

# A COMING-OF-AGE STORY

*DLCF helps kids in need in communities near Discovery properties.*







**CRYS O'GRADY LIVED** in four homes during three years in foster care and spent the year afterward sleeping in her car or “couch surfing.” All the while, she somehow maintained good enough grades to get admitted to prestigious Stanford University. Only after she spent a summer as a FosterClub All-Star—one of the nonprofits supported by the Discovery Land Company Foundation (DLCF)—did Cris understand how powerfully her personal story could affect public policy and motivate other foster youth to defy the odds, as she has. Unlike her, a high percentage of youth who stay in foster care long enough to “age out,” generally at 18, end up without high school diplomas, homeless, pregnant, or in jail.

Discovery Land Company Foundation projects range from support for former foster care teens to music therapy and more. Students get the beat going during a recital (left) at Every Child Counts, a project supported by DLCF in the Bahamas, while a classmate (above) enjoys the festive atmosphere. Top: FosterClub All-Stars pause for a photo op during meetings in Seattle in 2013.





Crys spent the summer before her senior year at Stanford in the eight-week residential advocacy and leadership-training program in Seaside, Oregon, offered by FosterClub, a national network for foster care alumni. The All-Star experience changed her life, Crys says. “I’d never really talked about my experience before.” But that summer she led workshops, gave talks at conferences, and wrote advocacy materials. The exhilaration she felt in helping shape the views of others led her to enroll in the University of Washington Law School and to focus on children’s rights.

Since its founding in 2007, DLCF has concentrated on nonprofits that help children, often in communities near Discovery properties. And as executive director Christy Nichols has become more aware of the needs of youth leaving foster care, the organization has increased assistance to young people who have aged out of care. Meeting and working with the FosterClub All-Stars each year has “magnified my understanding of how brutal it is for a teenager to navigate the transition to adulthood on his or her own,” she says.

Each year, about 25,000 youths lose the support of the state or county jurisdiction that took custody of them. Although recent changes in the law provide more help, many still leave care without copies of birth certificates or school transcripts, let alone the life skills and connections to caring adults that they need to make it on their own.

FosterClub’s All-Stars program was a natural fit for DLCF. “It’s a grassroots approach to empowering young people to not only change the system but to take control of their own lives,” says Celeste Bodner, FosterClub’s founder and executive director. “We help young people get a place at the table. When you put these young people in leadership roles, they are also able to reframe their foster care experience and stop seeing themselves as victims.”

Other DLCF grants in 2013 included substantial funding to SafeHouse of the Desert to complete construction of Harrison House in Thousand Palms, California, the charity’s second supportive housing program. A resident recently told SafeHouse executive director Kathy McAdara, “I can’t believe how nice this place is. I expected a shelter environment, and instead I got a home.” Adds McAdara, “We give



Angie Beltran (top), a case manager for the SafeHouse transitional living program in California, sets goals with a young adult. FosterClub All-Stars (above) get ready to travel in their new vehicle. At Every Child Counts, a youngster prepares to garden



Opposite: FosterClub All-Stars (left) learn team building while overcoming their fears on a ropes course in Seattle. Care and love given to residents of Children’s Village in Idaho (right) enhance their ability to be kind and helpful to each other.





so much credit to DLCF for giving these young people a place to thrive.”

Another formative 2013 grant went to Every Child Counts in Marsh Harbour, in the Bahamas, to start Starfish Enterprises Training Center, a sheltered workshop for the learning-disabled graduates of its private school. “This day is a dream come true,” Nancy McDaniel, the supervising teacher, wrote to Nichols on the center’s opening day in September. “Now our kids do not have to graduate from ECC only to go home and do nothing.”

And in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, The Children’s Village received vital funding from DLCF in 2013 to care for children whose parents are homeless, ill, or incarcerated. In addition to the 11 children who live there year-round, 70 to 100 infants and toddlers stay briefly every year in its crisis nursery.

Last year DLCF also contributed to several other children’s charities, including Best Buddies California, Boys and Girls Club of San Francisco, Amigos de los Niños in Los Cabos, Mexico, and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. As much as the charities welcome the grants, they particularly appreciate their relationship with Nichols and Discovery members who come to visit. “Christy is constantly building relationships between the different charities, bonding us together over best practices in the industry,” says McAdara. “She is interested in in-depth results for children in care and how we have accomplished those results.”

Nichols visits each major grantee periodically, which enables DLCF to respond to unexpected needs. For example, when



she learned that a teacher at Every Child Counts couldn’t easily afford the ferry to take her from Guana Cay (where Baker’s Bay Golf & Ocean Club is located) to Marsh Harbour, DLCF arranged for her to ride the staff ferry for free. When McAdara told Nichols that SafeHouse was having trouble paying for food for residents at its home in Riverside, California, DLCF underwrote half the food budget for a year.

And when Nichols personally observed FosterClub’s desperate need for a replacement for its aged van, DLCF was able to provide funds for a more reliable vehicle.

“The new van has had an incredible impact on our organization,” Bodner says. “We’ve doubled the number of youths the All-Stars have reached and helped.”

And that’s exactly what DLCF strives for.  
—MARTHA SHIRK

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUCE MURRIN