



2023 Annual Report  
July 2022 - June 2023

## CONTENTS

- 2 Our Impact by the Numbers
- 3 Fiscal Year 2023 Financial Report
- 4 Our TotalChild® Philosophy
- 4 Reflect - Father and Son Achieve Success Through TotalChild®
- 5 Culture of Four Oaks
- 6 DEI Initiatives at Four Oaks
- 7 Reflect - Preventive Services: Helping a Single Mother Succeed
- 7 It All Started in a Red Brick Farmhouse
- 8 Four Oaks: The Early Years
- 8 Reflect - Community-Based Services: Therapeutic Classrooms Offer Students the Opportunity for Success
- 9 Reflect - Treatment Services: Four Oaks Helps a Young Woman Heal and Succeed
- 10 Foster Care and Adoption Services
- 12 Affordable Housing Network, Inc. Housing Services
- 14 50 Years of Growth and Expansion
- 16 30 Years of the Four Oaks Golf Classic
- 17 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations
- 18 FY23 Committees and Leadership
- 19 Donors From the Past Year

## MISSION

Four Oaks assures children become successful adults.

## VISION

Expect success.

## PHILOSOPHY

Four Oaks services are focused on and rooted in the family. We empower children and families to achieve stability, self-sufficiency, and permanency.

## FOUR OAKS ENTERPRISE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<b>Lydia Brown</b> <i>Chair</i>	Chuck Kent
<b>Nancy Hill-Davis</b> <i>Vice Chair</i>	Travis Kolder
<b>Jim Choate</b> <i>Treasurer</i>	Mike McDermott
<b>Karl Hoffman</b> <i>Secretary</i>	Steve Moshier
<b>Mark Danielson</b> <i>Past Chair</i>	Scott Olson
Richard Allen	Anne Parmley
Jasmine Almoayyed	Kristen Rickey
Bruce Anderson	Leah Rodenberg
Dina Dusek	Paula Rogers
Matt Evans	Hunter Skogman
Emily Flowergarden	Vickie Snyder
Jerry Hunt	Marty Stoll
	Giacomo Tormene
	Kevin Torner
	Mike Wilkins

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING NETWORK, INC. (AHNI) COMMUNITY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

<b>Lydia Brown</b> <i>Chair</i>	Richard Allen
<b>Nancy Hill-Davis</b> <i>Vice Chair</i>	Emily Flowergarden
<b>Jim Choate</b> <i>Treasurer</i>	Jerry Hunt
<b>Karl Hoffman</b> <i>Secretary</i>	Travis Kolder
	Hunter Skogman

Dear Friends,

As we reflect on this past year, we are filled with gratitude for your continued support and commitment to our mission to help Iowa's families succeed. Supporters like you have been instrumental in helping us achieve our goals and make a meaningful impact on the lives of children and families in our community. Thank you for your contributions to Four Oaks.

This year marks a significant milestone for Four Oaks, as we celebrate five decades of service to Iowa's children and families. Fifty years ago, our organization began as a humble endeavor, fueled by the aspirations of a few dedicated individuals who shared a vision of providing support and care to children and families in need. Since that time, we have grown and evolved, reaching countless lives and leaving a lasting mark on our community. Every individual involved, whether a community partner, donor, staff member, or volunteer, has played an integral role in shaping this amazing legacy.

We invite you to take a look back with us through our journey from a single location that served 10 children to a statewide agency that impacts nearly 27,000 individuals each year. While our programs and services have evolved to meet the changing needs of children and families through the decades, our unwavering dedication to providing opportunities for families to succeed remains unchanged.

It is with great pride that we reflect on our rich history and celebrate the milestone we have achieved. Looking toward the future, we aspire to continue adapting and innovating to meet the ever-changing needs of our community. We are grateful for your partnership on this amazing journey. Together, we can build a brighter future for all those we serve.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth O'Neill  
*President and CEO*

Lydia Brown  
*Board Chair*



Pictured [left to right]: Mary Beth O'Neill, President and CEO; and Lydia Brown, Board Chair

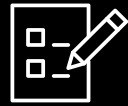
# 26,850

Total individuals impacted by the Four Oaks Enterprise in FY23



7,368

Served by our Home and Community services



1,383

Served by our Education and Workforce services



2,080

Served by our Residential Treatment and Shelter services



5,125

Served by our Behavioral Health services



1,565

Served by TotalChild®



768

Served by our Juvenile Justice services



6,885

Served by our Foster Care and Adoption services



1,676

Served by Affordable Housing services

## HISTORY AT A GLANCE

- 1973 Boys Acres is established in rural Bertram, Iowa. The new organization offered a home-like setting for boys ages 10-15 who had nowhere else to go.
- 1979 The Board of Directors decides to re-evaluate the community's needs and define the future role of the agency. Jim Ernst joins Boys Acres in October as the Executive Director, bringing a new vision for integrating the traditional child-centered philosophy into comprehensive, family-centered treatment. This integrated philosophy becomes the foundation of the agency's development.
- 1980 Boys Acres is licensed as the first residential treatment facility for pre-adolescents in eastern Iowa.
- 1981 The organization introduces The Family Environment Program, a treatment and family foster care program, and begins to work with foster families.
- 1982 A new home-based family treatment program aims to prevent out-of-home placements for high-risk children.
- 1984 Janice Baumbach wins a contest to rename Boys Acres. The organization becomes Four Oaks and expands services to serve more youth and families.
- 1986 Four Oaks opens a five-bed Foster Group Home program at the Bertram site for children needing long-term group residential care after completing treatment.
- 1986 The organization establishes the family-centered Home-Based Diagnosis and Evaluation Program to help prevent out-of-home placement.\*

\*History continued on page 9

## Financials

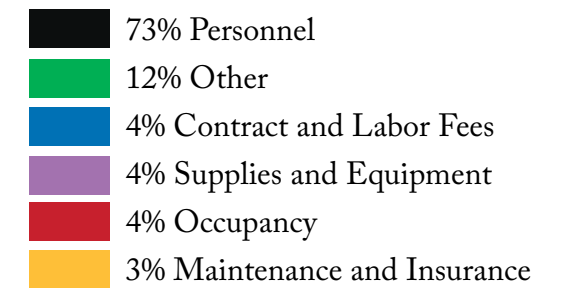
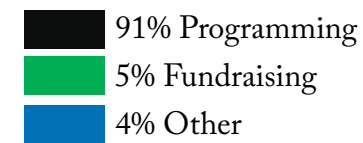
### Our FY2023



Revenue



Expenses



## Our People

562  
Full-time employees

194  
Part-time employees

## Volunteers

345  
Volunteers

2,600  
Volunteer hours given

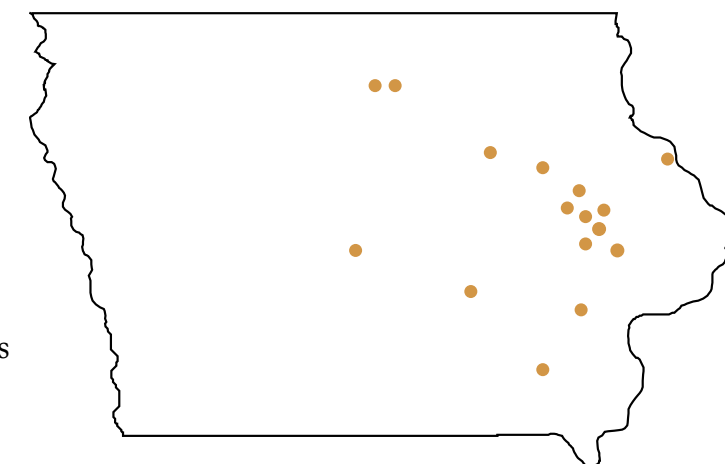
27  
Board Member volunteers

224  
Board Member hours given

\$79,326  
Value of hours\*

## Locations

- Ankeny
- Dubuque
- Bertram
- Grinnell
- Cedar Rapids
- Independence
- Cedar Valley
  - D Street
  - Harambee House
  - Jane Boyd Community House
  - The Bridge
  - Smith Center
- Iowa City
- East Campus
  - West Campus
- Marion
- Ottumwa
- Mason City
- Waterloo



\* Value of \$28.09 per hour as determined by the organization Independent Sector

## OUR TOTALCHILD® PHILOSOPHY

To be successful, a child must be supported in all areas of their life. In 2010, Four Oaks took its services to the next level with the launch of the innovative TotalChild® model of care. The comprehensive, long-term approach is based on the idea that families, neighborhoods, and communities are stronger when children hurdle all obstacles to success.

Over the last five decades, the evolution of child welfare programming and strategy has resulted in the formation of dozens of programs and initiatives in the field. In the past, children were simply taken out of the home and placed in care facilities. This approach often did not address the root cause of a child's trauma.

The TotalChild® philosophy addresses four key areas that impact a child's well-being:

- Childhood basic needs—health care, housing, food, clothing, and mental health
- Education and work—high school graduation and job preparation/training
- Family—functioning, parenting skills, and engagement
- Community—positive social network, safe/stable neighborhoods, access to support services

Mary Beth O'Neill, Four Oaks President and CEO, said, "When we work with community partners to support a child and their family's underlying issues, we see greater long-term, sustained success for each member of that family."

### Trauma-Informed Care

Research has shown that children who face traumas such as abuse, neglect or witnessing domestic violence are much more likely to develop social, emotional and behavioral challenges.

These Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, often follow children well into their adult lives. Adults who have experienced childhood trauma are more likely to develop difficulties with substance use disorders, mental health challenges, divorce, maintaining employment, parenting, domestic violence, and incarceration.

The Trauma-Informed Care approach has transformed the child welfare field and is embedded in all Four Oaks programming.

### TotalChild® Workforce

In 2016, the second phase of TotalChild®, called TotalChild® Workforce, began to focus on young adults through age 26 to help take them from poverty to paycheck.

TotalChild® Workforce is designed to carry forward the TotalChild® case management and navigation functions for older teens and young adults. The program partners with community organizations and businesses to address career readiness and placement skills, including post-secondary education and training, internships, mentorships, and more. At the same time, supportive services are provided to participants to help address financial, health, and social barriers to success.

For 50 years, Four Oaks has adapted to emerging needs, new programming, and evolving strategy to best serve Iowa's children and families. We will continue to fill this role well into the future.

# reflect

## FATHER AND SON ACHIEVE SUCCESS THROUGH THE TOTALCHILD®

Jason's\* son was spiraling out of control after suffering several devastating losses. He needed help for his son, and he found it with Four Oaks' TotalChild® approach.

At eight years old, Jason's son, Ethan,\* had experienced the death of his older brother, his aunt, and his beloved dog. Soon after, Ethan's parents divorced and he began acting out in uncontrollable rebellion and anger.

Jason got help for Ethan from area agencies like the Abbe Center for Therapy, Grant Wood Area Education Agency and the Marion School District for his educational needs. Four Oaks provided Behavioral Health Intervention Services. Jason was invited to enroll his son in Four Oaks TotalChild® to help manage this complex situation and to ensure that his son reached stability.

"TotalChild® helped get everyone we were working with on the same page, and I believe wholeheartedly it has been the determining factor in allowing Ethan to be successful," Jason said.

With TotalChild®, Jason was able to get the right treatments from the right professionals at the right time. Jason said Ethan became a different child, and they were grateful for the TotalChild® model of care.



\*Names and photos changed to protect privacy



Mary Beth O'Neill with children participating in Achievement Academy at the Jane Boyd Community House.

## OVER 50 YEARS, FOUR OAKS HAS BUILT A CULTURE OF CARE

People served by Four Oaks face many obstacles to success.

That's why it's important the organization's staff and volunteers are dedicated to helping children and families succeed. Four Oaks has a deep culture of caring—for children, communities, and each other—seen in the number of employees and board members who stay with Four Oaks for decades or return "home" after leaving for other pursuits.

This longevity contributes to a stable workforce, institutional knowledge, and leadership. Two current board members, Chuck Kent and Scott Olson, were Boys Acres founding members. And over the course of Four Oaks' history, there have been only four executive directors/CEOs: Ed Daley (1973–1979), Jim Ernst (1979–2014), Anne Gruenewald (2014–2021), and Mary Beth O'Neill (2021–current).

## CULTURE OF FOUR OAKS

Though the Four Oaks motto of "Expect Success" has not existed for the entirety of the agency's five-decade existence, the two words define the culture that has always existed.

The idea of expecting success is seen through community partnerships with local businesses that have spanned decades supporting major events and campaigns, including the annual Golf Classic.

It is our volunteers and donors who have provided critical infrastructure and support with their time and funding of programs over the years.

But at its heart and soul, Expect Success is most evident in the care employees take with our children and families. Many employees have been a part of the Four Oaks family for more than half of the organization's existence.

Deb Knake is the only Four Oaks employee to have worked for all four of the organization's CEOs and her impact on children for over four decades is still felt today.

Deb and the Boys Acres staff strove to make the environment as home-like as possible for the boys. They offered activities similar to what children might experience with a family, like camping, roasting marshmallows, swimming, and water skiing. Deb recalls teaching the boys social skills and going to a restaurant where they were so well-behaved, the manager rewarded them with free sundaes.

Mike Baldrige was a client in Bertram in 1983 when he was eight years old. As someone who spent the vast majority of his childhood in various facilities around the state, he said his time at Four Oaks was the only one where he remembered having, "any real fun."

"As a kid, I could tell they tried to create a home environment for us, which is almost impossible. But they tried," Mike said.

Dedicated to supporting Iowa's children and families, Deb has seen firsthand how growing up with a family can provide children with a sense of consistency, love, and belonging that lasts into adulthood and beyond. While working with families, Deb often reminded them: "I wouldn't be in this job if it wasn't for you."

"We really did feel the benefit of peoples' time and money," Mike added. "It wasn't wasted at all and it was very much appreciated by us kids, even if we didn't know how to show it."



Deb Knake is awarded the Spirit of Minnie Rubek award, which honors a nonprofit employee who has gone "above and beyond in their dedication to their organization and its mission."



Mike Baldrige

## DEI INITIATIVES AT FOUR OAKS

For 50 years, Four Oaks has endeavored to address systemic inequities in the community. The organization is committed to providing inclusive services to all individuals, regardless of their age, race, creed, color, national origin, gender identity/ expression, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, generational trauma, mental health status, and more.

Four Oaks believes access to resources and opportunities has a direct impact on individual and community wellness. Inequities disproportionately affect historically marginalized groups, and Four Oaks recognizes our responsibility to address these inequities. As an inclusive community, the organization is committed to fostering equity and a sense of belonging while acting as a change agent for the community.

Four Oaks actively implements Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts throughout the Enterprise. Through innovative and evidence-based practices, the infusion of DEI across the agency ensures that clients and employees have a well-rounded and positive experience while engaged in our services or in the workplace.

Some Four Oaks DEI Initiatives include “Stand Up Meetings” that are held every other month where staff delve into issues like

education, policies and procedures, and trainings through a DEI lens. Employees receive information about the latest DEI events and activities in the Enterprise and around the world twice a month in the employee newsletter. Stand Up Snapshots sent enterprise-wide feature a quick look at DEI celebrations or recognitions.

“DEI Drive Through Trainings” engage staff, offering insight into employees’ roles within their programs to incorporate DEI and cultural humility to better serve children and families.

Four Oaks is committed to DEI education for the children in our care, with projects like the DEI Art Museum. Four Oaks staff provided canvases and encouraged youth to draw what diversity meant to them, initiating a conversation about inclusion and how to celebrate differences.

Four Oaks stands up to inequities by fostering brave, gracious, and social spaces of belonging, diversity, and inclusion. We are committed to a culture of continuous learning and celebrating our differences. We endeavor to create hope and employ respectful, honest dialogue with ourselves, those we serve, and the communities where we live and work.



Four Oaks is committed to DEI education for the children in our care, with projects like the DEI Art Museum. Four Oaks staff provided canvases and encouraged youth to draw what diversity meant to them, initiating a conversation about inclusion and how to celebrate differences.



## PREVENTIVE SERVICES: HELPING A SINGLE MOTHER SUCCEED

Lauren\* was a single mother working multiple jobs, determined to better her family’s life by striving toward her undergraduate degree. She knew it was critical for her three children to be in a safe and supervised environment when school was out of session. Lauren enrolled her children in Achievement Academy, which offered them a healthy atmosphere to learn and grow after school and during summer break. Thousands of families have benefited from this program since it was implemented in 1999.

Lauren’s children Jayden\*, Hope\*, and Maya\* attended Achievement Academy for a total of nine years. Lauren said, “Four Oaks was a vital asset to our family. It provided a safety net for my kids and offered quality activities. My kids participated in the community and learned how to give back. They learned to appreciate what they have and how to respect others and themselves.”

Lauren and her family achieved success with the help of Four Oaks. After they grew older and their years at Achievement Academy were over, the kids became heavily involved in extracurricular activities at school, including football, drama, orchestra, choir, show choir, and marching band. Thanks to the educational and social supports they received in their early years and the hard work their mother did to help them succeed, their dreams for the future were limitless.

“The staff at Four Oaks met me where I was. They directed me to resources that helped me stay on track to reach my personal goals and those I had for my children,” said Lauren.

Through prevention services like Achievement Academy, children and families receive services early on, before a crisis occurs. This is a key factor for success now and throughout adulthood.

Prevention services look at challenges a family may be facing, and early intervention helps to prevent a family from encountering a crisis situation. Solutions include education, mentoring, family strengthening, employment, housing, and more.

\*Name and photo changed to protect privacy



## IT ALL STARTED IN A RED BRICK FARMHOUSE IN RURAL BERTRAM, IOWA, IN 1973.

The founder of “Boys Acres,” wanted to provide a home-like setting for boys who had nowhere else to go. He recruited a board of local businessmen to raise funds and help grow the venture. These volunteers looked into the faces of “troubled” kids and chose to see the boys’ potential for success.

The group home sat on nine acres and housed 10 boys, ages 10-15. The boys earned allowances by doing chores on the small farming enterprise. They enjoyed a safe environment, attended school in Cedar Rapids, received counseling, participated in extra-curriculars, and experienced the stability of caring adult role models.

An aspirational vision started Boys Acres, but the mission grew with the community need. In 1979, the group home was redesigned to offer residential treatment, with the goal of transitioning the boys back to their homes or into foster homes.



## FOUR OAKS: THE EARLY YEARS

In 1979, Boys Acres hired a new Executive Director, Jim Ernst. With the change in leadership came a change in service focus: The group home became a residential treatment program for pre-adolescents—the first of its kind in Eastern Iowa.

The agency changed its name to Four Oaks in 1984 to reflect expanding and increasingly diverse services. The inclusion of family in the child’s treatment remains an enduring hallmark of the Four Oaks philosophy.

By 1985, a constant waiting list for Four Oaks services prompted a fundraising campaign to raise \$1.5 million for a new facility. When the Smith Center, Four Oaks’ new Cedar Rapids headquarters, opened at 5400 Kirkwood Blvd. SW in 1988, 15 children from the Bertram facility were moved to the new building. Within two weeks, the Smith Center was at capacity, serving 40 children.

## COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES: THERAPEUTIC CLASSROOMS OFFER STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS

While attending a large high school, Trevor\* often took advantage of the vastness of the building to hide from teachers to avoid work. In such a big school, Trevor was flying under the radar. A victim of bullying, he often escalated to physical aggression when frustrated.

In an effort to help Trevor overcome his struggles, his school district enrolled the teen in its Four Oaks Therapeutic Classroom. The program uses personalized care that takes into account each student’s specific mental health diagnosis and needs. The Four Oaks team collaborates with mental health professionals, teachers, and families in a comprehensive approach, so the whole picture of the youth is taken into consideration when developing a plan for success, including any prior trauma they may have experienced.

When Trevor arrived for his first meeting with Four Oaks, the team was struck by how engaging, polite, and mature he appeared. In the first few weeks of school, however, the team began witnessing more of Trevor’s avoidance behaviors. When presented with work, Trevor would complain of exhaustion and place his head on his desk. Trevor also had difficulty accepting constructive criticism without giving his opinion in return.

Over the following two years, Trevor began to grow into a different person. With continuous support and feedback, Trevor learned that constructive criticism was given to build him up, not break him down.

He successfully graduated high school and moved on to vocational training. The key to his continued success and subsequent stable employment was the ability to take direction from a supervisor and accept feedback to improve his work skills. Trevor’s success in adulthood is what the Four Oaks mission is all about.

Four Oaks provides community-based programs like Therapeutic Classrooms to allow children who need support services to receive the help they need at school or at home, preventing the need for follow-up treatment. These services put children who are at risk and their families back on the track to success.



## HISTORY AT A GLANCE

- 1988 Construction of the new Smith Center at 5400 Kirkwood Blvd SW in Cedar Rapids is completed. The 44-bed residential treatment facility, complete with a gym, classrooms, and administrative offices, welcomes preadolescent boys and girls, and remains Four Oaks headquarters today.
- 1988 Four Oaks establishes Iowa’s first specialized residential treatment program for adolescent males with problematic sexual behaviors at the original Bertram site.
- 1989 Three 10-bed facilities are constructed at the Kirkwood Blvd site to house an expanded Foster Group Home Program.
- 1991 The 44-bed preadolescent residential treatment program at the Smith Center becomes the Psychiatric Medical Institute for Children with Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) accreditation.
- 1996 The McIntyre Center is completed at the Kirkwood campus, housing adolescents ages 13-18 with serious emotional and behavioral problems.
- 1997 Youth Homes of Iowa City merges with Four Oaks, the first merger of child welfare agencies in Iowa.
- 1998 Four Oaks is accredited by the National Council on Accreditation.
- 2001 Jane Boyd joins the Four Oaks family.
- 2005 Four Oaks adopts the “expect success” vision.
- 2006 Four Oaks acquires Gerard in Mason City to bring residential programs and other services to Mason City and surrounding communities.
- 2007 The Affordable Housing Network, Inc. (AHNI) joins the Four Oaks family.
- 2010 Four Oaks launches the ground-breaking TotalChild® program. This comprehensive, long-term approach helps children achieve stability in all areas of their life, then follows them to adulthood to maintain success.
- 2016 The agency expands TotalChild® to include TotalChild® Workforce and its renewed commitment supports young adults until age 26.
- 2023 Four Oaks becomes Iowa’s sole foster family Recruitment, Retention, Training, and Support (RRTS) provider.



## TREATMENT SERVICES: FOUR OAKS HELPS A YOUNG WOMAN HEAL AND SUCCEED

Sara\* came to the Four Oaks Psychiatric Medical Institute for Children (PMIC) residential treatment program in Mason City with a history of explosive and disruptive behaviors.

As a young child in Haiti, Sara witnessed horrific violence and was left with no family to care for her. She was adopted by a family in the United States.

Sara needed additional behavioral and mental health support during this transitional time in her life, and her adoptive family sought help through residential treatment. Unfortunately, Sara struggled to find a program that met her needs and she moved through several facilities. Sara’s treatment team was concerned about her future and her ability to successfully live on her own.

*Then she arrived at Four Oaks Mason City.*

One night, Sara became very upset and began throwing objects from the kitchen drawers. Numerous attempts to soothe her didn’t help. Then one youth counselor sat in a room just outside the kitchen to sing to Sara and, as time passed, Sara started to sing along. Hours later, Sara was calm and finally able to safely talk things out with the youth counselor.

The trauma Sara suffered as a young child had to be addressed before she could heal. The opportunity to do this happened at Four Oaks. Today, the child who was never expected to live on her own, let alone succeed, is a successful mom and nurse.

Sara put in the work to overcome her past and move forward. Four Oaks gave her the support and guidance she needed to become the successful woman she is today.

Four Oaks treatment programs like the Psychiatric Medical Institute for Children help youth who need multiple services and a higher level of care. The goal of treatment is to help children return to and live in an environment where they can thrive and flourish — with a family.

\*Names and photo changed to protect privacy



# reflect

## FOUR OAKS HELPS TO BUILD FAMILIES

Due to instability in their birth home, sisters Maddy\*, Izzy\*, and Ava\* were placed in foster care. For 940 days, the girls were unsure of what their futures held. Through Four Oaks Foster and Adoptive Family Connections, they finally found permanency with an adoptive family. Now, the tight-knit sisters are growing up together in a warm home surrounded by loving parents, two brothers, two dogs, and even a pig.

The girls' adoptive parents, Heather and Matt Peterson\*, credit Four Oaks with enabling them to fill their home with children's laughter. Faced with infertility, the young couple decided to become foster parents in the hopes of ultimately providing forever homes to children in foster care. First came older brother Zach\*, whose adoption was finalized two years prior to the sisters' arrival. The family doubled in size with the adoption of Maddy, Izzy, and Ava. The family grew once more with the adoption of Ethan\* one year later.

Heather said, "Four Oaks has given me the opportunity to become a mother through adoption. Without them, we would not be where we are today with our family."

Children who come from complex backgrounds, like the three sisters, often cope with trauma from their past. Four Oaks worked with the girls and their family through the ups and downs of their early lives. In all, a total of six different Four Oaks services have supported the girls, their two brothers, and their parents, helping to provide them with additional skills and tools to ensure the entire family succeeds. Through TotalChild®, Four Oaks will continue to follow the girls and their parents throughout their childhood and into their young adult years, offering assistance when needed.

Every child deserves a safe, loving, and supportive family. Foster and adoptive families play a crucial role in providing a stable and nurturing environment for children in crisis. Our foster and adoptive families help us build a world where every child has the opportunity for a safe and happy childhood.



\*Names and photo changed to protect privacy

## FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

Children enter Iowa's foster care system because their family is in crisis. When parents cannot take care of their kids, foster care is intended to be a temporary solution on the path to building a safe and stable family. Children in foster care may have trauma, and physical and mental health challenges. The goal is to return children to their home, but if that is not possible, they will be placed in an adoptive family where they can thrive.

Since 2007, Four Oaks Family Connections has recruited, licensed, trained, and provided support to foster and adoptive families statewide who open their homes—and hearts—to children in crisis. Family Connections is not a child placement agency. Its goal is to retain stable, nurturing, and diverse families to keep children safe from further trauma and assist them in their transition to permanency. Children in foster care often thrive when they can maintain relationships with biological family members.

## FOUR OAKS WINS STATE CONTRACT FOR FOSTER CARE TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

In 2023, Four Oaks Foster and Adoptive Family Connections won a new, statewide contract to manage foster care support services throughout Iowa.

Four Oaks is contracted by the state to recruit, train, support, and retain foster parents.

Four Oaks previously provided these services in 69 of Iowa's 99 counties and supported over 2,000 foster families in those counties.

The new contract sees the organization acquiring training and support for the entire state, serving an additional 1,400 foster families in the most western region of Iowa.



The Gazette • Sunday, June 18, 2023

### Four Oaks is sole Iowa provider of foster care support

C.R.-based nonprofit will mark its 50th anniversary in July

By Ellen Malachuk, The Gazette

**CEDAR RAPIDS** — Four Oaks, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this summer, will become the sole provider of foster care parents recruitment, retention, training and support for the state starting July 1.

Under the \$14 million contract with Iowa Health and Human Services, obtained by The Gazette, Four Oaks will take over the foster care support for the western part of Iowa, in addition to maintaining support for the rest of the state.

The Cedar Rapids-based organization, which started as a small group home in Bertram with 11 boys, now provides a wide range of family and child welfare services and support to more than 25,000 Iowa families annually.

It turns 50 in July. Four Oaks is funded through a combination of state contracts and grants, federal grants and private donations. Four Oaks is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

#### THE DAYS OF BOYS ACRES

Four Oaks began in a small group home known as Boys Acres in 1973 in Bertram, outside Cedar Rapids. The group home housed almost a dozen boys who had no other place to go. The boys played, ate and went to school like other children, making their own family within the home, longtime Four Oaks employee Deb Knake said.

Knake, who plans to retire soon after working at Four Oaks since 1979, recalled an overwhelming sense of belonging among the kids at Boys Acres and how crucial it was to their experience at the home.

"So we would be at the Hardee's and the person waiting on us would say, 'Oh, these are all your children,' and one of the whippersnappers would say 'yes,

### Four Oaks/Mission is to 'expect success'

FROM PAGE 10

#### Iowa children in foster care, by county



Four Oaks is looking to create a cohesive foster care program by setting training and support for the entire state. One major goal of the plan, O'Neil said, is to bring foster families to serve in all Iowa communities.

"When you can bring children to their homes or close to their homes, they're just going to do better overall. And that's why it's so important to have foster families that will commit their time, love and resources to really giving a child that environment in which they can grow and develop."

Under the C.R. State Plan Act of 2017, the state and Four Oaks are required to use in-kind contributions to share the responsibility to share of need. However, Four Oaks began similar initiatives decades ago when the state and Four Oaks were required to support foster care services, Knake said.

"When I look at the vision that Four Oaks has — that children give up been in families — the agency's work on the perspective that we need to look holistically at the work we're doing — what are the children and families needing."



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# Affordable Housing Network, Inc.

## HOUSING STABILITY

The TotalChild® approach especially highlighted the negative impact of housing instability on a child's ability to be successful. To help address this gap, from 2012 to 2017 Four Oaks operated a five-year federal demonstration grant, Partners United for Supportive Housing-Cedar Rapids (PUSH-CR), that helped provide families quick access to safe, stable housing.

PUSH-CR was a collaboration among Four Oaks, the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), the University of Iowa, and Four Oaks affiliate the Affordable Housing Network, Inc. (AHNI).

During this time, Four Oaks also partnered with AHNI to address a shortage of affordable housing units in Linn County. One of the most visible initiatives was the TotalChild® Wellington Heights neighborhood revitalization project, in which AHNI purchased more than 100 blighted properties to rehabilitate into decent, affordable rental units and single-family homes.

The initiative was so successful that a phase two project, Sustaining Wellington Heights Neighborhood Progress, launched in 2019. That five-year project is acquiring an additional 15 single-family/multi-family properties, which AHNI will fully rehabilitate and offer at affordable rates for sale and owner-occupied homeownership.

These efforts address more than just housing stability: They are prime examples of the synergy TotalChild® embodies. Four Oaks, AHNI, and other community partners are committed to improving neighborhoods, developing communities, and enhancing the lives of residents and their families. The TotalChild® approach supports these efforts by comprehensively addressing children's basic needs to achieve success in adulthood, including permanent housing.

When children hurdle all obstacles to success, Iowa's families, homes, neighborhoods, and communities are stronger.

Four Oaks and AHNI continued to expand their efforts in Dubuque in the 2010s and 2020s. In 2019, AHNI began to work with the City of Dubuque to advance goals for additional and improved affordable housing.

AHNI has not only renovated multiple houses in Dubuque and sold them at affordable rates, but also rehabilitated Bishop Block, a historic brick landmark in downtown Dubuque. The Bishop Block project ensured 32 workforce housing units were retained and improved.



## HOUSING SERVICES

As Four Oaks entered the new millennium, it added much-needed prevention services to its continuum of care. Helping kids and families overcome obstacles before they are in crisis can avoid the need for more costly intervention or treatment services. Housing stability provides the foundation necessary for individuals and families to work toward self-sufficiency. In 2007, the Affordable Housing Network, Inc. (AHNI), an affiliate agency of Four Oaks, was founded, with a mission to provide decent, safe, sustainable housing that promotes stability for individuals and families and creates community.

AHNI currently manages more than 420 affordable housing units in Linn County, including apartments, duplexes and single-family homes for rent, and affordable home-ownership opportunities. To date, the organization has acquired and positively impacted 120 properties in the historic Wellington Heights neighborhood, including 80 full rehabilitation projects, as well as 40 affordable housing units in Dubuque.





Mike McDermott, Bill Richter, Jim Ernst, Carlton Tronvold, Chuck Kent, Terri Christoffersen, Bob Chiusano, and Anne Gruenewald

## 50 YEARS OF GROWTH

While existing programs were rapidly growing, in the 1990s Four Oaks developed new programs and expanded into new communities. Federal grants to enhance and study adoption and residential services brought national recognition. Juvenile delinquency programming was added. Four Oaks services were now available throughout the eastern half of the state, including Dubuque, Waterloo, and Des Moines.

In 1997, Youth Homes of Iowa City merged with Four Oaks, becoming the first merger of child welfare agencies in Iowa.

That same year, a residential treatment program opened in Independence. In 1998, Four Oaks was accredited by the National Council on Accreditation.

In 2001, Jane Boyd Community House became part of the Four Oaks family, adding after-school and summer prevention programming for youth. In 2006, Four Oaks acquired Gerard in Mason City and continued to offer residential treatment and other services.

## FOUR OAKS EXPANDS PRESENCE IN DUBUQUE

In 2023, the Affordable Housing Network, Inc. (AHNI) purchased a former Loras College dormitory in Dubuque.

The building has a rich history of serving the community. It housed students enrolled in the college's music program for nearly 30 years, until college leaders decided to transition the program and students back to the main campus. Prior to the college using it for dormitories, the facility was home to the Sisters of the Visitation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Four Oaks community services in Dubuque have relocated to the new Four Oaks location, and AHNI plans to develop the upper floors for affordable housing.



Marion residential facility after renovation

## FOUR OAKS BEGINS UPDATES TO FACILITIES

After decades of continuous use, Four Oaks' residential facilities are in need of some improvements to brighten and modernize spaces, increase safety, and make youth feel more comfortable. Having a welcoming and vibrant environment is known to affect mental and behavioral health in a positive way as individuals seek healing.

In 2022, Four Oaks received a generous gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. Scott said at the time that she hoped Four Oaks would be able to, "convert the funds into meaningful services for others." She said, "Helping any of us can help us all. When we help one group, we often help everyone."

After a detailed strategic planning process, Four Oaks began using these funds for renovations to residential facilities. Four Oaks sites with residential treatment programs are getting new paint and flooring, as well as new furniture for youth.

# 30 YEARS OF THE FOUR OAKS GOLF CLASSIC

# 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

The Four Oaks Golf Classic has become one of the most respected and time-honored tournaments in Iowa. Held annually at the Cedar Rapids Country Club, the tournament hosts more than 200 golfers every summer. In its 30-year history, the event has raised more than \$4.3 million to support children and families across the state.



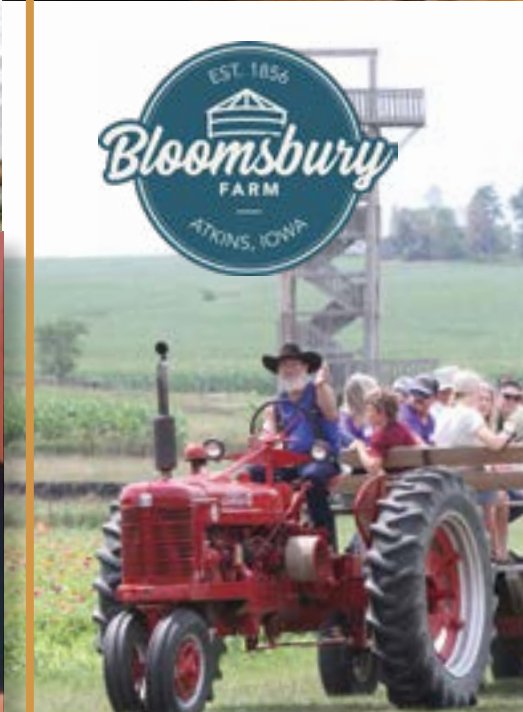
Chris and Suzy DeWolf, Lil' Drug Store, join Achievement Academy children at the Four Oaks Golf Classic.



Special events to celebrate Four Oaks' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary kicked off with an exhibit at The History Center in Cedar Rapids, highlighting the five decades of impact the organization has had throughout the state. Current and former staff as well as members of the Board of Directors attended the grand opening event.

Four Oaks reestablished its partnership with Bloomsbury Farm in 2023 and Bloomsbury planted a corn maze of the Four Oaks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary logo. At the ribbon cutting for the maze reveal, Four Oaks President and CEO Mary Beth O'Neill announced a Foster Family Day that would provide admission to Bloomsbury Farm for 200 foster families thanks to a generous sponsorship from Chelsey's Dream Foundation.

The Four Oaks Board of Directors also hosted a celebration luncheon for long-term supporters at Cedar Rapids Country Club in 2023. It was a great opportunity to reflect on the amazing things we've accomplished with our community partners in the past 50 years.



1996



1994



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**Renee Hawkins**  
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**Debbie Craig**  
*Chief Advocacy Officer*

Pictured [left to right]: Renee Hawkins, Jen Royer, Danielle Rocca, Mary Beth O'Neill, Steve Schuring



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