

Ford Family Foundation: A Private, Non-Profit Foundation's Impact on Child Protection in Rural Communities

One foundation's motivation to improve the lives of children has led them to prioritize training over 30,000 adults in communities throughout Oregon and Siskiyou County, California.

The Ford Family Foundation aims to make successful citizens and vital rural communities, this includes ensuring that children in their rural communities are protected from child abuse. The Foundation wants to change the way we protect children by educating community members on how to recognize and prevent child sexual abuse. After extensive research, the Foundation identified Darkness to Light's *Stewards of Children*® in 2014, to be the centerpiece of the *Protect Our Children* program. The state-wide Foundation program serves 14 sites across the state of Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The foundation is dedicated to working with partners, grantees, families, and rural communities to support youth and their families to be successful and free from abuse and neglect. The Ford Family Foundation believes that providing the necessary resources for children and their families will lead to a successful life of positive outcomes in the communities they serve. The focus of *Protect Our Children* is training of adults in the community in child sexual abuse prevention, with rigorous evaluation through the University of Oregon's Center for Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (CPAN).

THE MOTIVATION

The media often shares news stories regarding a pastor, a teacher, or a trusted authority figure who has been charged with child sexual abuse. The headlines grab your attention and remind you that child sexual abuse is very much prevalent in every community. In 2012, more than 10,000 children in Oregon were confirmed victims of abuse. Nationally, experts estimate one in 10 children are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.¹ An even more astounding statistic, 90% of the victims are abused by someone they know and trust.^{2,3}

Child sexual abuse can have a long-lasting impact on a child's development and overall quality of life. Victims of child sexual abuse have an increased likelihood of developing chronic illnesses, psychological problems, and behavioral problems as an adult. Understanding these facts, the question became: how can a foundation prevent child sexual abuse that ultimately leads to positive outcomes for the community?

The Ford Family Foundation found an answer – education and awareness. Although there is no magical solution to preventing child sexual abuse, experts have always agreed that education is crucial. The foundation wanted to support their grantees in building stronger child protection policies and procedures. Therefore, they began conducting a year of interviews and researched different curriculums that would be suitable for their grantees which is how they chose Darkness to Light's nationally acclaimed training, *Stewards of Children*® and its tools due to its scalability and accessibility. They knew that adults in their network could take *Stewards of Children*® and maintain its fidelity while also serving

¹ Townsend, C., & Rheingold, A.A., (2013). Estimating a child sexual abuse prevalence rate for practitioners: studies. Charleston, S.C., Darkness to Light. Retrieved from www.D2L.org.

² Finkelhor, D. (2012). Characteristics of crimes against juveniles. Durham, NH: Crimes against Children Research Center.

³ Whealin, J. (2007-05-22). "Child Sexual Abuse". National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, US Department of Veterans Affairs.

the needs of their community. The training educates adults on how to recognize the signs and how to react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

PROTECT OUR CHILDREN PROGRAM

“In Oregon, many of our nonprofits, state agencies, and individuals work hard every day to prevent and fight child sexual abuse,” says Keavy Cook, senior program officer at the Foundation, “but the challenge is great. We see this program as a way to help.” The Foundation has partnered with 11 nonprofits across the state of Oregon and in Siskiyou County, California to offer the *Protect Our Children* initiative, which seeks to prevent child sexual abuse through community education.

The initiative began in 2015, with the ultimate goal of training more than 20,000 adults in rural Oregon and Northern California through Darkness to Light’s *Stewards of Children*®, all for free or at minimal a cost. “Each site is tasked with reaching 5% of its population, which is widely acknowledged as the tipping point,” says Mary Ratliff, who is coordinating the program for the Foundation. “When you reach 5%, you can create social change.”

An essential piece of the *Protect Our Children* initiative is the understanding that parents are not the only ones responsible for preventing child sexual abuse. Athletic coaches, teachers, clergy, school personnel, healthcare workers, and others are required by law to report child sexual abuse. The initiative provides participating agencies the resources they need to deliver the training in their communities, including training volunteers to facilitate the two-hour curriculum, and also brings them together twice a year for an additional training and a chance to network with others in the field.

Evaluation is also a large part of the program. Select sites work closely with the project coordinator and evaluation team from the University of Oregon’s Center for Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (CPAN). The evaluation is done through pre and post surveys, longitudinal studies, focus groups, random digit dialing, and existing data analysis to measure knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in addition to changes in reporting rates.

THE RESULT

Darkness to Light’s *Stewards of Children*® has had an impact in the work The Ford Family Foundation is doing in the organizations they work with in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. At an individual organizational level, *Stewards of Children*® has allowed several ‘inward facing’ organizations that the foundation funds, like child advocacy centers, to become ‘outward facing’ and elevate their presence and visibility in their community, even establishing them as experts in child sexual abuse prevention locally and regionally. *Stewards of Children*® has allowed The Ford Family Foundation to engage with larger systems and effect change at a greater level. They’ve been a part of changing and igniting community conversations around prevention, intervention, and social norms. Training is also moving forward conversations about trauma-informed care, as communities recognize and acknowledge the child sexual abuse prevalence rate and subsequent devastating outcomes.

Since the *Protect Our Children* initiative began in March 2015, more than 30,000 people in Oregon and California have taken the pledge to protect children in their communities. They have served 26 counties in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. Additionally, The Ford Family Foundation has also contributed to the development of *Stewards of Children*® 2.0 and funded, filmed, and co-developed the Advanced Facilitator Training, making a large impact on child sexual abuse training nationally and globally. *Protect*

Our Children continues to work hard evaluating their program and meeting the needs of their community through research and evaluation.