Community Resilience

MountainStar is incredibly grateful to you, our supporters. We are grateful for your commitment to Central Oregon children, standing with us and declaring that every child deserves the best start possible. We are grateful that you are willing to learn and grow with us as an organization with a shared goal of helping our community thrive.

In that spirit, let’s talk more about Community Resilience. We’ve discussed not only the immediate impact of childhood adversities but also the lifelong and often multi-generational outcomes from early trauma. We balance this with the important caveat that a traumatic start to a child’s life does not eliminate hope for their future. MountainStar’s services provide children and families with an on-ramp to a positive path forward, one that includes resources and supports that help families heal and thrive.

The families that MountainStar serves experience an average of 16 family stressors - like extreme poverty, mental illness, food insecurity, or a history of family violence. Imagine the additional daily stress from housing instability, below living wages, or challenges in accessing health care.

Strengthening families and keeping kids safe is the work MountainStar does every day, and as a community member, you too play an important role in keeping kids safe and increasing our community’s resilience. A resilient community focuses on the root causes of trauma and creates systems and supports which allow for healing. Learning about and supporting policies that break down barriers on the community-wide level is one of the first action steps to reducing stress on vulnerable families. If that feels daunting, consider getting to know your neighbors and offering support when they are struggling.

By supporting MountainStar and other nonprofits that meet critical needs, you are already making a difference and increasing our community’s resilience every day. Thank you for being a voice for families who are pushed to the margins. Together we will continue to build resilience with children, families, and our community.
Mental Health Services

MountainStar sits in gratitude for the WHH Foundation’s investment in our mental health program services. Over the past year, MountainStar has explored providing direct mental health services for the children and families in our programs, as we search for the most impactful and sustainable path. We’ve invited mental health interns into our classrooms, hosted meetings with community partners, and most importantly, we have listened to the families in our programs, as well as our teachers and clinicians. It has been both heart-breaking to see the needs and illuminating to see the possibilities for children and families.

MountainStar determined that having a designated clinician at each of our five sites is the long-term goal. Building relationships is at the core of everything we do, so consistency for children and families is a key element in planning for MountainStar’s mental health services. Children will get the consistent attention they need, and families will have a resource and a familiar face with whom they can learn from. Teachers will be supported in ways that feed and inform their practice while enhancing their current classroom experience. Clinicians will maintain a healthy caseload and avoid burnout.

Currently, we have a clinician in our Bend site who is busy, happy, and integrated as a part of our MountainStar community. We have another clinician lined up for our Redmond site, have talked with clinicians for our upcoming La Pine program, and are seeking partners in Madras and Prineville. Funding from the WHH Foundation has given us the time we needed to find this path and is setting us up for success as we look to the future.
Commitment to Children

Children in MountainStar’s classrooms are making strides in their cognitive development. This is significant because learning doesn’t just happen by chance. Children can only learn when they are calm, self-regulated, safe, and in trusting relationships. For a child to be calm, their environment has to be filled with the same, loving, present adults who themselves are calm. To be self-regulated, a child has to receive co-regulation from their trusted adults countless times until they can begin self-regulating by memory.

Children determine the safety of a place or person by testing boundaries. They push multiple times to make sure that the adult will keep them safe. When the adult answers the child’s behavior in consistent, loving, kind ways, the child’s sense of safety extends into trust. These ongoing “serve-and-return” relationships take time and energy, and can sometimes feel tedious, but the reward is an attachment within which a child is allowed to be curious and can truly learn.

Amber’s Story

You may remember that we recently shared the story of Amber who was removed from her home and placed in foster care. Amber grew up in a toxic home environment and experienced neglect from an early age. This led to severe delays in her development, particularly around communication and the ability to form trusting relationships. It was hard for MountainStar staff to see the family separated, but Amber was in danger. Because MountainStar never gives up on children, we knew that we still had a critical role to play. We remained committed to Amber, knowing that consistency was our greatest tool to keep her moving forward. Now at four years old, Amber is just starting to communicate and the relationships she has formed continue to be critical to her development.

Amber is starting to thrive in her classroom. The trust she has extended to the caring adults around her helps Amber feel safe and confident. In addition, the presence of a mental health clinician in the classroom has been significant. The clinician helps Amber to deepen her connections with peers and teachers through language – both ASL and English. Watching Amber respond to her new ability to communicate is magical. Her frustration and anger are being replaced with curiosity and joy. Amber is also building attachment with her foster parents who are simultaneously being supported by MountainStar. In this unique situation, the clinician and MountainStar staff are parent educators, attachment practitioners, strategy sharers, and cheerleaders for Amber, for her foster parents, and for her mom who is working towards reunification.

This is what it means to be surrounded by a village – this is the heart of child abuse prevention. This is the work that you are a part of when you stand with MountainStar and declare that every child in our community deserves the best start possible.
April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

at MountainStar, it’s what we do every day, all year long.

We get involved with families facing tough challenges at a time when it matters most - the first 1,000 days of their child’s life. Children attend therapeutic early childhood classes designed for babies and toddlers living in high-stress and chaotic homes and who typically do not get enough quality time with a responsive caretaker. Our staff and volunteers create a safe and predictable environment to respond to the unique needs of each child in our program.

725 Central Oregon children were victims of abuse and neglect in 2021.

42% of reported cases of child abuse in Oregon happen to children under the age of five.