



Newletter

Spring 2017

You Helped Desiree Find a Great Career!

Sitting across from Desiree you can't help but mirror her infectious smile. Like those friends who always give you a positive outlook, she exudes optimism. It's an optimism that you encouraged, by supporting Desiree at different stages in her transition from foster care to a great career!

Desiree first relied upon Aunt Leah's as a youth preparing to "age out" of government care. Shortly after turning 19, she landed a job

"The first people I thought of was Aunt Leah's"

as a line cook and moved out with a friend for a couple of years. But after a severe accidental injury that forced her out of work, Desiree was in a difficult bind and needed support. "The first people I thought of was Aunt Leah's," she said, "everybody there was helping me, everything was really supportive, they showed me the right resources and encouraged me that things are going to change."

It was during this time that Vancouver Film Studios (The McLean Group) had approached Aunt Leah's with a job opportunity they wanted to provide to a youth transitioning from foster care. Aunt Leah's staff informed participants, and Desiree quickly got to work preparing her resume and practicing for her interview.

Shortly later, Desiree received a phone call informing her she was selected for the Administrative Assistant job. It's a role that Desiree approached with great poise, and after only a year of employment, they promoted her to Office Coordinator.

Like you, Vancouver Film Studios sees the potential in Desiree and is helping her pay for schooling at Vancouver Community College to complete her Administrative Assistant and Supervision Certificate. "They are supporting



Desiree (right) Giving Back to Aunt Leah's Place

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me to learn more, which is the overall big picture, they want me to grow," said Desiree.

Reflecting on the impact of your support during her journey, Desiree said "It's life changing for me. I was a cook making minimum wage; I was in a rut. It's hard to get out,

especially when you don't have the resources, you don't know where to go, you don't have the money. **It's all about who you know to help you succeed with your goals.**"

Moving forward, Desiree has a simple goal for the future, "I see myself as constantly growing, learning, and being a better person." It's a goal that all of us can get behind, and one that your support makes possible.

Today, Desiree is living independently and accomplishing her goals. *Join our Brighter Future Monthly Donor Community, and for as little as \$20 a month, you can provide continued support that helps foster youth in your community reach their goals.*

A Conversation with Gale Stewart, Aunt Leah's Founder

Q: First I want to ask, are you enjoying retirement?

I don't think I've really experienced it yet. I'm looking forward to travelling.

Q: During your three-decade career, how did you stay inspired?

When you see the youth coming through the organization and you hear their stories, I would think to myself, if that young person can get up and have the courage to keep going, from my privileged place, I should be able to do the same.

Q: From your experience, what do you think the biggest challenge is for youth aging out of care?

The challenge for youth who age out of care is that they

don't have the same privileges as other youth the same age. But I think the greatest challenge is trust. We know that youth who come to Aunt Leah's have moved through nine different homes. What's left of Trust when you move through nine homes?

Q: If I want to help improve the lives of youth in care right now, what can I do?

You can continue to tell their story, talk to the media, and speak to your MP's & MLA's. This is the first time we have ever had this issue really focused on, and I think the average citizen now understands the difficulty of this situation, not only when they [youth] are in the foster care system, but also when

they leave that system.

Q: Obviously you know Sarah Stewart very well, what will make her a great executive director?

Her management skills are excellent, and she has a passion for working with youth. Sarah knows every aspect of this organization, because she started when she was 18. She has done everything from driving a van full of kids to administrative work.



Gale Speaking at the 1st Annual Birthday Party Fundraising Gala



Celebrating A Decade of Continuing Support

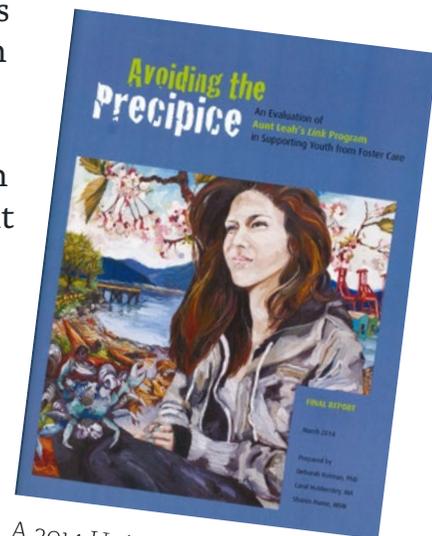
This year, thanks to you, our donors, corporate partners and community supporters, Aunt Leah's is celebrating The Link 10th Anniversary. The Link grew out of an honest desire to never give up on youth in foster care, to remain open while doors closed, and to do the right thing and provide support during a difficult time of transition.

"The Link started on the sides of our desks," said Pam Costello, Aunt Leah's former Support Link Coordinator, "I remember we had a young man move out of Support Link and he was not ready to live on his own. We couldn't leave it like that, so we moved him into an extra suite we were renting out." In a moment of distress, **you gave Aunt Leah's the ability to respond with compassion** over policy and helped this young man avoid homelessness.

With your encouragement, The Link became British Columbia's first program dedicated to supporting youth after they've 'aged out' of government care. During its formative years, the program remained small, serving anywhere between 30-50 people, but after Aunt Leah's added a remote 'hot desk' at Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), word quickly spread about this innovative program. "Soon social workers were calling in, alternative

schools were asking for help, and now we even have youth from Vancouver Island coming over, these kids need help," recalled Pam.

Today the program serves over 200 youth, up from 58 in 2012. "The Link could take over this whole building," said Pam only half jokingly. Despite this incredible need, Pam shared that the staff at Aunt Leah's have never turned a youth away. It's a testament to the underlying character at Aunt Leah's and to your commitment to supporting young people in need.



A 2014 University of Victoria study found that **Participants of the Link experienced 300% less homelessness** after 'aging out' of care.

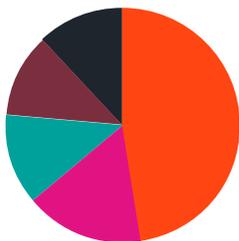
Over the past decade, the link has transformed into the capstone of Aunt Leah's family model, acting as an umbrella program that directs youth to the appropriate supports they need to reach their goals. "The staff are so busy, they are thinking on their feet at all times; one youth is looking for housing, the next youth is applying for

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schooling, another is trying to get their ID, and you can only imagine tax season,” says Pam. “Eventually they will learn how to do this stuff, but it’s an intimidating experience at first. It’s those everyday things, those typical things that a parent would help them with, they don’t have that.”

After a decade of operation, The Link continues to give youth hope and a support net that doesn’t exist elsewhere. “They [Youth] may not come back right away, but they know they can always come back to us,” says Pam. “That’s one of the great things this organization does for our youth, if you mess up, your welcome back. The kids know that, and they trust us. Probably, we are the only people they have worked with that won’t abruptly stop supporting them. It is a really pivotal part of Aunt Leah’s.”

By making a \$150 donation to Aunt Leah’s Place, you can ensure that more local foster kids have access to The Link when they ‘age out’ of care.



What Supports Do Youth Ask For?

(Top 5 Requested Meeting Topics)



auntleahs.org

Donor Spotlight: John Hardie Mitchell Family Foundation



Jack Zaleski with his Wife Donna Lee Zaleski

Since 1995, the John Hardie Mitchell Family Foundation has worked hand in hand with Aunt Leah’s to help bring change to local foster youth and mothers in need. “Aunt Leah’s is unique, I don’t know of any other society that does the extent of work that they do,” said Jack Zaleski, Managing Director of the Foundation. “The project that we like the most is ILLFY (i.e. Essential Skills Workshops).”

“I think it’s important to take a very active role in supporting young people in our society who are having difficulty establishing themselves,” said Jack explaining the reasons for supporting youth in care. “You can’t ignore these children, they are not there because of things they have done, they are there because of things that have been

done to them, and we need organizations, like Aunt Leah’s, to help these children and get them started.”

When asked what advice he would give to prospective donors or volunteers, Jack stated that “People who are considering supporting an organization need to look and think, is the organization well managed? Does it have a mission that will support people in the long term? And is what they’re doing sustainable? Aunt Leah’s has those qualities, and that’s why we support them.”

Speaking of the Foundation’s relationship with Aunt Leah’s Place, Jack confidently stated that “we feel very strongly that the organization is doing exceptional work and we plan to continue supporting them.”