

# The Palm Beach Post

Thursday, February 26, 2015

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

First edition | One dollar

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: THERESA PEAK AGE: 45

## Villages of Hope coordinator lauded for helping foster kids

By Dianna Smith  
Special to The Palm Beach Post

For someone who doesn't have a biological child of her own, Theresa Peak sure knows plenty about motherhood.

This 45-year-old from Palm Beach Gardens pours her heart and soul into her job as program coordinator with Villages of Hope, a program in Lake Park that helps those who age out of the state's foster care system at 18. It's one of the many programs available through Place of Hope, a faith-based, state-licensed child welfare organization in Palm Beach Gardens that provides family-style foster care, family outreach and a myriad of other services.

Peak counsels the young people in her charge, helps them continue their schooling and find jobs, and she teaches them how to build self-esteem. She wraps her arms around them when they need love and she's there to offer stern words when they've gone down the wrong path.

Place of Hope Executive Director Charles Bender recently presented Peak with a Decade of Dedication - Guardian of Hope award for her dedication to foster children. It's a big honor, Peak admitted, but she isn't one to brag.

Though the award, which now sits in her office, is a gem for Peak because every time she glances at it, she's reminded of the impact



Theresa Peak is program coordinator with Villages of Hope, a program in Lake Park that helps those who age out of the state's foster care system at 18. CONTRIBUTED

she's made on countless lives.

"I was totally stunned. I can't even remember the whole award because I was so thrown," she said.

Peak is from Maryland, but has lived in South Florida for 25 years. She took classes at Palm Beach State College and worked for the Palm Beach County School District before taking a job at the Palm Beach Regional Juvenile Detention Center.

Today at Villages of Hope, she focuses on young people who aren't yet ready to conquer the world on their own. Many don't have places to live or the money to pay for daily necessities, so Villages of Hope offers transitional housing for them and counseling as well. Peak serves as their mentor, supervisor, friend and, sometimes, mother.

"I play the role of tough

love, but they know I love them," Peak said. "I often say that I play whatever role they need me to play, whether it be mom, sister, friend or program coordinator. We want to make sure they can trust me."

Peak had always wanted children of her own, but learned early in life that she wasn't able to physically have them. The irony of that is that Peak certainly does have children. She has more than most mothers out there. And she's proud of each and every one of them, just as any mother would be.

"I see the results of those who are still working jobs that we helped them get and some are starting their own families. That's rewarding," she said. "I might not have birthed them, but I feel like I birthed them. They are my family."

### Q & A

#### What are your hobbies?

Increasing my knowledge through reading (my Bible and other self-help inspirational books) and spending time with my "grandsons," Josiah and Connor.

#### What would you do if you were invisible for a day?

Rest and relax on the ocean ... something about it calms me.

#### If you could have dinner with anyone in history, who would it be?

A lady after my heart, Mother Teresa. She had such an enormous heart to give and to give back as I do.

#### What is the best advice you ever received?

"Do unto to others as you have them do unto you."

#### What event in history would you have liked to have witnessed?

So many I didn't know which one to record.

#### What is your favorite childhood memory?

Playing in the snow with my brothers and going down the hills on the sleigh.