

Though Matt Bouchea passed away as a young man, he lived a life of consequence. His recognition of pain in the world compelled him to serve communities in need. Crisis can splinter families and leave the most vulnerable among them exposed. Children who emerge from this chaos endure countless hardships, but their struggle was not something that Matt was willing to let them face alone. In his role as a Social Worker, he would bear witness to their experience and his work affected him deeply. He would talk, and listen, and encourage. He would show empathy and offer support. He would leverage every conceivable resource to respond to their needs. And when his workday ended, their experience stayed with him.

With any story of hardship impacting young people, we recall with pride the many children Matt worked tirelessly to support through their cruel, impossible experiences. It is fitting that Matt's memory, along with this program, will continue to serve this community. With this initiative, foster children will begin each school year with a new pair of shoes. They won't be forced to fit their unique shape into a shoe formed around someone else's foot. It is said that walking a mile in someone else's shoes isn't as much about the walk or the shoes; it's about being able to feel what they feel, and understand why they are who and where they are. This is empathy, one of Matt's greatest gifts, and these shoes might serve as an ongoing reminder of that. The children he served left a lasting impression on him. His life and memory, along with this program, inspire hope for a new beginning. Hope endures, as will the legacy of Matt, and the impact of this program.