

Faith

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1C

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Getting back on track

Circle of Hope uses Scriptures, hard work to aid troubled girls.



Maggie Drew was 15 and troubled when she arrived at Circle of Hope. Now 18, she chooses to stay because she fears a return to her old ways.



Brittini Erman (left) and Maria Brubeck take care of livestock and pets such as Faye at Circle of Hope Girls Ranch and Boarding School.

HUMANSVILLE —

Maggie Drew had a plan. She would run away to a safe place and claim abuse so her parents couldn't touch her.

It didn't work out.

When her father and stepmother picked up Maggie, then 15, where she'd spent the night with a friend, they said they were going on a family road trip. They ended up at Circle of Hope Girls Ranch and Boarding School near Humansville.

"At first I didn't realize ... it hadn't hit me that I was staying," said Maggie.

Parents voluntarily place girls at Circle of Hope, a private Baptist organization that takes in troubled girls. Owners Boyd and Stephanie Householder and their staff work to get girls back on track using Scriptures. Law enforcement is not involved.

Maggie, now 18, said her parents knew she was out of control, but had no idea how deeply involved in drugs, cutting and Satan worship, and how suicidal, she was.

After her parents left, the Householders told her, "OK, you're here for two years or if your parents say, you can stay longer."

Maggie sat there in shock.

"Excuse me?" she said. "I was thinking, 'Great. First my brother dies and my family is split up and now my parents are sending me away to get rid of me.'"

Maggie cried almost constantly for a few days. Feeling lost and alone, she didn't want to be there and began to think of ways to get out.

After a few days, Boyd Householder called her to his office. He said, "You know, you're here. Nothing's going to change that. So you might as well get used to it."

Maggie was defiant. "You can't make me believe your Bible," she said. "You can't make me believe your God; and you can't make me change my life. Nothing you can do is going to change me."

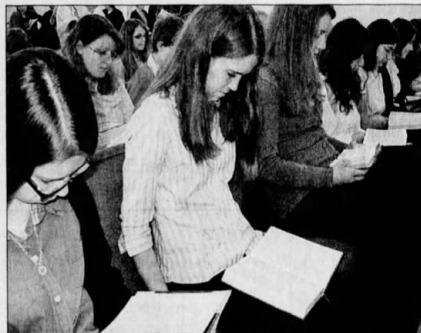
She said he told her calmly, "I know that ... but God can."

Stephanie Householder remembers that a few weeks later, during singing practice, the girls were singing "It is Well with my Soul." That's when Maggie realized the need for God in her life, she said.

Maggie still has her struggles, she said. "At 18, she can leave at any time, but she also is certain that if she goes back, she'll end up a mess," Stephanie said. "She works with us ... does a lot of the cooking and will graduate high school later this month."



Stories and photos by
Donna Baxter
FOR THE NEWS-LEADER



Circle of Hope girls read Bibles while waiting for services to begin during a visit to Berean Baptist Church in Springfield.

Circle of Hope receives referrals from churches

Circle of Hope owners Boyd and Stephanie Householder say they have never advertised or gone to a referral service but get a lot of referrals from churches.

"We figure that if the Lord wants us to have a girl he'll send her," Stephanie Householder said.

They can't always explain it. It has to be God, she said.

Katelin McCurdy, 16, is thankful she came there.

"I realize God has placed me here and I want to stay ... hopefully he will place me as a staff member here," said Katelin. "I have really learned to love the girls and just to love my family more, to understand what love really means outside of like the worldly meaning."

Carissa Mosier, 16, helps with outside chores and yard work and keeps track of girls working outside.

"It's a lot of responsibility but I thank God for it. It's helped me with my character and made me a stronger person, stuff that I need to be learning," she said.



Boyd and Stephanie Householder own Circle of Hope in Humansville.

Maggie Drew, 18, said the Householders are always there for the girls.

"They have been there for me since Day 1 even when I didn't want to hear it," said Maggie. "When they'd tell me the truth, I didn't want to listen. They were always looking out for my best and that's made a huge change in my life."

Maggie deeply regrets the things she has done. "It's always going to be a scar on my life but I wouldn't take it back now that I think about it, because I wouldn't have come here, wouldn't have gotten saved."

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Hope/School started with 3 girls

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The Householders can relate to the girls from personal experience.

Boyd was a rebellious teenager. Ironically, he said he joined the Marine Corps because he was "tired of taking orders and didn't want to get a hair cut."

Stephanie grew up in a rough family and lost her dad, which made her very bitter, she said. After college, she joined the Navy.

The Householders met at Bethesda Naval Hospital where Boyd was stationed and Stephanie was a patient. They married a few months later.

While attending a church in Florida, they learned of a need for workers at boys and girls homes. After a stint as house parents there they moved to Stockton, where Boyd worked at Agape Boarding School for boys and Stephanie worked at Refuge, a home for girls. They opened Circle of Hope with three girls in 2006.

Girls at the home have ranged in age from 6 through almost 18.

"Many times the girls tell us they don't know why they're here because they didn't think there was anything wrong with what they were doing," said Stephanie.

Many are just angry, she said. It doesn't matter who or what authority is in their life — parents, the Householders, grandparents.

"Until they come to realize that they are angry and their need to accept that whatever happened in their past happened ... and they need to learn from it ... they're just going to stay angry. It can shape them but doesn't have to make them," Stephanie said.



(From left) Brooke Summers, Amanda Haight, Brittini Hart, Blaze Jones (back) and Kaitlin Longo study.

DONNA BAXTER / FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

BENEFIT RIDE

The Big 50 Bike Ride to benefit the Circle of Hope Girls Ranch and Boarding School will be May 21. The event is hosted by Berean Baptist Church, with about 35 churches participating.

Anyone who would like to donate to the girls home can send a check or money order to Berean Baptist, 507 E. Norton Road, Springfield, MO 65803. Note on the check it is for Circle of Hope.

For information, call Assistant Pastor Al Price at Berean Baptist, 833-1529.

"Playing the game" doesn't work.

"Some of them can put on a good fake. I'll be honest with you, they are good at it," she said. "They can put the smile on if you're watching, but it never lasts. If they don't know we're watching, they put on a different face and you can see that they're hard."

Privileges increase with responsibility indicated by a girl's shirt color, starting with orange and progressing through yellow, pink, green, purple and red.

They also learn Bible verses and other things to move up, she said.

As they move up, "we can watch how they handle more responsibility and

privileges to see if they are really changing and will be able to do what's right at home," Stephanie said.

There are black shirts for girls who refuse to cooperate, continually cheat, throw fits, get in people's faces or start fights. They have no privileges.

Many girls have never worked before coming to the ranch. They learn cooking, washing dishes, house cleaning, laundry, yard work and taking care of the farm animals and pets.

Circle of Hope has two campuses — a dorm on the first level of the Householders' home and a two-story dorm a few miles away, originally built for an assisted living facility that never opened. The larger dorm has a large kitchen and dining area as well as a school room. Outside is a vegetable garden and a large yard.

New girls, and those who still don't want to do what's right — are at the Householders' home dorm. Some of the older girls also stay there to provide positive peer pressure.

"We can deal with them one-on-one and get to know them better. When they really start doing what they're supposed to, they can move over into the other dorm. It's not as intense," she said.