

**Pastor's Notes: The RISE UP Cooperative - Part 1 of 2****February 14, 2021**

*On Feb. 5, 2021, I interviewed Sandy Pricer, Basilica parishioner and President/Co-founder of the RISE UP Cooperative, a social service initiative that I am supporting as a board member, to help at-risk teens and young adults gain life skills. The first part of our interview is presented here.*



**Fr. Carter:** What is the RISE UP Cooperative? What inspired you to found the RISE UP Cooperative?

**Sandy Pricer:** RISE UP is an organization that is bringing life and leadership skills to teens and at-risk youth. Because of the pandemic, we are all virtual right now, obviously, with hopes for that to change in the near future, or at least sometime this year. But we bring the workshops to them in order to help them have a better tomorrow; teaching them those skills that sometimes so many of them, even adults, many times lack, just to help them have a foot up. I have always had a passion for teens. My background is in social services, and I worked with them in group homes and foster homes before Joe and I started having our own children. And then we decided to adopt from foster care. Our eyes were opened to how much they can lack as far as what they've been taught, because they're going from home to home. They are in traumatic situations. Their brain connections aren't the same as a typical child. They have so many things going against them.... After we adopted, we wanted to do more. I started doing the research, and I realized that there are a lot of service gaps, a lot of agencies that are trying to provide things like this to their clients, but they're overworked just like so many are. A fresh set of eyes, or bodies - I felt could come in and fill those service gaps. And the encouragement and support so far has been outstanding and amazing. And we've been truly humbled by it in order to help reach these kids in those ways.

**Fr. Carter:** What are some of those service gaps in particular that that inspire you to what the RISE UP Cooperative does?

**Sandy Pricer:** As a young adult, I personally didn't know how to budget or finance or take care of my money. We just this week had a banking workshop where we had a former banker come on and just talk to the kids about how to look at their money, how to save their money, the hidden things that take our money away that we're not even aware of. Things that can just help us have that foot up. Some other topics: dress for success. So many people don't understand how important your first impression is, specifically in an interview. How to interview - the things that you need to come in, and your body language, and things you should or shouldn't say. So many people are just unaware of it just because they've never been taught it before, and it's not something they teach in school. So it's a what-you-don't learn-in-school program. Time management, conflict resolution, different things like that, personal health.

**Fr. Carter:** There are things that you would think that people would be getting in a normal ordinary family environment. But they're not having a normal ordinary family environment, due to their circumstances, and maybe you're bouncing from family to family, so there's not a continuity of care that normal families would be able to give to children. And is that the gap that you're filling?

**Sandy Pricer:** Yes. With my biological children, from birth, we've been pouring into them these things, right? But when a foster kid comes into a home like that, you might only have six months, maybe a year, maybe less, to be able to pour into those children those things. And it's just not enough time to be able to do that, because you're fighting behaviors, you're fighting school, helping them with homework, because they're also missing things in schools, because they're bouncing from school to school. So those foster parents, and even adoptive parents, are doing other things. And this kind of gets put on the back burner.

**Fr. Carter:** When did you start the RISE UP Cooperative? And has it gone smoothly so far?

**Sandy Pricer:** We officially started in September of 2020, five months ago. It depends on your definition of smoothly. We very much have been blessed in in the support and the encouragement, like I mentioned earlier, and it's been a humbling experience for people to say, "I love what you're doing," and "Let me know how I can help you in any way." It has been a lot smoother than I had anticipated. It became a full-time job overnight, which I wasn't anticipating. I should have anticipated it. But it is what it is. And it's been a true blessing to be able to have this opportunity to pour into lives that otherwise I never would have been able to do.

**Fr. Carter:** Awesome. Now you started this nonprofit, cooperative in the middle of a pandemic. What kind of things have you had to do to adapt yourself to this environment?

**Sandy Pricer:** I am very thankful for technology and things like Zoom like we're doing right now. Because of the pandemic, we have not been able to get in-person with these workshops. And that is definitely something that I want to do very soon. However, I have been able to reach teens across the country. We've had, over the last couple of weeks, teens from Colorado and teens from Ohio. I have an organization somewhere in the Midwest that advertises for us. They get all the things around the country, for teens, that are available for them, and they share it with their clients. Being able to reach farther and wider, and virtual, even when we get in person, will be something we will continue to do, so we can continue to reach those teens that can't come in person when we find a location.

**Fr. Carter:** So maybe there is a silver lining behind the pandemic that it made a wider reach than you otherwise would have shot for.

**Sandy Pricer:** Absolutely. It opened my eyes to things that I never thought were possible. I never thought it would be a country-wide endeavor.

*The interview will conclude in the Feb. 21 pastor's notes. Mrs. Pricer will speak about the future of RISE UP and how people can get involved. The full video and transcript of the interview will be available on the Basilica's website.*