

# Food pantry to host ribbon-cutting ceremony

**Public invited to celebrate successful fundraising campaign, new pantry site**

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

The South County Community Food Bank has invited the public to celebrate its successful community driven campaign during an ice-cream social and ribbon-cutting ceremony July 25, 1 to 3 p.m. at the food pantry's new facility on North Roosevelt Drive.

The site opened in January after volunteers moved equipment and food from the pantry's temporary location, at the former Coastal Research & Maintenance building, to the new location, north of the Seaside School District's bus barn.

The new building is not "new" in a technical sense — it was constructed from two portable classrooms formerly used by the Cannon Beach Elementary School. But the

pantry recently acquired the structures, a donation from the school district. They were recycled and renovated to become the pantry's home for the foreseeable future.

"Everything is intentional, sustainable and is there to plant the seeds for passion and creativity and engagement," said Mary Blake, a member of the pantry's board of directors.

## A community without hunger

A few years ago, the board of directors knew they would need to build a permanent home for the food pantry. At first, they considered going after an available federal block grant of \$1.5 million.

The application process was cumbersome, Blake said, and although the organization had applied for and obtained grants in the past, the board had to decide if a \$1.5-million building would fit the community. They decided it would be "maybe a little over the top," Blake said, and



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

**Managing Director Karla Gann spent Tuesday morning stocking shelves at the South County Community Food Bank, a food pantry located at 2041 N. Roosevelt Dr. in Seaside. The food pantry is holding a ribbon-cutting and ice cream social from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25.**

opted instead to "roll up our sleeves and do a grassroots effort. And that's what we did."

In June 2014, with about \$65,000 in hand, the board

launched its operational and capital fundraising campaign, themed "Imagine a Community Without Hunger."

Community organizations, including the American Le-

gion Post 99 and the Seaside Rotary Club, held fundraisers benefiting the food pantry. Businesses and individuals donated about \$100,000 in services. The organization re-

ceived several donations and grants.

The food pantry exceeded its goal, raising about \$210,000, in addition to the initial \$65,000 and in-kind donations. The board was on budget for the roughly \$350,000 project, which included buying the land, retrofitting the portable buildings and buying some new equipment, Blake said.

From the local schools and service groups, to individuals and businesses, "there really hasn't been a group or anybody that hasn't been touched by our food pantry," Blake said.

The pantry closed its temporary site, which the organization rented for several months from Bank of the Pacific, at the end of December.

The new location, at 2041 N. Roosevelt Drive, Blake said, is "right up front, right on Highway 101, because the food pantry is part of the fabric of our community. A lot of our people rely, as part of their day-to-day living, on our food pantry."

# Local woman makes national news for her work with foster youth

Bodner from Page 1A

Bodner was 26 at the time, and she coached youth sports as a volunteer. She enjoyed being around young people, so when the boys came to the Bodners' house looking for their mother or her boyfriend and had nowhere to go, Bodner was happy to give them a snack and let them hang out.

Over time, it became increasingly clear there was nowhere safe to drop them off, Bodner said. Snacks turned into dinners; dinner turned into overnight stays. At last, Bodner knew she had to get child protective services involved in the situation.

Through a process that took three months, it was revealed the Bodners were whom Terry and Gary identified as the most stable adults in their lives. The couple was asked if they would provide temporary foster care for the children.

"The boys entered the foster care system at the same time we did," Bodner said.

A discrepancy she noticed, however, was that she received a 40-hour training to learn the system and other resources for support and education. The boys, however, were given no information.

"To not give them any tools to navigate the system seemed very odd to me," Bodner said.

When she sought a peer support group for Terry, she was unknowingly directed by a therapist to a group for juvenile offenders, an association that disheartened and appalled both foster mom and son.

"Needless to say, we didn't go again," she said.

Faced with a lack of resources for foster youth, Bodner took matters into her own hands. In 1999, she created a resource using a tool still fairly untested as a social medium at the time: the Internet. She made a website featuring message boards where foster youth could share their stories and give one another support and informal education. She called it FosterClub.

The following year, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative asked if FosterClub would like to take its operation to the next level by receiving a \$180,000 grant. That was the year the network got its nonprofit designation and became incorporated.

In 2002, FosterClub was contracted by the state of Or-

egon to host the Oregon Teen Conference. Bodner, with the help of her family and friends, led interactive workshops for participants, and the event went well, she said.

In 2003, after Bodner moved back to Seaside bringing FosterClub with her, the organization was asked to lead a similar conference in Montana. Bodner did not have family and friends to help, so she turned instead to three youth leaders with experience in the foster care system. They helped her run the event, and during a question-and-answer panel, Bodner realized something: "These young people are way better at leading this conference than me or my friends could ever be." They had insider knowledge, personal experiences and could make a unique connection to participants.

FosterClub's All-Star Internship Program began the next year as a way to provide training and facilitate even more opportunities for foster youth alumni to educate their peers, bring awareness to the demographic and spearhead change in the foster care system through policy and practice reform.

## The All-Star era

In 2004, Bodner and six foster kids formed the first "All-Star" group to help Bodner host teen conferences in Colorado and Oregon.

The group set out for Colorado in a \$3,000 RV, spray-painted yellow and purple and fondly dubbed "The Groove Mobile." Unfortunately the vehicle's wheels had been put on backward, which caused the first of multiple breakdowns and pit stops along the journey. Nevertheless, Bodner said, they rolled into Denver a few hours before the conference at 8 a.m.

"We went in, and those All-Stars rocked that conference," she said.

That first challenging summer was when Bodner adopted the concept of "game face," which soon became a FosterClub credo. The idea, she said, is to show determination, perseverance and confidence in the face of obstacles — or keeping your game face on.

The Groove Mobile was retired after the first year, but it was clear to Bodner they were onto something. Armed with a developed curriculum,

**'We want young people who are committed to giving back and improving the system and leveraging their stories to do that.'**

Celeste Bodner

the following year's program went more smoothly. Since then, the All-Star program has continually developed and evolved, mostly from suggestions given by participants themselves.

Now the program features two seven-week summer sessions in Seaside, with a crossover week in the middle where the team from the first session gets to meet and interact with the second team. The teams — groups of 18- to 24-year-olds who are selected to represent a diversity in culture, race, educational experience, skills, personal qualities and in foster care background

— are given an intense training the first two weeks of each session. Then the team members are dispatched on assignments individually or in small groups. Those assignments usually involve speaking at events, leading conferences, doing policy work or other activities.

The young adults reside at the organization's home on First Avenue during their sessions. Their experience is sponsored by individual states or other funding FosterClub receives through grants and donations. The criteria to be an All-Star are minimal; from 300 applicants, more than half

would qualify, Bodner said.

"We want young people who are committed to giving back and improving the system and leveraging their stories to do that," she said.

FosterClub considers the All-Star program to be a year-long commitment with seven weeks of in-resident training. After the summer sessions are completed, the young adults return home, to school and work, but they continue to be advocates for foster youth and consultants for FosterClub.

## Playing the game

"FosterClub is an organization, but it's also a movement," Bodner said.

The organization has four mission areas: providing training and events; cultivating young leaders; spearheading policy and system change; and increasing membership and outreach. In the background, Bodner and her

11 staff members are working diligently and modestly to advance those missions.

Bodner used a sports analogy to describe her role in the network. She identifies herself as the coach and the foster youth, past and present, as the players. She knows they're best suited for playing the game; FosterClub is just designed to help them hone their skills and give them access to demonstrate those skills in different arenas or fields.

When the recent magazine article featuring Bodner was published, many foster care alumni in the FosterClub network shared, liked and commented on links to the story on social media websites. Such actions increase the organization's visibility, Gibson said, but it was clear from the comments the players also were "proud to see their head coach get the recognition she deserves."

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