**Seeing that care continues after the foster care ends**

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Sept. 11--Both his parents had died, and once Ken Butler turned 18, he officially "aged out" of foster care. That meant the checks stopped coming to his foster parents. He was given a garbage bag for his belongings and put out on the street. "I was homeless, sleeping in SEPTA shelters, until I started working at three jobs and got an apartment," Butler recalls. Other kids had parents they could ask for help. But, he says: "I had to do it all on my own, which is impossible. Everybody needs somebody." His best friend took him along to a new clubhouse for foster kids known as Eddie's House. There, Butler met and befriended other "aged-out" young adults and found a support network. Today, Butler is designing his own fashion line and taking classes at Wharton. Now 27, he still goes back sometimes to the Tuesday and Wednesday night discussion meetings and mentors others. "I honestly am shocked that Eddie's House is still always there for me," Butler says. Eddie's House was founded 10 years ago by Sharon McGinley, 56, who calls herself a "retired Main Line housewife. I was never good at cocktail chatter." Her husband worked as a successful Wall Street broker, and they enjoyed boating and sailing. One day out on the water, she slipped and broke her back. "I was clinically dead in the hospital, and while I was out of my body, the message was so clear and upsetting. I realized the only thing we leave behind is the love we give. My fear had kept me from doing that. I had blown it." McGinley lived, but she left the Main Line social circuit far behind and joined the board of Philadelphia's Support Center for Child Advocates. There, she talked to a group of 18-year olds who had aged out of foster care. "These kids had never met one another, and they were laughing and joking about living with roaches, or with foster parents who chained them to radiators," she recalls. She set up an informal clubhouse where they could meet for group discussion, work on resumes, apply to college, even sleep over. These days, Eddie's House, named for one of the first young men McGinley met, has a new home at Holy Apostles and the Mediator Church, 51st and Spruce Streets. McGinley joined forces with another nonprofit run by Marion Campbell, who works full time at the University of Pennsylvania and is executive director of Eddie's House. The two women are affectionately called "Mama Goose" and "Mama Marion." "How do kids hear about us? Usually word of mouth," Campbell says. Some are referred by the Department of Human Services or other agencies working with city youth. One 10-year-old boy began attending Eddie's House's summer camp and basketball league, now at the Able Center, 5100 Spruce St. "We found out he had never had a birthday cake," Campbell says. "So we made him one and sang him, 'Happy Birthday.' " Another young man "was angry all the time, vandalizing and starting fights. But we never kicked him out, like other programs. After a month or two, he knew he belonged," Campbell adds. Of Butler, she says: "He's a loving soul. He had potential, but no one to direct it." "A child does what a child sees. And our kids form these cohorts, groups of friends, who give each other advice. One girl wanted to be a prostitute. Her group talked her out of it. Once they realize they don't have to settle for the cards dealt to them, they keep coming back," Campbell says. For her part, McGinley has done everything from helping young adults rent apartments; writing reference letters for college; and introducing kids to attorneys, mentors, and business connections. One of her Main Line friends just came to teach yoga. "We're always looking for volunteers. And you don't have to stay for life. Just drop in and help," McGinley says. "The zip code we're in, 19139, has the highest rate of foster kids in the city. And we're open to kids in the neighborhood, too," many of whom have joined the basketball league. McGinley recalls one young woman "who'd been born to a mother on death row. She's in college now." Three sisters who grew up in foster care were reunited at Eddie's House and now live with their birth mother. On Sept. 25, Eddie's House will host a fund-raiser at McGinley's Ardmore home, which is open to the public. A resume clinic is set for Sept. 17 at Eddie's House, and a new program called Phoenix Rising launches in October. For more information, visit www.eddieshouse.org or call 215-307-3273. "This life isn't about things, although that's easy for me to say. It's the legacy of what we give. And it's often scary to give in person," McGinley acknowledges. "But I've gotten more from them, the kids, than I could ever give." earvedlund@phillynews.com 215-854-2808@erinarvedlund

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