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COMPELLED TO CARE

by KRISTIN WILEMAN SHELDON (/EN/AUTHORS/KRISTIN-WILEMAN) on August 16, 2021

 PRINT



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 Message This

Jane VanDeventer is no novice when it comes to foster parenting. She and her husband, parents to two biological children, have been foster parents for more than 40 years and provided a temporary home for over 300 children. Despite their seasoned experience, a few years ago VanDeventer, 66, found herself enmeshed in a series of situations with several children that made her heart heavy and her emotions raw. She felt isolated because of her circumstances.

Desperately needing community, VanDeventer signed up for a **Compelled to Care** (<https://www.compelledtocare.com/>) retreat for foster moms and listened to stories of others who had walked through situations like hers. She felt relief as other foster mothers told of kids' challenging circumstances, such as family reunification. She felt understood as others outlined the joys of walking kids through difficult situations — plus the heartache that often accompanied those moments.

VanDeventer's story is mirrored by hundreds of families in the Olympia, Washington, area that have been impacted by Compelled to Care, an organization that works to serve foster, kinship, and adoptive families by building community and support. The ministry started in 2015 as a small group out of **Evergreen Christian Community** (<https://www.evergreenpnw.com/>), an Assemblies of God church, after pastors felt called to support families in the **foster system** (<https://www.compelledtocare.com/about>).

Over five years, the small group grew from 10 parents and 20 kids to over 80 parents and 150 children. Programs that launched as small gift drives and baby formula donations boomed to envelop community development and systemic foster family training. This year, the ministry officially became a nonprofit, with the intent to grow ministries in surrounding counties and increase impact in the larger Olympia region.

Ashley Wambach, director of Compelled to Care, has deep personal connections to foster ministry. In 2015, she and her husband, Nick, felt the Lord calling them to become a foster family. Wary of bringing additional kids into their home, the couple began donating diapers and baby wipes. They began volunteering for different events and supporting others engaged in foster care.

"After a few months of donations and other acts of kindness, the Lord told us that what we were doing was 'beautiful disobedience,'" Wambach says. "We were doing good things, but we weren't doing what He had called us to do."

They thus began opening their home to children in the foster care system, two of whom they have permanently adopted into their family.

Through her experiences, Wambach is keenly aware of the difficulties foster families face. The 34-year-old president and executive director says that while foster recruitment is a worthy cause, a bigger issue lies in family retention. Her focus corresponds to national data. The **National Foster Youth Institute (<https://nfyi.org/>)** says a majority of foster families report struggling with isolation and lack of support. One-third of respondents said they lack adequate training to deal with the unique situations of kids in the foster system.

Compelled to Care has created a multipronged solution to these problems.

Across the community, the nonprofit holds **regular family dinners (<https://www.compelledtocare.com/familydinners>)** that create opportunities for attendees to meet other foster families. The programming includes a gift drive for graduating seniors as well as a **Care Box Project (<https://www.compelledtocare.com/thecareboxproject>)** for kids entering foster care.

"It's incredible the amount of connection and encouragement that can happen by taking your kids to the park together or sitting down over a meal," Wambach says. "Simple acts like this break down isolation and are absolute game-changers for foster families."

The organization also hosts an **annual restore retreat (<https://www.compelledtocare.com/restoreretreat>)** for foster moms.

"When you become a foster parent, you're exposing your heart to be broken and your family to be forever changed," Wambach says. "You're picking up the mission field and putting it in your house, and as a mom, you need people around you who understand what you're going through."

Despite the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic imposed on the organization, Wambach and her team pivoted an in-person model without compromising the mission. In the past year, Compelled to Care developed a **Facebook community group (https://www.facebook.com/compelledtocare/?ref=page_internal)** of over 500 people interested in receiving a foster care license. The group also uses social media platforms to connect families, build community, and share resources.

Partnering with several other groups, Compelled to Care has developed **We Foster WA** (<https://www.facebook.com/wefosterwa>), an initiative to unite foster care organizations into a one-stop-shop for people interested in learning more about the process. Through this conglomerate, Wambach has helped host community fairs and caregiver appreciation events.

Together, these programs have worked to increase foster engagement in the Olympia area, and Wambach says involved families have stayed in the system longer and report higher connection and satisfaction with their involvement in foster care.

VanDeventer says Compelled to Care has filled a much-needed void.

"We've been in the foster system for a long time and have craved community — especially faith-based community," VanDeventer says. "We're so grateful for the community Compelled to Care has built, and the opportunities we've had to be ministered to and to minister to others."

Wambach says the intrinsic motivation of a relationship with Jesus keeps her going.

"Engaging in the foster system is a response to the Great Commission," Wambach says. "The gospel is our motivation. Being like Jesus requires caring for the vulnerable."

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