

Stacy Johnson shares her nonprofit's story

WOMEN HELPING OTHERS

Anne Marshall

The Women Helping Others ladies had a very special speaker at their November meeting. The group was honored to support the Central Texas Table of Grace and learn about founder Stacy Johnson's story.

Established in 2014, Central Texas Table of Grace was formed by Ms. Johnson, a former foster child, who recognized the need for a local temporary shelter for displaced children.

Headquartered in Round Rock, the nonprofit was conceived and organized to address the social, intellectual and recreational needs of Texas' displaced youth, and to assist in the successful transition to life in a positive environment.

The mission is accomplished by addressing the critical need of emergency housing and care for displaced children and youth through local initiatives and targeted outreach programming.

The organization is dedicated to helping each child reach his or her individual potential by encouraging wholesome habits such as perseverance, focusing on goals and personal responsibility. They demonstrate a passionate commitment to excellence.

In 2021, their mission to help foster youth expanded to include people who age out of foster care. The Grace365 Supervised Independent Living program launched and is one of only three in the Austin area. It is the only one in Round Rock.

Ms. Johnson was a foster kid, but said she tries to refrain from using that label because it has such a negative connotation.

"The first thing people say when I share that detail of my past is, 'You turned out great for being a foster kid,'" she said. "I wish we could just get rid of the label altogether."

She said she bounced from one home to another from the time she went into the system at the age of 2 until she turned 13. At that point, she asked her social worker if she could be placed in a group home. Despite the social worker describing a group home as feeling like a jail, she made the move.

"I knew that if I went into a staff-run facility, I would be able to stay there as long as I followed the rules and did what I was told," she said. "In my experience in foster homes, it was just too easy to get replaced if the foster family had a life event that affected their ability to care for extra children."

At the group home, she said there were a lot of rules. Residents were required to attend mandatory therapy sessions daily and had little or no contact with the outside world. However, there were people there to help. She achieved that and went off to live on her own at age 16.

"I expressed this [goal] to the group home therapist and he believed in me," she said. "I attribute the achievement of my first major life goal to a few defining moments."

The first was meeting that group home therapist who believed in me and taught me so much."

"Achieving a monumental goal despite all odds gave so much back to me that I had lost in the shuffle from home to home. Always an outsider and never cared for properly, I lost my self-worth. But someone believed in me, then I believed in me and I achieved what I had set out to do."

She said through the experience — as well as gleaming inspiration from the book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and support from therapists — she found herself, her strength and a happy place, and was able to move into her own apartment.

"I want to help create more stories like mine and prevent the all-too-common story and stereotype of 'The Foster Kid,'" she said.

Donations may be made at the Central Texas Table of Grace website at ctstableofgrace.org