Some married couples would consider it to be a daunting adjustment to move into a house full of eight teenage boys. But for Kevin and Ashley Barrett it was the exact opposite.

“Kevin and I both come from big families,” said Ashley. “He has six brothers and sisters and I have seven, so it was actually a harder adjustment for us to be married and just be the two of us under one roof than it was to take on a group of kids.”

The Barretts love having a bustling, full house. In fact, it’s one of the things that drew them to become Life Skills Teachers (formerly known as House Parents) at Omaha Home for Boys. The Barretts have been at the Home since May 2018 and have found that living the house parent lifestyle is the perfect fit for them and their four children ranging in age from newborn to six years old.

“Working with my wife and having my kids there too is amazing,” said Kevin.

As Life Skills Teachers in the Home’s Residential Care Program, Kevin and Ashley are responsible for creating a safe, secure, healthy family environment for the teenage boys who live in their cottage. They know how important it is for the youth in their care to have positive role models and mentors present as this is something that most are lacking in their lives.

“A lot of the kids haven’t had a healthy example of what a parent is or what a marriage looks like,” said Ashley. “I think the example that we can set of loving each other, being married, loving God and loving our kids gives the youth something they’ve never really seen before. It gives them a totally different perspective and that alone can help set them up to be more successful.”

Kevin has an interesting perspective to offer as a Life Skills Teacher having walked the same path as many of the youth in his care. He spent five years in a group home as a teen so it’s especially rewarding for him to see the transformation that young men in his care make.

“I love to see the positive changes that take place in our youth. It makes me so happy,” said Kevin. “One of my favorite things about being a Life Skills Teacher is seeing kids who are willing to change and be better people.”

The Barretts readily admit that things can get a little hectic with a house full of teenagers plus four little ones of their own, but they wouldn’t want it any other way. The opportunity to give back and make a positive impact on the lives of the young men they work with far outweighs the stress that comes with running a busy household.

“We realized we could live our life doing whatever we wanted, earning our money, going on vacations and just worrying about our life, our children and what we have going on; or we could help change somebody else’s life and do something to effect somebody else’s life. We chose to live a life of giving,” said Ashley.

Kevin and Ashley Barrett, Life Skills Teachers at Omaha Home for Boys, love having the opportunity to mentor and act as positive role models for the young men in their care.
President’s Corner

As I reviewed our 2018 Impact Report it really hit me what a remarkable year we had at Omaha Home for Boys!

The theme of the impact report is Igniting Change, which is a very fitting way to describe 2018. Because of the support of friends like you, we saw many positive changes in our organization, our programs and most importantly in the youth and young adults served by the Home.

Your support helped us bring critically needed services to the community through two new programs, Clinical Services and Supportive Housing. It is because of you that we were able to create greater financial stability and long term sustainability for the Home by reducing our draw from the endowment fund from over 6% to 4.5%. Additionally, the physical landscape of the Home changed when Nebraska Medicine opened a new primary care clinic on our campus and we welcomed new renters in the Rec Center and Wurdeman Learning Center. The impact of your generosity was immense in 2018!

While these organizational and program changes are certainly notable, it’s the transformations of the young adults served by the Home that are the most telling examples of the impact of your support. You helped Maria reach her dreams. You made graduation a possibility for Jamal. You helped Kyle find and maintain sobriety. And for the first time in her life, Fatima felt acknowledged and inspired because of you.

You truly do serve as the fuel that ignited these changes and transformations in 2018, and for this, we are tremendously thankful and humbled.

I invite you to meet Maria, Jamal, Kyle, Fatima and other Omaha Home for Boys youth in our 2018 Impact Report and learn more about the accomplishments that we achieved together in 2018. Let’s make 2019 even better yet!

Sincerely,

Jeff DeWispelare
President & CEO
New Board Members, Chair Welcomed to OHB

Earlier this year some new faces joined our Omaha Home for Boys Board of Directors while one familiar face was appointed Board Chair. Kirsten Case, a longtime board member and nonprofit expert, was appointed Board Chair. Kirsten is the Community Liaison at the University of Nebraska Omaha Service Learning Academy and brings more than 20 years of nonprofit experience in direct service and administration to the Home. Kirsten’s appointment as Board Chair marks the first time in Omaha Home for Boys’ nearly 100 year history that a female has held the position.

Joining the Home’s Board of Directors as new members in 2019 were Patricia Lamberty, Serenna D. Russell and Mark Seip. “The Home is truly honored to have Pat, Serenna and Mark join our Board of Directors,” said Jeff DeWispelare, Omaha Home for Boys President & CEO. “Each brings a unique skill set and experience that will be extremely valuable in guiding the Home and all have a strong passion to support the mission of Omaha Home for Boys and youth in Nebraska.”

Day Reporting Provides Activity, Structure for Struggling Youth

As you may recall from the Winter 2019 edition of The Twig newsletter, the Home’s new Clinical Services Program launched in late 2018 and now the program is fully staffed and accepting new clients. The Clinical Services Program provides a number of behavioral health, mental health and substance abuse counseling and therapy services. The new program expands beyond the Home’s clients to serve additional youth and families in the community.

One service provided by the Clinical Services Program is day reporting. Day reporting is a daily program for youth who are struggling in their current environment and are in need of additional structure and activity throughout the day. Youth are picked up in the morning and spend the day at Omaha Home for Boys engaging in activities such as studying, life skills training, counseling and recreation time. At the end of the day, the youth are transported home.

On one particular day, the day reporting youth fine tuned their independent living skills by planning a menu, budgeting, grocery shopping and cooking a meal together.

Youth Mart Expands Aid in 2018

When young adults are facing the transition from foster care to independent living without the needed network of supports in place, they know where to turn: Youth Mart. Youth Mart is a donation center that collects and redistributes critically needed items to young adults who are working toward setting up their own independent living environment. Youth Mart serves young men and women from Omaha Home for Boys as well as youth from eight other Omaha area agencies.

In 2018, Youth Mart welcomed more than 200 young adult shoppers through its doors, an increase of 60% when compared to 2017. Additionally, Truck Brigade deliveries of furniture to youth in the community increased from just 21 deliveries in 2017 to 126 in 2018, serving as a true testament to the dedication of our faithful Truck Brigade volunteers.

To donate items, volunteer, or shop online for needed donations, visit OmahaHomeForBoys.org.
What’s It Really Like to Be a Life Skills Teacher?

We sat down with Kevin and Ashley to find out the inside scoop on what it’s really like to be a Life Skills Teacher in charge of a brood of teenage boys who all come from different backgrounds.

Q: What’s a typical day like for you as a Life Skills Teacher?

Kevin: When the boys get up in the morning they’re working on chores and breakfast. Then they’re off to school. Ashley and I work on paperwork, phone calls, emails and help with appointments while also spending time with our own kids. When the boys come home from school, it’s time for check-ins and snacks before they head off to work. Dinner is followed by study time and we end the day with recreation time, including going to the Rec Center, playing games or watching sports.

Q: What’s it like living and working with your spouse? That’s a lot of time together.

Ashley: I wouldn’t want it to change. I love working with Kevin.

Kevin: Working with my spouse and having my kids there too is amazing.

Q: What do you consider to be a successful day with the youth?

Ashley: I think, like any parent, a successful day is finding that you’re not wishing for bedtime to get here! Also any time I can build a relationship with a youth and act as a healthy female voice for them is a successful day.

Kevin: For me, it’s having one youth do one thing better than they did the day before. We like to celebrate the small successes.

Q: And the burning question everyone wants to know about having eight teenage boys in the same home, how do you keep them all fed and full?

Kevin: She’s the cook!

Ashley: I come from such a large family I don’t even know how to cook for just two people. Plus, we keep lots of snacks handy!
From Surviving to Thriving: Monae’s Story

When you’re not sure where you’re going to lay your head at night or where your next meal might come from, it’s impossible to concentrate on anything but surviving day to day. Setting goals and thinking about the future is out of the question.

Such was the case for 19-year-old Monae. The teen was living in an unstable home environment often bouncing around from family member to family member. On any given day, it was like rolling a dice to see if she’d have a roof over her head or a hot meal that night. With uncertainty consuming her life, she fell behind in school and her self-esteem began to sink lower and lower.

Just when it seemed that Monae may never escape the struggles of being a homeless teenager, she connected with Jacobs’ Place, Omaha Home for Boys’ Transitional Living Program, where she found the security and stability she so desperately wanted and needed.

With a roof over her head and caring adults surrounding her, Monae quickly settled in and began achieving many of the goals that she set for herself.

“When Monae first came to Jacobs’ Place, she seemed to lack confidence and seemed a little sad and uncertain,” said Carma Gunter, an Independent Living Specialist at Jacobs’ Place who worked closely with Monae. “After just a month and a half at Jacobs’ Place she had already completed high school graduation requirements. She already appeared more confident.”

In addition to graduating high school, Monae worked with Jacobs’ Place staff to find steady employment and completed her application for federal student aid. Jacobs’ Place staff also guided Monae in improving her communication skills and provided classes in cooking, budgeting, grocery shopping and time management, all of which were areas in which Monae struggled prior to connecting with Jacobs’ Place.

But the most significant indication of Monae’s growth came in the form of her volunteerism. She became an exemplary volunteer, giving over 100 hours of community service.

“Monae has volunteered to clean out rooms at Jacobs’ Place when residents move out,” said Carma. “She has shown other residents how to ride the bus and navigate public transportation and she also volunteered at a local nursing home during the holidays, taking cookies and cards to the residents.”

Monae is nearing the completion of the Jacobs’ Place program and is making steady progress towards transitioning to living independently. She is saving money for an apartment and a car and is in the process of applying for an Omaha Home for Boys scholarship. She plans to start Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes soon and has college plans as well. One day she hopes to be a pediatrician.

Seeing Monae’s beaming smile and radiant confidence today makes it hard to believe that she was once so uncertain of herself and her future. But today, one thing Monae says with complete certainty and confidence is, “My life would not be as great as it is right now if I hadn’t come here [Jacobs’ Place]. I wouldn’t be as happy as I am.”

Monae is pictured at Jacobs’ Place enjoying some leisure time on the computer before heading to her job at a local grocery store.
Did you know that more than one third of the young adults that seek the guidance of Omaha Home for Boys have never been employed? Those who had previous employment most likely found themselves in a low paying job where they barely earned enough to scrape by.

Because finding and maintaining employment is such a significant hurdle for the Home’s young people, our Branching Out Independent Living Program has made workforce readiness a top priority when it comes to preparing youth for a stable future.

Branching Out provides numerous courses throughout each level of the program to help clients find sustainable employment. Youth are offered classes on resume writing, professionalism, long term career planning and even time management and budgeting.

“Our goal at Branching Out is to not only help youth find a job that pays enough and has enough hours to meet their financial needs, but also one that is accessible from public transportation as many of our young people do not own their own car,” said Keenan Page, Independent Living Employment Manager at Omaha Home for Boys. “We also focus heavily on budgeting to help our young people learn how to save for their own transportation and other basic needs.”

Another key piece of Branching Out’s workforce readiness training is connecting youth with internships that offer on-the-job training and career advancement opportunities. In fact, a partnership was formed with Warren Distribution, one of the leading manufacturers of aftermarket automotive lubricants, in August of 2018 and so far four young adults from Branching Out have taken advantage of this internship opportunity.

“Our internship is unique because interns get hands-on training and the independence to work on their own after training,” said Melanie Smith, Outreach and Recruitment Specialist at Warren Distribution. “This really gives them a hand up and sets them up for success after the internship when they can apply for any openings we may have. The goal is to retain our interns so we start prepping them near the end of their internship to start looking at open positions and applying.”

One young man in particular found employment success upon connecting with Branching Out and the internship at Warren Distribution. Kyler* had just moved into an apartment after going through bouts of homelessness when he worked with Branching Out to land his internship at Warren Distribution. He was relying on rides to work or taking the bus but both proved to be unreliable. Branching Out purchased him a bicycle that he rode 13 miles to work until he got his first few paychecks and got a car.

Once Kyler secured reliable transportation there was no looking back. He began to excel in his internship at Warren Distribution and was even offered a full time position. He is now earning a living wage and has found the stability needed to work towards paying off debt.

“Kyler was always able to get jobs easily but finding ones that had development potential and gave him the wages and hours needed to make ends meet was much harder to achieve,” said Keenan. “Kyler led the way with his networking and determination to grow his skills. I’m just glad that Branching Out could be there to guide him.”

The determination of our young adults paired with Branching Out’s workforce readiness training has proven to be a winning combination. Eighty-one new jobs were obtained by Branching Out youth in 2018.

*While this is a true account, the name of the youth and some identifying details have been changed in order to be respectful of his privacy.
The start of our 100th year is just a few months away and plans are in store for a year of celebrations. This brings to mind earlier celebrations in the Home’s history, memorable times even if not as momentous as a century of service to youth and families.

Our first photographed celebration came in the backyard of a mansion in south central Omaha, which a year later was to become the new location of the Home. This picture was in the spring of 1922, you see, and the residents were taken to the site they would move to in April 1923. It was clearly a red letter day. Each boy was in his Sunday best, holding a piece of cake and a wrapped present. The Megeath family, who donated the mansion so we could double our capacity, is at the right with Superintendent James Noble enjoying his cake at the rear of the crowd.

Then there was the Home’s picnic and open house at its newly acquired farm three miles north of the 52nd and Ames campus in June 1951. Several hundred people enjoyed the visit to what would eventually become Cooper Memorial Farm, named after donor Bob Cooper, and enjoyed the pigs which were barbecued for the occasion. After the speeches had gone on long enough Bob Cooper, a no nonsense man, yelled out, “Pipe down. Let’s eat!” and they ate plenty too.

The Home has always noted special anniversary years after its 1920 founding, but it entered a new phase in celebrations when it put on an anniversary banquet in 1965. For the 45th year celebration we all enjoyed Peony Park’s ballroom for our banquet and program. All 80 residents and their house parents were taken by van to the dinner and were joined by hundreds of friends of the Home.

By 1982 a group of alumni in California were meeting annually and they invited the Home to send a representative to their next meeting. It could only be a sparkplug of the Home, Margaret Staska of the Youth Services Department.

She was a hit with the alumni and plans were laid for a 1984 nationwide reunion, our first nationwide effort. One hundred two alumni attended from 12 states and we saluted the oldest returning alum and the youngest. The oldest was Judge George Bigelow from western Nebraska, a resident from 1924 – 29, and the youngest was Shane Jager from Columbus, Nebraska, a resident from 1981 – 82. No one enjoyed the festivities that day more than Margaret Staska.

Another anniversary celebration occurred in 1985 to honor 65 years of the Home’s service. It was an evening short on speeches (which Bob Cooper would have appreciated) and was highlighted by a video of local, state and national officials and Masonic dignitaries who added their congratulations for the celebration. The climax came when Vice President George H.W. Bush added his comments on the video, thanks to the efforts of Congressman Hal Daub of Omaha. It was an impressive ending to the 1985 banquet.

In 2013 we entered a new era in Home celebrations holding the Home’s banquet and gala on an annual basis at a local hotel venue. This yearly event is a fundraising celebratory affair. We have a silent auction, a grand dinner preceded by a VIP reception with the chance to meet the guest of honor for the evening, a keynote speaker, and the opportunity to help the Home and its mission financially. Our guest of honor at our first gala was Hollywood actress Marlee Matlin, winner of the Academy Awards Best Actress Oscar for “Children of a Lesser God.” This wonderful lady charmed us all. This event led to annual galas with various movie and television actors.

The trend continues this year with 100th anniversary celebrations both at the start and the conclusion of our 100th year.

Thank you for your support of the Home. Now let’s get ready for our second century.

John E. Carter
How You Can Help – Today and Tomorrow

Youth at Omaha Home for Boys come from a myriad of troubled backgrounds yet we hear time and time again the positive impact that participation in the Home’s 4-H program has on their future. 4-H plays a vital role in helping youth develop self-confidence, learn the value of hard work, practice patience and learn to act responsibly, all skills that benefit them today and for years to come.

The Home’s 4-H program also provides therapeutic benefits that accompany working with livestock outside in the fresh air at our Cooper Memorial Farm. Many youth who have been hardened by harsh life circumstances become hopeful and happy on the farm.

Will you consider making an investment in the Home’s 4-H program to help us continue this life changing work? The table to the right shows a number of existing needs and we would be so grateful for your gift to the 4-H program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Your Investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rope halter</td>
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<td>Smart Comb for livestock grooming</td>
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<td>6 months of vet care</td>
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FUNdraising Slated for 2019

This year we’re putting the “fun” in fundraising and whether near or far, we invite you to join us in person or online!

Omaha Gives
Omaha Gives is a 24 hour charitable challenge set for May 22 and Omaha Home for Boys is an official partner. Join us as we work to put our “Wheels in Motion” to raise $25,000 for the transportation needs of our youth and programs.

May 22 – All Day Give online at: OmahaGives.org/OHB

Omaha Home for Boys
2019 Golf Classic

What’s more fun than a day of golf with some friends?

How about a day of golf with some friends while you support Omaha Home for Boys! Join us for a fun-filled day on the greens with proceeds benefitting the Home.

June 5 – 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. – Tiburon Golf Club – Omaha
Register online at: OmahaHomeForBoys.org or call Lori at 402.457.7014

Many thanks to our Presenting Sponsor: RBC Wealth Management and our Dinner Sponsor: Scheels

Roaring 20s Gala
We are celebrating a century of service at Omaha Home for Boys by taking it back to the Roaring 20s when it all began! Grab your glad rags and join us as we kick off our 100 Year Anniversary Celebration with a festive evening complete with 1920s themed cocktails and costumes, a live band, a speakeasy, photo booth, a Model-T, dinner, auctions and more. It’s going to be the bee’s knees!

November 8 - 5:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.
Embassy Suites – La Vista
Register online at: OmahaHomeForBoys.org or call Lori at 402.457.7014