



### FOSTER CARE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Gail Bardin  
 Jay Belloli  
 Nikoo Berenji  
 Nancy Dannevik  
 Patrice Gibson  
 Tim Hartley  
 Rosemary Hyde  
 Celina Lew  
 Jeanette Mann  
 Kim Miles  
 Gail Portrey  
 Anne Riffenburgh  
 Nicole Rodger  
 Lacreata Scott  
 Judi-anne Simmons  
 Melanie Williams  
 Dwana Willis  
 Pamela Wilson  
 Anne Wolf  
 Trula Worthy-Clayton

### Mission Statement

All Saints Church Foster Care Project provides community education, public policy/advocacy and direct services for children and youth who have been removed from the care of their parents to the supervision of the state. The Project recruits and sustains volunteers who serve in public and private agencies or work on special projects designed to enhance the lives of foster, homeless, transitional and incarcerated children and youth.

## ART WITH HEART: ANOTHER “SELLOUT” FOR FCP’S 9TH ANNUAL ART SHOW

On Sunday, April 23, a variety of bold, creative works of art were on display at Sweetland Hall at All Saints Church as part of Foster Care Project’s 9th annual Art Show. The artists included foster youth, as well as young adults who had recently transitioned out of foster care. Many of the children’s art teachers stopped by, eager to show their support and demonstrate pride in their students. The show was well-attended by All Saints parishioners and community members, and by 11:00 a.m.

all the art pieces—paintings, drawings, photographs and sculpture—had been sold, with the total proceeds going to the artists. And, for the first time ever, some visitors to the show commissioned artists to make new works.

Although the quick sellout was thrilling, the show’s organizers worried that the plethora



Steering Committee Member Jay Belloli curated the show.



of “sold” signs and lack of available art would disappoint those arriving later. Jesse Castillo, a professional artist, former foster child, and longtime friend of Foster Care Project, came to the rescue, bringing in other works of art from the trunk of his car, so that late morning visitors would have additional art to view and potentially purchase. Jesse exhibits his work at the Art Show every year, serving as an

inspiration while graciously offering guidance to foster youth interested in pursuing a career in art. Once again, FCP steering committee member Jay Belloli served as Art Show Curator, with significant organizational support provided by longtime FCP volunteers Susan and Dan Flaming. Additional help with sales, room set-up and break-down, lunch and more was provided by 22 past and present FCP steering committee members and other supporters. When asked what the Art Show meant to him, Jay Belloli replied, “It proves that foster youth can make wonderful art, and their experience of being in the show gives them such

## ACAC Hosts Celebratory Graduation Lunch for Foster Care Youth

On May 19th, FCP's Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program hosted a delicious, fun-filled luncheon at El Portal in Pasadena in honor of four college-bound foster care youth. The newly minted high school graduates were joined by proud family, friends and support people. Abel Ramirez, owner of the popular Yucatán restaurant, and a wonderfully community-minded gentleman, provided decorations and discounted rates on the food. Soft drinks were on the house, and El Portal staff offered VIP service. As a special treat, each graduate received a festive piñata to commemorate the day. ACAC coordinators Beth Gertmenian, Rosemary Hyde and Anne Riffenburgh organized the event.

Graduating seniors included three boys, Walter, Antonio, Mark, and one girl, Jenniffer. Walter plans to attend Rio



The Fantastic Four! ACAC honors college-bound high school graduates (from L to R): Walter, Jenniffer, Antonio, and Marc.

Hondo College; Mark has been accepted to Citrus College; Antonio is heading to Long Beach City Community College. Jenniffer is excited to be enrolled at Cal State Los Angeles and is already thinking about how to furnish her dorm. Each student received luggage, a \$50 Target gift card, and an invitation to attend ACAC's annual back-to-school shopping spree. ACAC's "adopted" DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez has been closely involved with all four students for several years, providing ongoing support and strongly encouraging their educational aspirations. "These kids have worked hard to overcome chaos and trauma," Sylvia said. "Each has been fortunate to find a stable, positive and nurturing environment. All have displayed a drive to succeed and a strong desire to create a good life for themselves. It has been my privilege to support them in their efforts."

FCP and ACAC offer warm congratulations and best wishes to these four amazing students!



positive feedback about what they can create."

Many of the young artists who attended the exhibition were thrilled to meet and discuss their work with potential buyers. Their enthusiasm was returned measure for measure by attendees. FCP Steering Committee member Judi-anne Simmons said, "The art was amazing and so meaningful. And the artists—some of whom were really young--were awesome."

Foster Care Project would like to thank the artists, teachers, volunteers and visitors for helping to make the 9th annual Art Show one of the best ever. We are already looking ahead to another wonderful exhibition next year.



Foster Kids Are Our Kids

## Sending Out a Big Thank You to Backpack Donors

A great big thank you to 17 of our FCP friends and supporters, who contributed a total of 34 festive backpacks (and a smattering of lunch boxes) to our annual backpack drive. Donors were provided with a child's name, age, and an informational blurb, such as: "Likes purple and the characters from Frozen" or "Enjoys sports, especially the Dodgers and Lakers." Our 17 contributors went all out, choosing age-appropriate backpacks, with attention to individualized style and preference, as well as durability. Each backpack was filled to the brim with much-needed school supplies, and all were received by the July 27th deadline, giving our "adopted" DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez plenty of time to make deliveries before the start of school. Backpack drive coordinator Beth Gertmenian said, "Thanks to all who made this project a huge success. The children will be thrilled to start school so well-prepared."



**Her Car Runneth Over:** Our "adopted" DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez prepares to deliver some of the 34 backpacks donated by caring FCP friends and supporters.

## Bicycle Donation to CSUN's Resilient Scholars Program



**Wheels of Fortune:** Members of CSUN's Resilient Scholars Program receive bicycles donated by Bikes4Orphans.

A special bicycle donation to CSU Northridge's Resilient Scholars Program took place on CSUN's campus on June 21st. A total of 17 foster youth received new bicycles from Bikes4Orphans. The bikes were purchased at cost from Pasadena's Velo Cycle Shop, and the shop also made a monetary donation to Bikes4Orphans. A Velo representative was on hand to train

the students about the bikes' features and make any necessary adjustments. Rounding out the party, locks and helmets were donated by the Reseda-based nonprofit, Focus on Children Now.

Bikes4Orphans was created by Shawnt and Sebouh Bazikian in 2012, while the two brothers were still teenagers attending St. Francis High School. Their goal was to help orphans around the world by providing bikes to improve access to education. Impressed by the Bazikians' drive and passion, Jeanette Mann, one of Foster Care Project's founding members, suggested that the brothers consider helping foster youth locally. The Bazikians educated themselves about the myriad obstacles faced by foster youth, including struggles with daily transportation. Motivated to act, they were referred to CSU Northridge's Resilient Scholars Program, which provides ongoing support and multiple campus resources to emancipated youth throughout their college experience. According to the program's website, without support services, less than 1% of all foster youth who attend a four-year university will graduate from college. When foster youth are provided with ongoing departmental liaisons, that figure rises significantly.

A small reception with refreshments and well-wishers marked the bicycle donation event. FCP Steering Committee member Melanie Williams said, "The students were so happy, appreciative and mature. They loved the bicycles and appreciated the recognition." Kevin Taylor, representing Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's office, presented Bikes4Orphans with a certificate of appreciation. Resilient Scholars program coordinator Jina Gonzalez voiced her gratitude to the Foster Care Project for facilitating the donation. Special thanks to FCP Steering Committee members Nikoo Berenji, Jeanette Mann, Kim Miles and Nicole Rodger, who each donated a bicycle.

## KUDOS! Pasadena Family Connect Visitation Program Named as Pilot for All of L.A. County

Family Connect Pasadena and the Pasadena Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) recently received good news: the highly praised Family Connect Visitation Program has been named as a pilot program for all of Los Angeles County. Since 2013, Family Connect Pasadena has trained volunteers to monitor court-ordered visits between children and their parents as part of DCFS's ongoing effort to reunite families separated because of abuse or neglect.

Five visitation sites are currently up and running (three in Pasadena, a fourth in El Sereno, and a fifth in South Pasadena), with two additional back-up sites located in Echo Park and Baldwin Park. The cheery visitation rooms—brightly decorated and stocked with fun and appealing toys and games—serve as a “safe space” where specially trained coach-monitors assist separated families in their efforts to reconnect and heal. The number of children and families served is expected to grow under the new mandate. The combined sites have the capacity to serve 26 families and 40 children each week.

Interested in becoming a volunteer coach-monitor in the Family Connect Visitation Program? The next training will be held October 20th, 21st, 27th, and 28th at All Saints Church. For more information, contact [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

## Update on Foster Care/Adoption Reception



Foster Care Project and its partnering agencies, Five Acres and RaiseAChild, celebrated Foster Care Awareness month on May 21st with a reception for those wishing to learn more about the foster/adopt process. Two All Saints families, who had been through the foster/adopt experience, generously shared their stories. Three families subsequently began the process of becoming resource parents, the first step in fostering and ultimately adopting a child. Information on the foster/adopt process is available on Sunday mornings at the Foster Care Project lawn table at All Saints Church. Another informational Foster Care/Adoption Reception will be held at the church in December.

For further details contact: [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

## FCP's Summer Shopping Spree: A Peaceful, Easy Feeling



**Shop 'Til You (Almost) Drop:** FCP shopping spree volunteer Lulu Henry teams up with 19-year-old Walter, who will be attending Rio Hondo College this fall.

Last year's Foster Care Project shopping spree was marked by smoke and ash in the air from a nearby wildfire. The year before, we experienced screeching fire alarms (smoke in the adjacent Starbucks' kitchen) as well as drenching thunderstorms. By comparison, our most recent back-to-school event was calm and uneventful. On July 29th, 25 children under the jurisdiction of the courts were accompanied by 29 FCP volunteers to shop for new shoes and clothing at Target Pasadena.

Each child was matched with one or two volunteers, who managed a \$200 donated gift card to spend on a variety of essentials: shirts, pants, school uniforms, socks, underwear, tennis shoes and more. The children ranged in age from four to 19, from preschool to college. Some were shy and quiet; others were take-charge fashionistas, but all were beaming by the end of the spree, pleased with their purchases and looking forward to starting the school year in confidence and style.

One memorable moment came at the end, when a shy 8-year-old stuck out his hand to a volunteer and whispered a heartfelt, “thank you.” Thanks to all who generously donated funds for this special event, as well as those who got up early on a Saturday morning to serve as kind, enthusiastic “personal shoppers.” We couldn't do it without you.



## FCP Seeks Thanksgiving Food Donations for Students and Local Families

Once again, the Foster Care Project will be collecting non-perishable food items to provide Thanksgiving dinners to foster care families in the Pasadena area. An additional food donation will be made to Lancer Pantry at Pasadena City College, which provides healthy, non-perishable food at no cost to currently enrolled students in need. Although numbers vary, recent studies show that an unexpectedly large number of college students are unable to find or afford nutritious food. Food insecurity is a notable problem for college students—especially among students attending two-year colleges and current and former foster youth.

If you would like to help with a donation, the following food items are especially welcome: Non-perishable hams, such as DAK hams (not the refrigerated kind), canned chicken, canned fruits and vegetables, instant mashed potatoes, soups, juices, and baby food. You may also provide a \$10 grocery store gift card and let one of our volunteers do the shopping for you. Please check expiration dates before donating and remember that only non-perishables can be accepted. Food items and gift cards may be dropped off at the FCP lawn table at All Saints Church on Sunday, November 5th and 12th. If you cannot drop off items at the lawn table, check at [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org) for an alternative site.



## Foster Care Project Welcomes Gail Portrey to the Steering Committee



**Gail Portrey, FCP's Newest Steering Committee Member**

Gail Portrey is not the type to let much grass grow under her feet. She spent more than 25 years leading business development efforts in the private sector, working mostly with minority, disadvantaged and women-owned firms, as well as multi-million dollar corporations. She earned a Masters in Communication Management from USC and an undergraduate degree from UC Berkeley. She has assisted numerous nonprofit organizations with strategic planning, grant writing and fundraising, including Mending Kids International, NMA, Hollygrove, the Joslyn Center and Burbank YMCA. In addition to her work with Foster Care Project, she teaches yoga, focusing on strength and flexibility for seniors, and stress-relief for people in grief recovery.

Gail began working with Foster Care Project in October 2014, serving as the chair of FCP's Development Committee. Thanks to her efforts and expertise, over the last two and a half years FCP has been awarded over \$45,000 in grant monies--a significant sum, which has enabled us to extend the depth and breadth of our mission. More recently, Gail became a member of FCP's Steering Committee. We are thankful to Gail for her contributions and ongoing commitment to improving the lives of children in foster care.



JOIN  
the  
Birthday  
Club

More than 100 FCP Volunteers are each matched with a foster child for whom they provide a wrapped birthday gift.

For information: [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

### Partnering Agencies

50/50 Leadership  
Aspire West, Pasadena  
Barrio Action Youth and Family Center  
California Youth Connection  
Cal Tech Y  
CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)  
Child S.H.A.R.E.  
COLORS  
County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services  
County of Los Angeles Probation Department  
EOPS Resilient Scholars Program, California State University Northridge  
First United Methodist Church  
Five Acres  
Friends of Foster Children  
Hathaway-Sycamores  
Hillsides  
Hillsides YMO  
Holy Family Services Adoption and Foster Care  
Imagine LA  
Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles  
Learning Works Charter School/Home Boys  
Maryvale (Rosemead address)  
My Friend's Place  
National Congress of Black Women  
One Simple Wish  
Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services  
Pasadena YouthBuild  
Public Counsel Law Center  
Raise-A-Child, US  
Rosemary Children's Services (Pasadena address)  
STARS at PCC  
The Alliance for Children's Rights  
Violence Intervention Program  
Vista Del Mar Child and Foster Care Program  
Young and Healthy

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Jeanette Mann, FCP Public Policy and Community Relations Chair

### Food For Thought

For the past fourteen years, the Foster Care Project has advocated for legislation, policies, and practices which would enable foster youth to graduate from high school and transition to college and/or technical training. Our efforts have focused primarily on the K-12 funding and systems of higher education. We have been heartened by the legislators, agencies, and administrators we have worked with to remove barriers and provide pathways and resources to productive adulthood for these children and young people.

In a recent study of community college students a majority of former foster youth were found to be hungry and homeless. Fifty-five percent were food insecure (defined as hungry or threatened by hunger), while almost seventy-five percent were housing insecure (defined as an inability to pay rent or utilities, moving more than once a year, doubling up or living with other people). Although hunger and housing are both important issues, we have previously addressed the topic of housing in this publication and will focus here on hunger.

The issue of hunger is not limited to community college students. The University of California system has made student hunger a priority. In July 2014, the UC launched the Global Food Initiative, designed to develop and export local and global solutions regarding food security, health, and sustainability. In March 2015, UC President Janet Napolitano allocated \$75,000 to each campus to support the effort. UC campuses have surveyed students in order to assess the scope of food security issues and have begun to implement short-term relief, where needed, as campuses explore long-term solutions that address student nutrition. Many UC campuses have food pantries and partner with local food banks.

In 2015, California State University Chancellor Timothy White commissioned a study to determine how CSU campuses were meeting the needs of food insecure students and to offer recommendations to ensure success and graduation for these students. Many CSU campuses have implemented programs for food insecure



students, ranging from small food pantries to large programs and support services.

At present, there is no system-wide plan to help combat student food insecurity issues in community colleges. However, some individual colleges have plans in place to help address the hunger needs of students through food pantries and food drives. The Lancer Pantry at Pasadena City College offers healthy, non-perishable food at no cost to currently enrolled students in need. The only requirement is a valid PCC student ID.

In the California legislature, Senator Shirley Weber introduced legislation addressing the issue of student hunger, which the Foster Care Project supported. AB 214 (Secondary education: student hunger) expressed the intent of the legislature to reduce hunger among college students in California. The bill clarified policies and definitions to simplify the administration of CalFresh (the federal food stamp program) for college students and required the Student Commission to notify Cal Grant recipients that they qualify for Cal Fresh.

AB 214 passed the Assembly and the Senate without a dissenting vote and has been signed into law by the Governor.

"This is just the first step," said Jeanette Mann, Chair of the Foster Care Project Public Policy Committee. "Hungry students have difficulty concentrating on their studies and learning. It is imperative that we find ways to feed and house our college students." If you are interested in learning more or would like to join us in addressing these issues, contact [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)