have tremendous potential that has been snuffed out because they didn’t get the help and encouragement they needed. When kids arrive at The New Foundation, they are often defensive, negative and hopeless. We help them learn to define what success looks like, and to set their own goals. When they leave here, they have skills they can transfer to a different environment. They have the choice to walk down a different path. The small changes they learn to make can literally change the course of their lives. Don’t believe small changes matter? Consider that if you are traveling from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., and are off course by one degree, you will end up on the north side of Baltimore (46.2 miles away). A mere degree makes that much difference. That’s why we help kids aspire to and celebrate day-to-day progress. Over time, each smart choice they make has a real and substantial impact on where they will end up and how life turns out.

Conclusion

Behavioral health is as important as physical health. Regrettably, our society is somehow embarrassed and reluctant to talk about it, as though behavioral health problems are a weakness, or worse, a punishable offense. We’re not embarrassed to talk about having cancer. We don’t jail people with broken bones. Why are broken spirits different?

None of us wants to fail. Kids are no different...every child wants to succeed. Unfortunately, all a child knows is what he or she sees. So many young people are destined to make poor choices because that’s all they see. Others have caring and supportive families, but struggle with issues that families cannot understand or address. Regardless of the reason, a child lost is a wasted life! So we show them something different. A young lady who came to The New

Foundation from the Department of Children's Services turned her life around. She graduated from high school, and we threw her a graduation party. Then she went on Northern Arizona University. She said, "This was the first place in 17 years that I felt safe. I could focus on who I wanted to be, not on staying alive." As a result, she is now a productive, working, contributing member of society. She's not a system failure...she's a detour success.

No matter our age, we all share human vulnerabilities. We all struggle with something, whether it's self-perception, substance abuse, family circumstances or our ability to cope in tough situations. Kids are no different than adults in this regard. Unfortunately, they don't have the knowledge or freedom to make informed choices about what to do. They don't know about the detour that can help them get back on track. The New Foundation provides a kid-focused environment where young people can heal from emotional wounds and build strength for the future.