



Randy Williams (left) and Tiana Preator, local THRIVE coordinator for Goodwill Industries of Wyoming, look over his Dodge truck earlier this month at the Mountain Spirit Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Powell. Preator and Goodwill paid off Williams' truck Aug. 3 through a state program that helps youth who've been in foster care transition to adulthood. Tribune photo by CJ Baker

## After foster care, lesser-known program works to help local youth

BY CJ BAKER  
Tribune Editor

As a local employee of Goodwill Industries of Wyoming, Tiana Preator is used to people being a little surprised with what she does.

"So many times, when I'm working in Park County and Big Horn County, they're like, 'Goodwill? I didn't know we had a Goodwill [store] around here,'" Preator said. When she explains that she works on Goodwill's missions side, helping youth who are or were in foster care make the transition to adulthood, "they don't know anything about it," Preator said.

She sometimes surprises the youth she works with, too: Randy Williams, a 19-year-old Powell resident, got an unexpected boost from Goodwill earlier this month when they paid off his 1999 Dodge Dakota.

The truck had been donated to the Habitat for Humanity ReStore, where Williams works. Then Mountain Spirit Habitat for Humanity's executive director, Jaime Schmeiser, offered Williams a deal: He could take the \$1,300 truck, work some extra hours, make payments and, eventually, the vehicle would be his.

Although it has a massive dent in the driver's side (which requires Williams to get in on the passenger side), it's in good working condition. Plus, "it's a lot better" than having to walk everywhere, Williams said.

"The day that I made my first payment, the first week ... I got insurance on it and then I took a trip, a 12-hour drive up to Libby, Montana, to go see my family," he said. While there, he got in a camping trip and at-

tended his little brother's birthday and older brother's wedding.

Williams got a little more freedom to roam on Aug. 3, when Goodwill presented him with a check for the remaining \$1,120 owed, making the Dodge officially his.

"We're going to help him out, because he's been working super hard," Preator explained.

Goodwill is a state contractor, helping coordinate the Wyoming Department of Family Service's Independent Living Program in much of the state. The program aims to help youth who've spent at least a year in foster care in their teenage years successfully make the transition to adulthood.

Williams spent time in foster care because of numerous issues with his family; he says one of the things he learned is to "stay away from the [wrong] people, stay clean and get your life together."

"It's not hard," Williams said.

Cindy Hamilton, the director of community programs for Goodwill in Wyoming, listed some of the independent living program's goals: "We really want young people to graduate from high school; we want them to get a job; we want them to get a driver's license; we want them to be self-sufficient so they're able to take care of themselves."

Williams — who Preator playfully ribs as being her "poster child" — has effectively accomplished all of those things within the last year.

"It has been driver's license, it has been GED, it has been getting self-sufficient in another living environment, it has been getting this job, this truck and now he's en-

rolled in college," Preator said, adding that all had happened "just since October."

"We try to showcase young people every chance we can," added Hamilton. "Because when they're doing everything they need to do, against all odds when they were younger, we just love to do anything we can to support that."

Hamilton is based in Cheyenne while Preator, based in Powell, is the coordinator for Park and Big Horn counties, currently overseeing 17 youth spread from Cody to Basin. Under the program, young people can get assistance with education, getting ready for and finding jobs, developing life skills, making future plans and can even get a hand with bills in certain situations.

"There's a lot of foster youth out there that don't know that there's this kind of support out there for them and they're out of the system," Preator said of the difficulty in getting the word out about the program.

Added Hamilton, "It's just important. There's so many young people out there that have experienced out-of-home care that are between 18 and 21 that we can't reach anymore because they're not in the system."

One of the best parts of the state grant that funds the program is "we can spend money directly on young people," Hamilton said. "So we can pay for the truck."

Williams hopes to start studying at Northwest College this fall, likely beginning with a couple online and night classes so he can keep working at the ReStore. He's particularly interested in photography and Japan.

As for his new truck and its big dents, "My plan is to pull them all out, repaint it ... then maybe put some more in there," Williams quipped.

Laughed Preator, "We'll talk about that later."

For more information about the Independent Living Program, contact Preator 307-254-2885 or tiana.preator@goodwillwy.org.

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Tiana Preator  
Goodwill Industries of Wyoming

### CONCERTS IN THE PARK

Aug 17: Screen Door Porch - Americana/Blues/Rock

CITY PARK BANDSHELL - CODY - 6:30-8:30PM

### UPCOMING COUNTY BOARD APPOINTMENTS

Applications are now being accepted for the following volunteer county boards:

**BUFFALO BILL DAM VISTOR CENTER BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
1 Upcoming Appointment; At-Large Representative – Unexpired 3-Year Term (Expires January 1, 2020)

Applications may be requested electronically at [ngerharter@parkcounty.us](mailto:ngerharter@parkcounty.us), or applications are available at the County Commissioners' office in the COURT-HOUSE, 1002 Sheridan Avenue, Cody, or at the PARK COUNTY ANNEX, 109 W. 14th Street, Powell. **DEADLINE** for submittal is **NO LATER THAN 3:00 P.M. on Friday, August 25, 2017. Please submit a letter of interest or resumé with the application.** Interviews will be held **Tuesday, September 5. Applicant must appear in person for interview.**

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## CENTER OF THE WEST NAMED NO. 1 WESTERN MUSEUM

True West magazine has again named the Buffalo Bill Center of the West its Top Western Museum. The center received the honor in 2015, too.

"It started in a log cabin. Today, it's a complex of five museums that goes beyond the heritage of Buffalo Bill him-

self," says True West Executive Editor Bob Boze Bell. "It does a remarkable job of preserving and sharing the Old West. The Buffalo Bill Center of the West truly is the top Western museum."

The center's executive director, Bruce Eldredge, said the

award "verifies that our collective efforts to celebrate the spirit of the American West for 100 years resonates with those who love the West as much as we do."

"It truly is our staff, our trustees and advisers, and our volunteers who make the West come alive each day for our visitors,

on site and online," Eldredge said.

True West is the world's oldest, continuously published Western American magazine. Earlier this year, the Center of the West earned multiple reader's and editor's choice awards from the magazine.

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