



**Statement from Friends of Youth President and CEO, Terry Pottmeyer.**

For the past ten years Friends of Youth has provided services for unaccompanied minors for the Federal Government under a contract with the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement. Over the last few days we have been receiving calls and email from media and concerned individuals who want to know more about our work with unaccompanied youth and we wanted to let you know more about our program.

Most of the unaccompanied minors we serve have crossed the border on their own and were unaccompanied when they arrived and were detained. They are in the custody of Homeland Security, and are fleeing violence and war. They are seeking safety and shelter.

The youth we serve under our ORR contract are under 18 and either placed in our therapeutic program or our foster care program. We are not a shelter program; youth placed in our group care programs are in need of therapeutic services to address mental health and behavioral issues, including the impacts of trauma, trafficking, and violence in their lives-- things that that they are fleeing in their home countries. Once therapeutic goals are met (usually in about 6 months) they are able to 'step' down, usually to foster care. They all have pro bono legal representation, through KIND, Kids in Need of Defense (<https://supportkind.org/>).

Our program is fully bilingual, as most of the youth we serve speak Spanish as a first language. We provide a safe and supportive environment for each child in our care. An Individual Service Plan guides the case management process, addressing legal services, medical care, medication management, mental health care, individual/group counseling, family reunification and release services, education and vocational training, recreation and leisure, behavior management, transportation and specialized treatment as indicated. All services are sensitive to the age, gender identity, culture, religion, dietary needs, language, and individual needs of each youth.

We have our own school, responsive to the educational level of the children in our care, which can vary quite a bit individual by individual. This morning I met a youth who came to us just three months ago with no writing or reading skills—he is thriving in school and so grateful for our support. Children in our foster homes attend school in the community.

We are passionate about serving children and youth, and work very hard each and every day to ensure that they are cared for with understanding, professionalism, and heart.

Our commitments at Friends of Youth for our unaccompanied children:

- We stand firmly against the policy of separating children and families.

- We work each and every day to reunify children with families/sponsors—work that is specifically required in our grant from ORR. We are committed to doing all that we can to reunify children wither with their family or with sponsors in the US.
- We remain strongly and passionately committed to the unaccompanied children we serve.

We have had several people ask how they can help support our youth— donations of new clothing, shoes, socks, underwear, art supplies are always welcome. Visit our Support Us section of our website <http://friendsofyouth.org/donateNow.aspx> or take a look at our Amazon Wish List: <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/2MXY85941K2RH?>

Thank you,

Terry Pottmeyer

President & CEO

Friends of Youth