

Dream Team:

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several outfielders also toss a few extra softballs back and forth while they wait their turn to bat.

No matter what happens, players, coaches and parents in the stand erupt into cheers.

Smalley, whose daughter plays on the Dream Team, said she appreciates the opportunity to create something that works for people of varying ages and abilities.

"It's nice to do something that's activity based, that doesn't rely on verbal skills," she said.

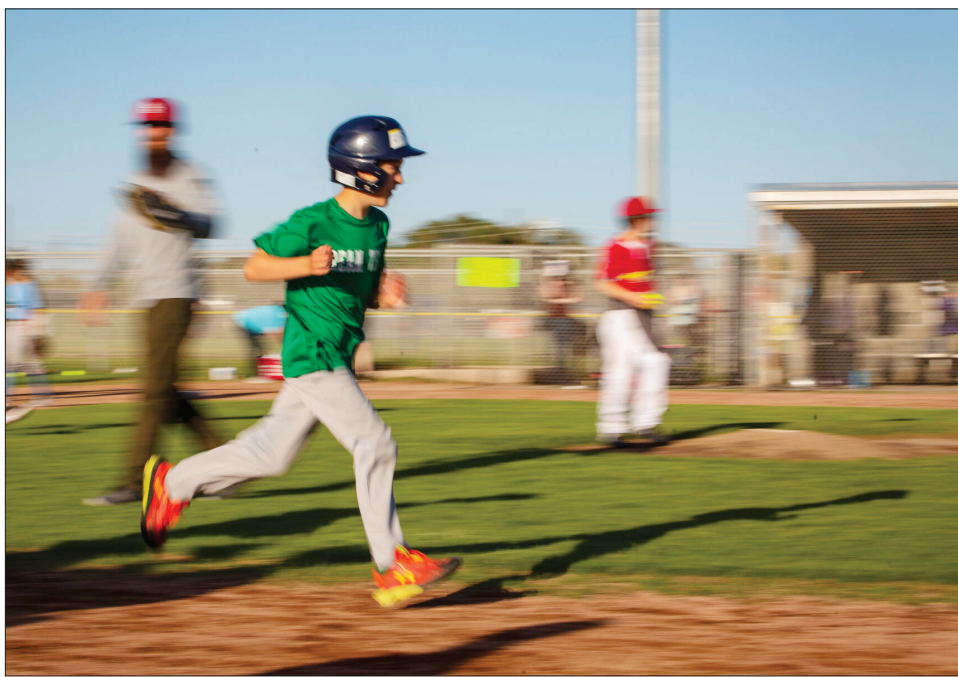
Smalley also said she often hears from parents of the "neurotypical" Little League athletes that it was their child's favorite game of the season.

Bleyenbergs said Little League has always been great about getting them whatever equipment they need. When she first got involved in the program, started about a decade ago by John Guillen, she assumed it was a standard part of Little League. But she has since learned that most kids don't get that opportunity.

Lexi Sinor and Avery Devin, both 11, were two of the Marlins helping Dream Team athletes field balls and run bases on May 4. Avery said she liked helping out with the game and was glad she did it, while Lexi said it was her first time playing in the game, but she had a lot of fun helping other people get to play softball like she does.

"I like helping kids that don't always have the same advantages," she said.

After the two-inning game is over and each Dream Team player has gotten to bat twice, players do some cheers before lining up for a squirt of hand



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

The Dream Team's Cole Cemore runs between second and third during a game at Hermiston's Field of Dreams on Tuesday, May 4, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/Hermiston Herald

Above, the Dream Team's Rian Middleton hits the ball during a game on Tuesday, May 4, 2021. Below, Adolfo Zuniga throws a softball back toward the infield.

sanitizer and a snack.

Rian Middleton grabbed a treat bag and juice box before giving other players his signature high fives. He said his favorite part is getting to hit the ball. It's also the hardest part, he said.

The final game of the season is May 25, and Smalley said it will end with a pizza party.



Foster:

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an emergency placement for a teen who had been living with some friends of hers who were moving out of state.

It hasn't always been easy — there have been a few brushes with law enforcement — but Wilson said she and her husband love their kids and are glad to have them.

"Our daughter did the same kind of stuff to us, so sometimes I have to remember, 'You're talking back to us because you're a teenager, not because you're in foster care,'" she said.

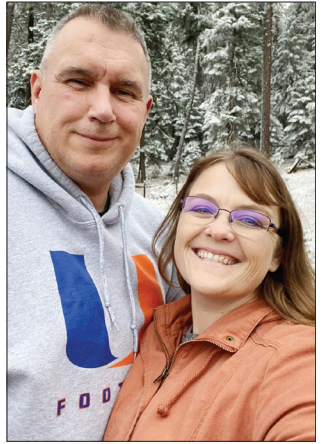
She, Osuna and Davis all said they really enjoy the friendships they've made with other parents who are also doing foster care. There is a huge need for resource parents in the area, Wilson said, so she said if anyone is interested in giving it a try, it's worth pursuing, even though it is an arduous process to get certified.

How to become a resource parent

May is National Foster Care Month, and Marvin Hamilton, who does recruitment for resource parents for DHS in Umatilla and Morrow counties, said he is grateful for all of the people who are willing to take a child or teenager into their home when living with their biological parents isn't an option for the time being.

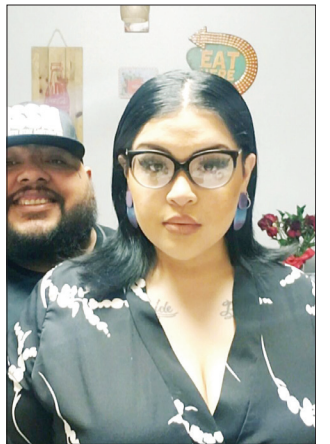
"They work hard to partner with families to offset the tremendous grief and loss children and young adults experiencing foster care may have," he said. "They are partners in achieving the best possible outcomes for families while providing for the safety, health and well-being of the children and young people they're committed to caring for in their home."

He said there is a great



Tonya Wilson/Contributed Photo

Tonya Wilson and her husband, Gene, have been resource parents for about a year.



Bianca Osuna/Contributed Photo

Bianca Osuna has been providing foster care for three years.

need for more resource families in the area, and they are especially short on Spanish-speaking homes. He said currently Umatilla and Morrow counties have a total of 183 children in care and 131 resource families.

Resource parents can be single, married or living together, with biological children or without. They must be at least 21 years old, be able to adequately support their family financially, have adequate room for children in their home or apartment, be able to physically care for a child's needs and pass a background check.

For more information, contact Hamilton at 541-564-4484 or Marvin.HAMILTON@dhsosha.state.or.us.

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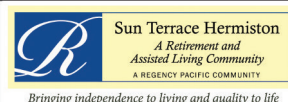
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