

Love And Luggage Ready To Boost Success For Young Adults Leaving Foster Care

BY KRISTI FISH

MIRROR REPORTER

Love and Luggage is ready to welcome its newest class of young adults aging out of foster care.

Next month, the organization will hold its graduation, where the youths who have graduated from high school and are emancipating or aging out of the foster care system will be celebrated.

The graduations began in 2021, when the organization was newly formed and looking for ways to support a vulnerable part of the population.

"We looked at what those youths aging out need and wanted to fill that," said cofounder Sarah Otis. "They need a support system, connections to resources and living essentials."

At the graduation, which takes place at First Pres Maumee, the young adults emancipating from Lucas County Children Services will meet with Love and Luggage board members and begin forming connections with community members who want to be a part of their support system.

They'll also be presented with a duffel bag and a variety of pantry items and other living essentials.

"There is an ongoing need for non-SNAP-eligible goods like cleaning products,



Love and Luggage cofounders Sarah and Jim Otis started the organization to help young adults aging out of the foster care system in Lucas County. Students are provided with access to a pantry full of much-needed household items and connections to a support system full of individuals ready to help. Donations to the pantry are needed ahead of the organization's graduation on Thursday, June 5. More information on how to donate can be found online at loveandluggage.org.

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hygiene items and housewares," Otis said.

Dishware, kitchen utensils, paper towels, pots and pans, first aid kits, soaps, facial tissues, toilet paper, linens, lightbulbs, clocks and other supplies are essential for young adults who are preparing to move out on their own or have already secured their own housing.

The cost of these items can add up quickly, though, noted Skyleigh Cook.

As a 2021 graduate of Love and Luggage, Cook has been with the organization since its beginning and knows just how important the support of Love and Luggage can be for an emancipated young adult.

"They help you build from having nothing," Cook said.

After attending her graduation, Cook continued to stop by Love and Luggage for the monthly dinners, where she received dinner and the

chance to connect with other young adults in the same position. Together, they could celebrate their accomplishments and support each other.

Eventually, she got to know many of the Love and Luggage partners and board members, who were there to help her access the resources she might need.

"It can be hard for us to trust that people care for us," Cook said. "Everybody there

is very loving and supportive, and they were ready to help."

That has been the goal of Love and Luggage, Otis said, to lift the young adults up and make sure they feel seen, heard and respected.

"What's amazing to me when I come to these meals is not just the young people and what they're doing, but the amount of adults and the support that is there," said First Pres Maumee assistant pastor Jason Armstrong. "I

do truly believe that when you come into that room, it is a room of love and hope and promise that people are here to support you and care for you and love you."

It all helps prove to the young adults that Love and Luggage is meant to be a support system they can trust, Otis said.

At the graduation, which is the first interaction the young adults will have with Love and Luggage, the graduates are invited to go shopping through the pantry items that have been collected by the support system of Love and Luggage. The much-needed pantry items, which will help to set the young adults up for success, are found via the organization's Amazon wish list.

Items can be purchased directly from the wish list or purchased and then dropped off at First Pres Maumee and marked for Love and Luggage.

First Pres Maumee is located at 200 E. Broadway St.

"These donations are so helpful because that's what gives Love and Luggage the resources to help out these youths," Cook said.

In addition to the Amazon wish list, those wishing to support Love and Luggage can find a link to donate online at lovenandluggage.org.