

Family teaching couple at Boys Town devote careers to helping at-risk youth from marginalized communities.

Rich and Sara Blackburn sit across from each other at a dinner table with 14 chairs surrounding the table. This size of table is common at the Blackburn house where 9 teenage girls live with them during their time at Boys Town.

The Blackburns are one of the many family teaching couples that devote their day to day to teaching at-risk youth the social skills they will continue to use for the rest of their life.

The Blackburn's have spent their entire careers working with marginalized and at-risk youth. The couple met in Oklahoma where they were both working for a nonprofit rescue mission.

Rich worked as a youth pastor and Sara as an instructor for the therapeutic creative arts program for 15 years in Oklahoma before they moved to Nebraska. When they moved to Nebraska, Rich began as a Chief Operation Officer for a nonprofit.

While in Nebraska, Rich and Sara both missed working together and working hands-on with the youth.

"We agreed that if some of the tougher kids, or kids that we lost to street violence or prison, was if they could just live with us for a year we could make so much of a bigger difference," Sara says.

Rich saw a billboard advertising the position at Boys Town, and Sara saw a posting on Indeed for the position, and they both decided to work as a family teaching couple.

"There were a lot of different opportunities and we just felt like this was where, for us, our faith was leading us to and what we were wanting to do," says Rich.

The couple likes the opportunity they are given when they can spend a year with a child to give them the consistency that they need.

Sara says she likes the research behind the model they use at Boys Town to teach the girls these social skills they can use after the program.

Rich says he enjoys the community behind Boys Town.

“[The girls] will never be in a place their entire life where they have so many people that are focused on their success,” Rich says.

During their time at Boys Town, the Blackburns have had 21 girls come through their house.

Along with the girls in the program, the Blackburns have their own two children, a 14-year-old daughter and a 5-year-old son. The two children are heavily involved in the work that the Blackburns do at Boys Town.

Their daughter walks the fine line of friendship and family teaching and their son acts as a mascot for the girls and you can find him at any basketball game rooting on the girls.

“We have always worked in marginalized areas with kids in our home. We don’t know how to do our work without having the kids involved,” Rich says.

The relationship between the Blackburn children and the girls in the home is positive and very involved. Their daughter just celebrated her birthday and the girls spent the birthday with the daughter and her friends from school.

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“We did a painting party here at the house and our girls participated in her party along with the friends that she had from school,” Sara says. “That allows some of her friends to see what is really going on here because Boys Town gets a negative stigma out in the community.”

Sara says that many teenagers out in the community believe being sent to Boys Town is a bad thing and having their daughter’s friends over allowed them to see it is just normal teenagers in the house.

After a child finishes their program at Boys Town, the company has a follow-up program for a continuum of care that reaches out for five years. After those five years, the alumni association reaches out to them for the rest of their life.

“There are a lot of folks that have seen a lot of change and attribute their success to Boys Town,” Rich says.