

# Giving Sole


HEARD-KNOWN-LOVED






For Inquiries:  
[info@givingsole.org](mailto:info@givingsole.org)

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 [@givingsole](https://www.facebook.com/givingsole)

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## OVERVIEW

Giving Sole is an Arizona-based nonprofit organization providing new brand-name shoes to children in foster care.

Through various partnerships with group homes and the Arizona Department of Child Services, Giving Sole provides foster children with not only the shoes they need but the shoes they personally select. We not only provide foster children with proper footwear, but we provide them the footwear they want. Giving Sole also provides these kids with a handwritten note from the Giving Sole team and a branded sports bag.

Since 2018, Giving Sole has provided over 1,000 foster children with new brand-name tennis shoes. Along with the new shoes, Giving Sole also seeks to ensure these kids are heard, known, and loved by giving them each an encouraging handwritten note to let them know they are enough and cared about in their current circumstances.



## THE STORY

Giving Sole was founded by then 10-year-old Gavin Henss and his parents, Shawn, and Alia Henss. Giving Sole has a simple yet powerful mission: to remind foster children that they are more than their circumstances and that their voices matter. It's a mission that's been close to the Henss' hearts ever since they became a short-term foster family to a little girl.

Gavin and his parents weren't sure what this help would look like until the basketball game that catapulted Gavin into Internet stardom. In March of 2018, Gavin and his dad attended a Cavaliers and Suns NBA game. Gavin had made a sign for LeBron James, showing his support for all the things LeBron does off the court to help his community.

"After our [foster daughter] left our home, we weren't emotionally ready to foster another child," says Shawn. "But Gavin still wanted to find a way to support children in foster care. He wanted to help."

LeBron showed some love back to Gavin by giving him his shooting sleeve that he wore in the game that night. This exchange was not only captured on live tv but also went viral the next day all over social media. After Gavin realized that he was all over social media, he asked his dad if he could use this newfound fame to help children in foster care. It was shortly after that that Giving Sole was born.



After seeing the impact his sign made on so many sports fans, Gavin and his family decided to use this same message as the platform for Giving Sole.

In homage to the charity's inspiration, Giving Sole gifts children in foster care brand new athletic shoes in a branded Giving Sole bag. Along with each pair of shoes is a handwritten note from Gavin with inspiring messages like, "I can't wait to see what you'll grow up to be" and "You are so much more than your circumstances."

Gavin and his parents hope each message reminds kids that their voices matter and that the shoes are a constant reminder of their inherent worth. It's also why Giving Sole gifts only brand new, brand name shoes.

"When you're a kid, walking into school with a brand-new pair of Nike or Adidas shoes is a big deal," says Gavin's dad, Shawn. "We want to give these kids not just what they need, but what they deserve." When the Henss family fostered a little girl for almost a year before she moved to her forever home, they became aware of all the challenges these children face. When the Henss' went to pick her up from the DCS office, all she had was the clothes on her back and a clear trash bag with a couple pieces of clothes (which did not fit her) and a little stuffed animal. That experience has stayed with the Henss family ever since, which is why they want to give these kids the best experience possible with new shoes.



## THE FOUNDERS

In 2016, the Henss family embarked on their journey into foster care by welcoming a 13-month-old girl into their home. During the year she spent with them, they became more involved in the world of foster care. However, they also realized the many needs within the foster care system.

After their foster daughter left their home, the Henss family still wanted to do more for other children in foster care. So, they worked as a family to find a way to do just that.

Their conversations with the Arizona Department of Child Safety led them to focus on providing foster children with brand-new tennis shoes. They quickly learned that many of these kids had never owned a brand-new pair of shoes, and many needed shoes that fit properly, as they were either too small or too big.

However, the Henss family didn't stop at shoes. They decided that with every pair of shoes they gave, they would also provide a tote bag for the child's belongings and a personalized note to encourage them and remind them that they are more than their circumstances.

The Henss family is committed to continuing their efforts to support foster care kids, one pair of shoes at a time. Their goal is to ensure each child knows they are heard, known, and loved!



## **FAQ**

### **What is foster care?**

Foster care is a temporary living situation for kids when they are removed from their biological parents. This can happen due to abuse, unsafe environment, death of birth parents, or voluntary placement.

### **How many kids are in foster care?**

As of 2023, there are about 10,000 children in foster care in Arizona and over 300,000 in the US.

### **Why tennis shoes?**

It's a sad reality that many children in foster care don't have shoes that fit them properly. Furthermore, some foster families struggle to afford new shoes for their foster kids. When we provide these children with new shoes, we not only help them but also relieve some of the stress that their foster parents might be experiencing while caring for them.

### **How do you find the kids that need shoes?**

We work closely with the Arizona Department of Child Safety and other local foster care agencies. They email us the child's first name, age, shoe size, and any shoe preferences.

### **Why brand-new name-brand tennis shoes?**

For a lot of these kids, getting a pair of new shoes is a first-time experience. The stories we've heard about their reactions are incredible. It's heartwarming to see how surprised and grateful they are when they receive their requested shoes.

### **What if you can't find the exact shoe the child wants?**

If we are unable to find the desired shoe, we will search for the closest alternative and include a note to ensure the child feels heard.




## MEDIA

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## PRESS COVERAGE



Giving Sole  
Documentary



Now This  
Media



Trevor Story  
(MLB TV)



The List  
TV Show



Homes for Good  
Partnership





## TESTIMONIALS

“Giving Sole has provided hundreds of new shoes for children in foster care. The excitement of the child picking out a new pair of shoes is remarkable. For some children this is the first time they are able to choose the exact shoe that they have wanted. Shawn Henss and his team at Giving Sole make every child feel special and they take the time to ensure that the child will have the shoes of his or her liking. The Children’s Heart Gallery appreciates everything that Giving Sole does for Arizona’s Children.”

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***Heather : Program Specialist for AZDCS***

“Here at DCS, we love partnering with Giving Sole! For a number of years now, they have helped support many youth in group homes as well as youth attending the Children’s Heart Gallery events to ensure they receive a brand new pair of shoes that they want and that fits. The kids always have the biggest smile on their faces when we deliver shoes! Giving Sole always goes above and beyond to help youth in foster care feel special.”

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***Lisa : Program Specialist for AZDCS***

“Shoe shopping might appear like a seemingly ordinary task; however, Giving Sole demonstrated to my family and I that when picking out a pair of sneakers for a foster child, the act takes on a whole new meaning. When shopping with Giving Sole, my family learned about the incredible organizations that aid foster children and how even a basic need such as shoes that fit is often overlooked. Not only does Giving Sole meet this need, but Gavin and Shawn take care to see that the child or teen gets exactly what they want--the pair that will make the recipient feel their absolute best.”

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***Melissa : Donor***





Giving Sole's commitment to providing shoes to children in foster care has generated a lasting impact on the lives of these vulnerable youth. Their efforts go far beyond the simple act of supplying name brand shoes to youth in care, they represent a fundamental investment in the self-esteem, dignity and well-being of each of the youth they serve. I have witnessed first-hand how excited and amazed these youth are when they get that new pair of shoes. I have heard them say "I never thought I would ever have shoes like these", their smiles go from ear to ear when they get those new pair of shoes, words can't say enough about how wonderful this is for these youth. Giving Sole helps these youth have a sense of normalcy and fit in with their peers. It's not only the youth that are impacted by the amazing things that Giving Sole does, but also the caregivers. They have expressed their gratitude for all Giving Soles has done for the youth they are caring for. Thank you, Giving Sole, for all you do for our youth!

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***Kelley: Program Specialist for AZDCS***

I am beyond grateful for the incredible opportunity to have worked alongside the Henss family and Giving Sole over the past few years. Words cannot express how fulfilling it has been to witness the power of their compassion and work in meeting the needs of deserving children living in our local foster care system. Their promise of providing brand new, best of the best, shoes to these deserving kids helps shape their mission of letting each of them know that they are heard, known, and loved. Seeing the joy and excitement on their faces as they receive their new kicks is truly priceless. The Henss family's dedication and passion for service and to making a difference in these children's lives is beyond inspiring. Thank you, Giving Sole, for your friendship and for allowing me to be a part of this amazing journey.

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***Tim : Giving Partner***



#THESESHOESHAVEANAME



Giving Sole