

# Caritas

## Quarterly

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*/'karita:s/ (noun) love of humankind, charity*

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*Carrie, pictured here enjoying Kanab's natural beauty, is one of the many dogs that enjoy their time at Best Friends before being adopted by a loving family.*

## Best Friends Animal Society's mission is to bring about an enormous impact on the animal community nationwide

Zoom in on a map of Utah and you'll find something special just north of the Arizona border on Highway 89. Nestled comfortably in the red rocks among Zion, Bryce Canyon and Grand Canyon national parks is an organization making a massive national difference in saving animals: Best Friends Animal Society.

The Best Friends organization spans the country, far beyond its jewel of a headquarters near Kanab, Utah, site of the animal sanctuary and organizational headquarters. Best Friends operates programs in places ranging in size from Bentonville, Arkansas, and Salt Lake City to Atlanta, Houston, Los Angeles and New York City. Its reach is extensive, even if its mission is simple: "Save them all."

Holly Sizemore, chief mission officer for the organization, said that the Best Friends organization has been very successful in that mission since it began its work in 1984. At that time, she said, 17 million dogs and cats were being killed at U.S. shelters simply because they had no safe place to call home. As of 2021, that number had dropped to 355,000.

"Best Friends' mission is to bring about a time of no more homeless pets," said Sizemore of Best Friends Animal Society's goal to have the country



*Pip and Percy are two of the many cats that enjoy their time at Best Friends Cat World before they are adopted or fostered.*

move to no-kill shelters by 2025.

It's not just dogs, nor is it just cats that get the Best Friends treatment. The sanctuary is home to about 1,600 animals at any given time, including bunnies, birds, goats, pigs, horses and wildlife. Current sanctuary residents include Jessica the Rabbit, Suvali the Owl, Suzie Q the Goat and even Rupert the Pig. With every animal, Best Friends assists in giving it a lovely life in the shelter, all while committing resources to the animal's adoption. It's a big goal, but Best Friends looks to meet it every day.

Much of that force for good comes from Best Friends' staff, numbering 400 at the sanctuary and another 400 at other Best Friends locations. Many of the Best Friends staff have longstanding experience in sheltering and/or animal welfare. Onboarding policies help get new team members up to speed on Best Friends culture, the mission to "save them all" and their policies and procedures.

Sizemore mentioned that the idea of "best

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practices” is not her favorite phrase, especially with the connotations of top-down authority. “We know that what is ‘best’ is constantly evolving and changing,” she said of the work done by Best Friends and countless others advancing animal welfare. Allowing team members to give input and field ideas is paramount to their mission to save all animals. It involves engaging the right experts in decision-making and operating with a mindset of continued improvement from all stakeholders in the process.

That willingness to train and commit to lifesaving work is shared by volunteers, too. In 2021, 5,500 people volunteered at the sanctuary, while 4,100 more volunteered at either a lifesaving center or event elsewhere.

Educating volunteers on the mission is great, but Best Friends goes beyond recruiting committed volunteers. One of its biggest points of pride is its work done with shelters across the country to collaborate in animal treatment, fostering and adoption. Everyone interviewed for this story spoke highly of so many other shelters contributing to this lifesaving work.

Said Sizemore, “Collaboration has been key to saving homeless pets. Best Friends currently has more than 3,600 network partners across the country.”

These are shelters, rescues and other animal welfare organizations working together to improve lifesaving measures for animals in their communities.

Sizemore said that Best Friends helps other shelters by providing grants, marketing and PR tool kits, fundraising information, subsidized adoption fees and more — all to improve each shelter’s lifesaving commitment and share best practices.

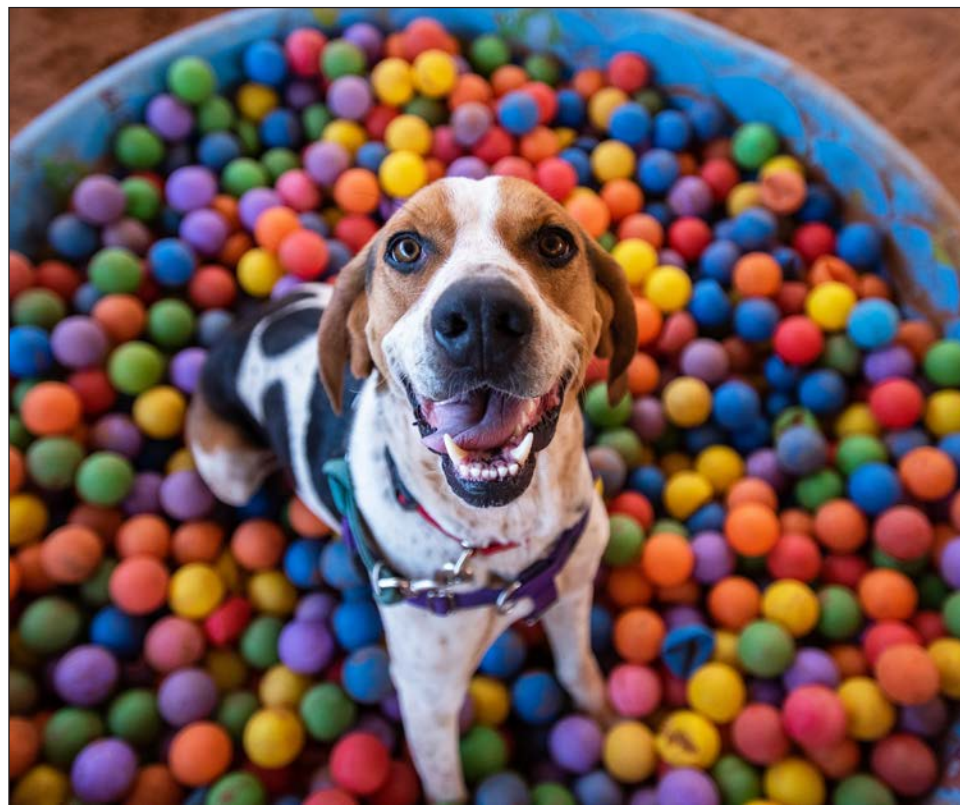
Proprietary information and “us versus them” language never enters the vernacular of Best Friends. “The goal is to provide shelters and animal welfare organizations with tools to start saving lives right away and sustain that momentum,” said Sizemore.

One of the ways that Best Friends works with these partners comes via their embed program.

During a tour of the sanctuary



*Best Friends staff member Caroline works to help newborn puppies nurse and get ready for adoption or fostering at the sanctuary or elsewhere.*



*Stax, an abandoned dog, enjoys the ball pit, one of the activities for animals at the sanctuary, as he awaits adoption.*



*Suvali, a misplaced barn owl, is part of an expansive bird program operated by Best Friends Animal Society.*

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Member  
**FDIC**

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facilities, Chrissy Rollison, volunteer and VIP experience coordinator, said that the goal is to meet fellow shelters wherever they are. Best Friends employees then embed at other shelters and work hand-in-hand with staff there to continue this mission of saving as many animals as possible. As they share resources and work together, animals at those shelters often find stable homes with loving families in the community.

It's all a matter of pooling and utilizing everyone's resources. As Best Friends and its partners come together and communicate, animals are transported to new shelters for adoption, other animals move to the sanctuary and all work toward the same goal — save them all. Sizemore said that the pandemic has been a sign of community resilience to come together and save animals. Thousands of adoptions and fosters have taken

place in the past two years. But it has also laid bare how precarious many humans, and therefore pets, feel.

Where poverty, resource insecurity and affordable housing issues pop up, so do shelter issues. Even in places where everything is more secure, local ordinances and homeowners' associations prevent would-be adopters or foster homes from giving these animals another chance.

The organization sees the responsibility to save all the savable pets as one shared by every person in every community — Kanab, Los Angeles and cities and towns across the country. This unified approach highlights how the greater shelter community is committed to creating the best life possible for these animals.

"I knew in the beginning of these programs how positive it would be in saving tens of thousands of animal lives," Sizemore said, "but what I didn't expect was how profoundly it would affect shelter staffers' lives."

Sizemore reported that many animal shelter workers expressed how they went from beaten-down and burnt-out to hopeful and proud to come to work every day.

Sizemore continued, "The work is still hard, even when you are saving every savable pet. But for

most shelter workers, who often seek jobs in shelters because of their deep love for animals, that hard work is truly a labor of love when you are confident that every pet entering the shelter will get the resources, care and community support they need to be saved."

Since no-kill shelters make up 52 percent of the 4,000-plus animal shelters in the U.S., there is a lot of work to do for both Best Friends and their partners to continue pushing animal fostering, adoption, healthy homes and to keep going when the going gets tough to save these animals.

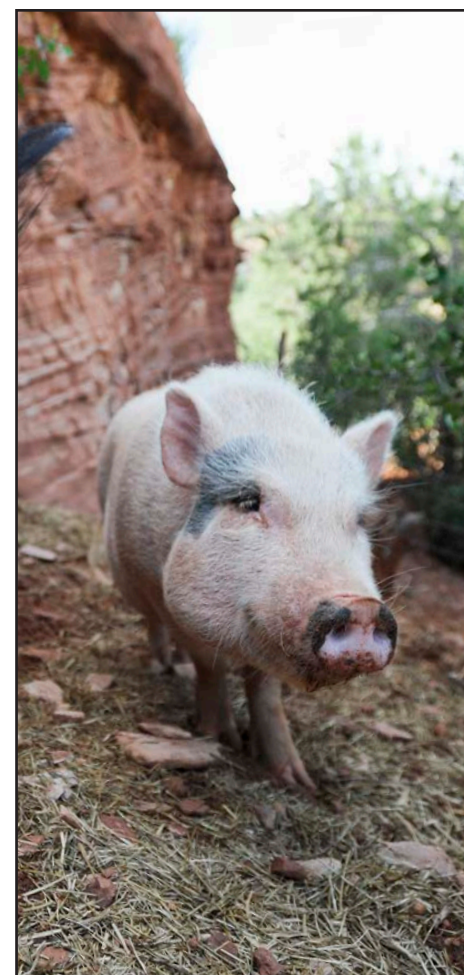
Even through the challenges of the past few years, the efforts to save them all are not in vain. More than 4.8 million more animals have been saved in America's shelters since 2015.

"We know that with this kind of progress, we can see our no-kill 2025 goal come to fruition, but it will take all of us to make it happen," said Sizemore.

Best Friends' current goal is to bring that no-kill policy to every shelter in every town in every state. It's ambitious, but one that the organization believes can be achieved by uniting in purpose with every possible animal welfare organization and individual animal lover in America.

Sizemore put it best: "It's only by working together that we will save them all."

Two by two, by a dozen or by



*Rupert, a pig rescued by Best Friends, runs around with his fellow rescues in search of some fun in the form of cool mud and food.*

hundreds, they continue their mission, hand-in-hand with every community partner, neighbor, volunteer and staff member: Save them all.



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*Jessica the Rabbit plays with a puzzle containing toys and treats at the Best Friends sanctuary.*



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# Special Olympics Utah



Challenging and fun, Special Olympics offers many different sports programs for athletes of all abilities.

## Let's play ball!

### Special Olympics Utah strengthens communities through sports programs and inclusivity

Changing society is a lofty goal. But little by little, one catches glimpses of improvement and suddenly it all feels more achievable.

Special Olympics is laser-focused on what it does best — providing those with and without intellectual disabilities an opportunity to grow through sports. Through sports, the organization is showing how inclusivity and being engaged in community events are the best ways forward.

Scott Weaver, president and CEO for the organization, said as much. Two years with Special Olympics Utah (and 42 years in other Special Olympics roles) confirms things are improving not just for the organization, but for various communities in Utah.

These athletes are from all over — Vernal, Logan, West Valley, Herriman

— playing soccer, basketball, track and field and others with their classmates. The costs — somewhere between \$500 to \$2,000 per program for coaches, practices, skills-building and fun for the entire season — are fronted by Special Olympics Utah. It's competitive, too.

“The best kept secret is that we're a sports organization for anyone and everyone,” said Weaver. Every ability is welcome. The difference is its deliberate inclusivity for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

There is a misconception that the events only coincide with Bob Costas and the Olympics. Nope. Well over 2,000 athletes participate in these statewide programs that go in season. As summer moves into fall, Special Olympics is starting flag football. Educating and informing volunteers, donors, families and athletes, “[Special Olympics Utah] is much more than an event; it's a lifestyle,” Weaver said.

The events are a culmination. But

the training, the games, the leadership skills, the winning and losing as a team — these programs are where the real wins are made.

“We believe that, through sports, you can teach a lot about life.”



Special Olympics athletes come from many different backgrounds but look to hone their skills in different sporting activities.

said Haley Nall, special events manager for Special Olympics Utah. Sportsmanship, training, fitness and new sports skills are important lessons, but athletes also learn confidence and how to communicate with others — lessons everyone can enjoy. And those lessons continue in Special Olympics and in life. Student athletes who continue with these programs can take up leadership positions and opportunities in high school and beyond. It's literally all fun and games as they play sports with their classmates, coworkers or colleagues.

Through these, the athletes from Special Olympics Utah's Unified Sports and Unified Champion Schools programs can grow in their sports and

CONTINUES next page



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compete at higher levels as desired. “Special Olympics is not a token program,” said Nall. Everyone, she emphasized, is welcome. “We feel like [Special Olympics programs] allows them to grow and pushes them past just participation and to continue to advance and develop.”

Special Olympics Utah sees a lot of success, especially in schools with buy-in at every level. Participation comes from students and teachers all the way through superintendents and school boards to run these sports programs.

And they’re buying into way more than just sports. Special Olympics Utah offers health screenings for participants across the state, delivered by experts. Vision, audiology, general medical exams and dentistry are free for those with intellectual disabilities.

As Luciano Colonna, senior director of health and grants management, described it, the bonus is twofold. “Athletes walk away with free glasses or some other benefit,”

he said. But one of the best benefits is how athletes learn and engage with health experts, promoting their own health and well-being and speaking up for their own care.

It’s the self-advocacy work done here that Colonna finds particularly impressive.

“The true experts are the individual athletes themselves,” Colonna said. Those individuals with different needs combine forces with empowering schools and healthcare professionals, and it builds a

community of people who understand. Colonna mentioned how, as these programs all grow together, family members and others can have periods where they get to see their children succeed in many different lights.

**CONTINUES on page 10**



*Community partners are hugely beneficial to the organization. Here, Hughes General Contractors offered to take athletes in the company jet all the way to Orlando for a national competition.*

**Inclusive Leadership**

**Whole School Engagement**

**Unified Sports**



**SPECIAL OLYMPICS UTAH MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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- Courtne Worthen**  
Director  
Unified Champion Schools
- Yolanda Kunder**  
Director, Sports Development
- Haley Nall**  
Director, Special Events Manager
- Luciano Colonna**  
Senior Director  
Health & Grants Management
- Frank Crowther**  
Area Manager, Northeast
- Boston Iacobazzi**  
College Growth
- Karen Kunder**  
Office Assistant
- Jennifer Percival**  
Healthy Athletes Program
- Vanessa Tuckett**  
Volunteer Coordinator
- Ullby Dyson**  
Young Athletes

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front of key decision-makers.

“She has taken our Unified Champion School strategy and made it a statewide initiative,” said Boston Iacobazzi, who oversees college growth and participation as well as the Unified Champion Schools program. That effort to bring the project to more high schools while also expanding its reach in middle and elementary schools has helped people like him to stay engaged in the community. Watching people build skills and flourish is fun and empowering.

“It’s why I love it,” Iacobazzi said of the inclusion revolution. “I’m excited to see how they change and grow as they move forward and then graduate high school.”

It’s led to a lot of positives, according to Iacobazzi: a decrease in bullying in schools, increased social and emotional learning and better relationship-building from students who just had to show up and participate. It all goes to push communities in the right direction and engage more people who may have been sidelined.

Weaver is excited for the continued growth of those programs and the introduction of new sports like cheerleading, dance, cycling, alpine and cross country skiing and

snowboarding. Each new sport will reach new athletes and sponsors in Special Olympics Utah’s four geographic areas and helps Unified Sports expand in the areas outside the Wasatch Front.

But in each of these areas, residents and community members are taking the initiative. In Vernal, the Walk for Inclusion organized by the Uintah Dinos, raised \$14,000 to help Special Olympics Utah fund the Special Olympics programs in their area. School districts and surrounding universities are actively engaged as well, helping with resources like

facilities, volunteers and recruiting those with disabilities to be on their sports teams.

So what does the organization need? Weaver said efforts so far have been great, but more participants, volunteers, sponsors — “the whole nine yards” — would be a huge benefit for the program.

Their work continues as they get the word out about Special Olympics Utah and bring in those with or without disabilities to participate in something bigger than themselves. It’s changing the lives of athletes, families and communities for the better.

That’s the societal change brought about by including anyone of any ability, where all are working for good outcomes together. The effects, Colonna explained, build opinion leaders who can keep pushing for inclusivity at every level of society, paving the way for others to navigate the world successfully.

A few of the key sponsors for the organization are Harmons Neighborhood Grocer, Merit Medical Systems, Utah Section PGA, Les Olson IT, AlphaGraphics and Mountain America Credit Union. Harmons has sponsored Special Olympics Utah for over 40 years to keep these activities free for athletes. Fundraising events, government grants, individual donors and corporate sponsors help with resources, but the connections generated through this work are invaluable.

First Lady Abby Cox has helped push these Unified Sports programs and get Special Olympics Utah in



*The spirit of competition is alive and well for people of all abilities in Special Olympics.*



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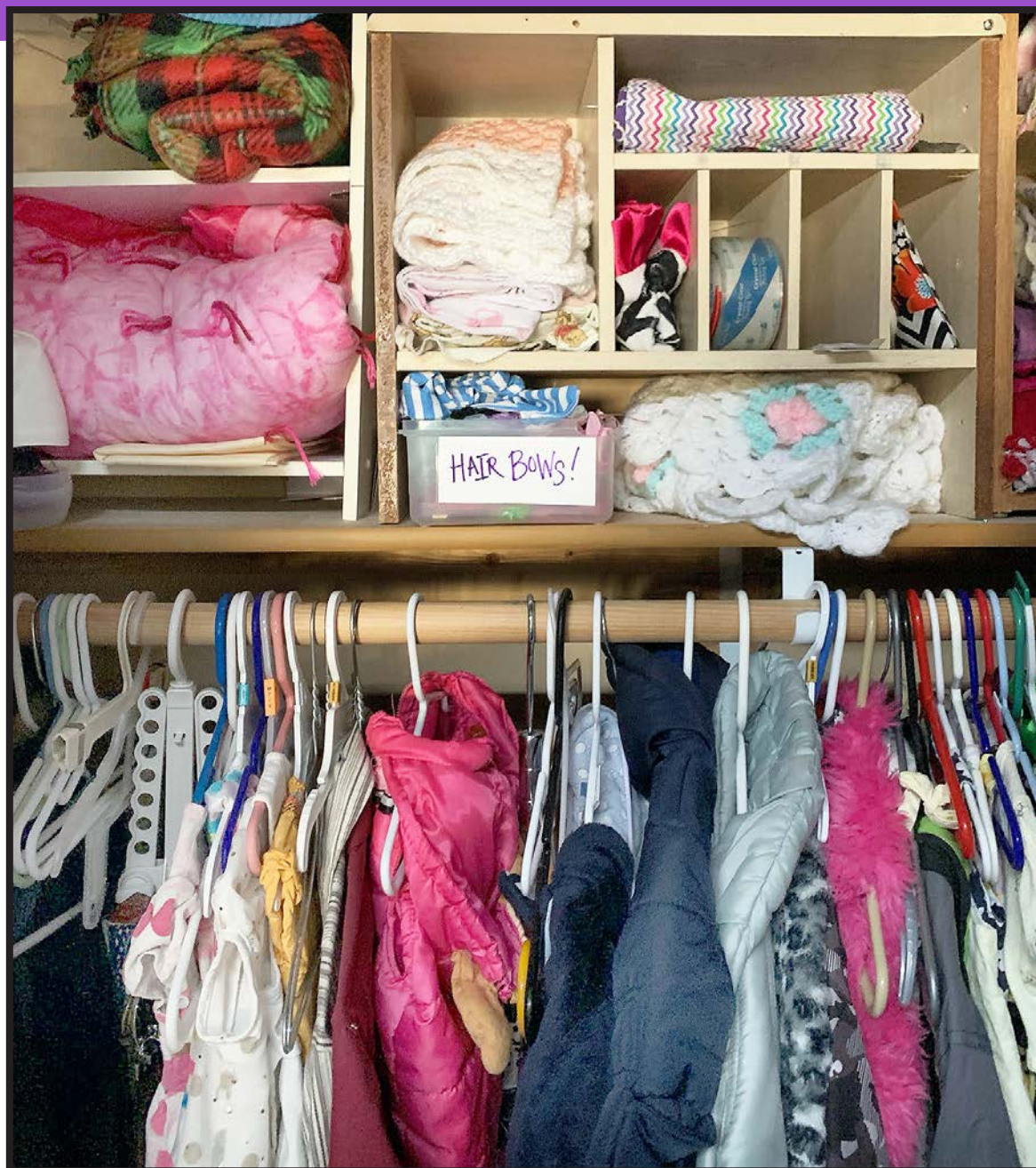
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## Adding emphasis to motherhood



*Regan Barnes, founder of Momivate, wants to meet mothers wherever they are with Momivate's free resources and events, like Revolving Closets.*

*Momivate seeks to change the conversation around motherhood by supporting mothers unconditionally and recognizing the strength of their essential role*

Regan Barnes has seen the awesome power of motherhood.

The founder of mom advocacy group Momivate is not only a champion of getting mothers the resources they need to help raise their children, but she's a "mom-of-eight" (say that three times fast and see if the name "Momivate" takes on another meaning).

Barnes remembers how her idea of motherhood was shaped by

conversations with her own mother, a single mom of five.

"I wish I had time to be a mom," Barnes recalled her mother saying. It didn't make sense at the time — Mom was mom. She had five kids, what else was there?

After becoming a mother herself, Barnes could explain it.

"It's not just shuttling kids around to their events," she said about motherhood, "nor is it keeping

kids away from danger." Instead, Barnes said, "It's a repetitive, long-term commitment to modeling strong relationships, creating a positive home atmosphere, managing time and self-discipline, building healthy habits and rising to challenges both as a family and as an individual."

Wherever her own mother felt she fell short, Barnes doesn't blame her. Resources for motherhood rarely are abundant


and widespread enough to meet community needs.

As the mentors, teachers, medics, playmates and advocates for their children, the roles motherhood encompasses are endless. Barnes saw a need for an organization that would expand society's view of motherhood.

**CONTINUED on page 14**



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Midwest  
COMMERCIAL INTERIORS

FROM page 12

Momivate is in its nascent stages since its official designation as a 501(c)3 organization in January 2020, but she sees the potential. So far, all of the participants in the organization are volunteers. Momivate had an intern for a time who helped it gain a greater organizational footing, but Barnes compared those early days to buying an empty field and attempting to build something on it.

It's similar to how she sees motherhood. Of her choice to become a mom over 22 years ago, she explained. "Even though I didn't know what I was signing up for, I signed up for it and I'm going to use it as a stepping stone instead of a stumbling block." She spoke of spiritual convictions helping her to move forward with creating this organization and continue to provide guidance in its growth.

Thanks to the help of her co-founder, Leigha Westover, and other stalwart volunteers, that empty field now has a foundation in place and bricks are on-site ready to go in. To assist mothers of all types, Barnes said that their organization tries to help with "EMT," even if the emergency is a little different.

The "E" is for education, or, as she explained, knowing what mothers can do to help kids succeed, not just survive. Momivate's website is chock-full of resources for moms to consider or use. Whether that is through reading articles about motherhood or finding free activities to do with children, Momivate wants to bring those resources as close as possible.

"M" is for money. "There's so much good stuff out there," said Barnes about the resources and the knowledge available for mothers, "and we want to offer it for free, resolving the problem of requiring moms to pay when they aren't earning money from motherhood."

"Revolving Closets" is one program that does just that. Momivate utilizes the resources of volunteers and participants to create a type of pop-up donation center for children's clothes where moms can pick up new clothes for their growing kids and donate their old ones — all for free. The organization also links mothers to employment opportunities with



Momivate wants to get the word out about motherhood, like at the career fair pictured, where they wanted to emphasize that motherhood is a fulfilling career.



Momivate celebrated International Women's Day with Trina Kinyon (USOA Ms. Utah) acting as emcee for the event.

CONTINUES next page



### Board and Staff

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companies that value motherhood through The Mom Project, gaining them flexible hours or remote work.

Time is the final piece of the acronym, which Barnes said manifests in work-life balance. With society's breakneck pace, going back to something slower seems like a pipe dream.

"We're so concerned about efficiency," she said. "Motherhood wasn't meant to be efficient. Childhood wasn't meant to be efficient. It's a long-term, repetitive process as designed by Mother Nature. Aligning with it, instead of fighting against it, will only be to our benefit — even if the economy has to adjust."

It is here where Barnes sees Momivate's work as most beneficial. Barnes is thrilled with the opportunities happening in women's lives to be leaders in the workforce and in public life but doesn't want motherhood to take a backseat to employment. She wants both. Statistics like the 2 million women who have dropped out of the workforce — and not returned — since the beginning of 2020, (according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) prove she's not the only one to feel this way.

To respond to this need of time and without sacrificing their role as mothers, Momivate has tried "MomPods." A few days of the week, whenever the moms decide, the moms gather at one of their homes and one mom acts as the "first responder" or "kids mom" and addresses any immediate needs of the combined group of children, while the other "working mom" can focus on their work or whatever else they need to do remaining in the house.

"You're still close by and you can help with whatever you need to help with," said Jessica Pino, Barnes' neighbor and a participant in a MomPod. Pino enjoyed how the MomPods added a little more formality to the typical "child swap" for a parent who needed to run an errand. More importantly, she loved how the explanatory booklet from Momivate helped create a mutual understanding of boundaries and expectations on what daily activities would look like — lunch, watching TV, etc. — when the moms were together.

"You're not panicked about something out of the ordinary," said Pino. Her experience being the "working mom" afforded her the consistent, focused amount of time to do her work making baby clothes on MomPod days. She also enjoyed being the "kids mom" too, when Barnes had her turn as the working mom, because she was close by. When resources may be slim for mothers, MomPods seek to combine resources to create a better way forward.

Beyond MomPods, Barnes talked of letting children be a part of society and creating greater visibility. Doing so, she said, would bring motherhood into not only recognition, but prominence. Barnes talked about an ideal interaction in this revolutionized world, where one could walk into the bank and be asked to wait a few minutes while the teller finishes nursing her baby.

Hope is in the air as some major and small companies have started to move in this direction, providing on-site childcare and daycare for working mothers during work hours. Barnes mentioned a friend — a college professor — who brought her child along with a nanny to the college. During the professor friend's work hours, the nanny would attend to the child's immediate needs and when the mother had free moments, Mom could be present with her toddler.

"Sometimes, the value of just the presence of a mother is underestimated," said Barnes. "Playing with kids, doing all of these games and being the source of entertainment isn't the only way to be involved. Sometimes, kids just need to be around to hear their mom's voice and know she's near."

Pointing to Mount Rushmore, a colossal project that took 15 years and hundreds of sculptors to complete, Barnes expressed a goal to "create a Mount Mothermore, featuring inspiring women who personify the nobility of this crucial role." She spoke of women like former Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski and talk show personality Meredith Viera who publicly pursued the "profession" of motherhood even at the risk of their other professions.

It will be a constant climb to bring Momivate's mission forward. But it's a mission that Barnes and her fellow volunteers are excited to undertake as they welcome others to join the challenge.



*Janeen Brady and her family sing a song to celebrate International Women's Day in an event sponsored by Momivate.*



*Volunteers and participants in Momivate's Revolving Closets program can take and donate gently used clothes, shifting financial resources away from clothing and into other, more needed, areas.*



*The organization looks to elevate mothers and women with events and resources that help connect the community.*



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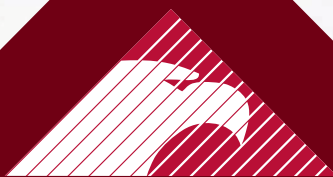
When you reach out, rather than hold back.

When you dig in and really get to work.

It's an attitude created by forming connections,  
supporting one another's goals, giving back and getting things done.

Because better starts here—with all of us.

We're Mountain America, and we're here to ***guide you forward.***



**MOUNTAIN AMERICA**  
CREDIT UNION