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All Saints Church Foster Care Project

# Newsletter

All Saints Church

## Foster Care Project



September, 2018

### FOSTER CARE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

- Gail Bardin
- Jay Belloli
- Nikoo Berenji
- Nancy Dannevik
- Patrice Gibson
- Tim Hartley
- Rosemary Hyde
- Liz Jackman
- Jeanette Mann
- Kim Miles
- Anne Riffenburgh
- Nicole Rodger
- Judi-anne Simmons
- Melanie Williams
- 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.

## “FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS”

### Foster Care Project Celebrates 15th Anniversary

**P**lease join us this fall for the commemoration of an important milestone: the 15th anniversary of All Saints Church Foster Care Project. Foster Care Project’s steering committee members eagerly anticipate reviewing accomplishments and honoring founding volunteers, donors, and other supporters with a celebratory luncheon on October 14th.



“I have been involved in many volunteer activities throughout my life, and I can say that this has been the single most satisfying volunteer experience that I have either witnessed or personally experienced...”

Megan Cooper,  
Volunteer Coach-Monitor,  
Family Connect  
Visitation Program

The seeds for Foster Care Project were planted in spring of 2002 at an All Saints Women’s Issues Committee (WIC) meeting. Mary Moreno Richardson, an Episcopal chaplain at Juvenile Hall, discussed work being done with girls awaiting sentencing for felonies.

Inspired by the presentation, founding FCP steering committee members Jeanette Mann and Gail Bardin spent the next year visiting different agencies and researching the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of the community: foster children and youth. Later the mission expanded to include homeless, transitional, and incarcerated children and youth, as significant

“Believe it or not, you’ll be able to make this world a better place simply because you have helped a child.”

Trula Worthy-Clayton, FCP  
Steering Committee Member

overlap among these categories became apparent.

Jeanette Mann recalls meeting a young woman whose mother had died, a situation that propelled her into foster care at the age of 14. “She said to us, ‘you know, the State is our parents, and we don’t think you’ve been very good parents.’ So we decided...let’s see what we can do. These kids are our responsibility, and we can be better parents.”

Foster Care Project was approved as an All Saints Church ministry in summer 2003. A steering committee formed, composed of individuals united in twin beliefs: “Every child is entitled to a safe and stable environment” and “Every child deserves to feel loved, valued, and cared for.” Since its inception, the project has focused on providing community education, public policy/advocacy, direct services

“I think that’s one of the things that we want to present to them...you are valuable, people do care about you, and you do have a future.”

Nancy Dannevik,  
FCP Steering  
Committee Member

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for children and youth in foster care, and nurturing growth and personal transformation through the volunteer experience. Gail Bardin notes, “When we were putting together what we wanted to accomplish, we didn’t want to duplicate any services that were already being provided. We wanted to fill in the gaps.”

That “gap-filling” has been substantial. Foster Care Project has endeavored to improve the lives of local foster children and youth through:

- Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker Program, which provides “adopted” DCFS caseworkers with support and much-needed donated items, such as clothing, diapers, food, pillows, and bedding
- Annual Art Show featuring art of children and youth, with all proceeds going to the young artists
- Annual back-to-school shopping spree, backpack drive, Thanksgiving food drive, Christmas Angel Tree, and Easter basket giveaway
- The Birthday Club serving more than 300 children each year
- Family Connect Visitation Centers, with volunteer coach-monitors who supervise family reunification visits
- Volunteer recruitment for partner agencies and FCP-sponsored activities
- Advocacy on behalf of foster children and youth on legislation before city, county, state, and federal governments.

Volunteers form the backbone of Foster Care Project. They create a positive environment for children and families

“That’s what Foster Care Project is all about. It’s about people who want to help kids.”

Kim Miles,  
FCP Steering  
Committee Member

about her experience mentoring a foster child, whom she accompanied to All Saints Church. “Joseph taught me a lot about hope and survival and resilience. His requests

by providing a calm, attentive, reassuring presence. Sometimes they offer respite and distraction from fear and anxiety. Sometimes they provide a listening ear. Sometimes they offer a sense of fun. Rewards range from the simple—being on the receiving end of a child’s smile—to the more profound. Former steering committee member duVergne Gaines writes movingly

*“The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don’t wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope.”* Barack Obama



Volunteers are the backbone of Foster Care Project. Sharon Deny (center), her husband Armand, and friend Angela Covey display a few of the lovely quilts Sharon made for children in foster care.

after communion to go to the side chapel for ‘healing’ and to request special healing for his mother, contained such a deep and fundamental yearning for the grace of God and for forgiveness for the conditions of his life – it was awe-some, in the true sense of the word.”

Foster Care Project is guided by a simple but powerful motto: “Foster kids are our kids.” As we celebrate our 15th anniversary, we are heartened by what we’ve accomplished and keenly aware of how much more there is to do. We wish to acknowledge the FCP donors and volunteers who continue to give generously of their time, money, energy, and love to enhance the lives of “our kids.”

*FCP’s 15th anniversary luncheon will be held on October 14th from 12:30 – 2:00 p.m. in Sweetland Hall at All Saints Church. Lunch is complimentary, but attendees are asked to consider making a donation to the 15th Anniversary Scholarship Fund. They are also invited to bring small toiletries to fill foster care donation baskets. To attend, please RSVP by October 5th on Eventbrite [goo.gl/MG1cHv](http://goo.gl/MG1cHv) or to Liz Jackman [ljackman@caltech.edu](mailto:ljackman@caltech.edu), 626-940-8551*



# Spotlight on Jessie Castillo:

*"I found something that spoke to me."*



**Foster Care Project acknowledges Jessie Castillo for his hard work and accomplishments. We salute him for creating art that resonates and a life that speaks.**

abuse directed at young residents. From the age of 8 to 16 he was able to return to live with his mom, and during that period his sister was born. When Jessie was 16, and his sister was still a toddler, both were removed from the family home. Despite the emotional upheaval of the move, Jessie recalls this last placement as one of the best, describing his foster parent as "stern but supportive."

Jessie's love affair with art began at age 14. He started Santa Monica High School as a freshman, and saw kids, who were sophomores, doing colorful graffiti pieces in sketchbooks. "I was so amazed. I wanted to do that," he says. He had toyed with taking up basketball or skateboarding, but had reservations about both. "I always felt I'd be too scared to play basketball because of an audience, and I didn't know how to do skateboarding tricks. But when I saw the graffiti, I found something that spoke to me, that I could be good at. It gave me an identity and a purpose."

Jessie started thinking about his life and setting goals. He wanted a phone. His mother said, "If you want something you have to work for it." He got his first job at Ralph's at 16. He started taking his schoolwork more seriously. He committed to graduating on time.

As he aged out of the foster care system, Jessie found his way to Pasadena-based Journey House, a multi-service non-profit that assists emancipating foster youth 18 years and older with job placement, housing, and education. It was here that Jessie met Kim Miles and other representatives of All Saints Church Foster Care Project when a small group of FCP members visited Journey House. Jessie was living in transitional housing. He

Jessie Castillo is no stranger to hard knocks. From the age of three, he was in and out of foster care in the San Gabriel Valley, an experience he calls "a mix of good and bad." The hardest part was being placed in a group home, where he witnessed staff

knew he didn't want to do anything illegal to jeopardize his status or saddle him with a record. He decided to move away from illegal street art and stick to canvas. "I would've lost everything, and I did not want to be homeless." His art evolved as he branched out from graffiti and became more creative.

In 2008, Jessie started showing his work, searching for art shows on Craig's List, and sometimes earning commissions. In 2009, he participated in his first All Saints Foster Care Project Art Show, where he met Jay Belloli, an FCP steering committee member and professional art curator. Jay provided Jessie with pointers and has remained a staunch supporter. Jessie recalls, "I sold a lot of work that day. It motivated me to continue not risking my life to do graffiti." Former steering committee member Joe Kelly and his wife Pat remember buying stretched canvases for Jessie. Joe says, "We were very taken with his talent, and I encouraged him along the way." Jessie exhibits his work at the Art Show every year, renewing ties with FCP friends and graciously providing guidance to foster youth interested in art.

Now 30 years old, Jessie is doing well. His paintings and murals hang in galleries and public spaces all over Los Angeles. He and his fiancée are the proud parents of a beautiful baby girl. Jessie works as an administrative assistant at headquarters for the Department of Children and Family Services in Los Angeles. He has built connections with pastors and teachers throughout the community, receiving referrals which enable him to "pay it forward" by sharing the joy of art with schoolchildren and children in foster care.

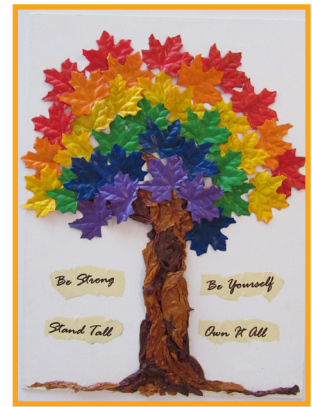


**All Smiles: Artist and former foster child Jessie Castillo has maintained a 10-year connection with Foster Care Project and is committed to "paying it forward." Here he is with friend and FCP member Kim Miles.**



**Creative Spirit:** Artist Jessie Castillo, with curator and event organizer, Jay Belloli, displays one of his vibrant works at the 10th annual FCP Art Show.

# FOLLOW YOUR ART



*Art is not always about pretty things. It's about who we are, what happened to us, and how our lives are affected.*  
--Elizabeth Broun

On Sunday, May 6, a number of promising young artists from across Los Angeles County revealed something of “who they are” through their vibrant, creative art, which was on display at All Saints Church, as part of Foster Care Project’s 10th annual Art Show. The artists included children and youth currently in foster care, as well as young adults who have transitioned out of the foster care system. The participants excitedly discussed their work with prospective buyers and attended a celebratory lunch at the conclusion of the exhibit. As always, 100% of the proceeds went to the young artists.

The Art Show has enjoyed a long tradition of enthusiastic attendance by All Saints parishioners and community supporters—and this year was no exception. Sweetland Hall was abuzz as members of the public circulated, sometimes pausing for several minutes to contemplate the works before them. Abstract art beckoned, with vivid imagery swirling mysteriously in a jewel-toned cosmos. Several nature compositions soothed with themes of peace and serenity. Others inspired, including a lovely tree motif with rainbow-patterned leaves and a message to: “Be Strong, Be Yourself, Stand Tall, Own It.” Other works hinted at darker themes of grief, loss, loneliness, and alienation.

Once again, FCP steering committee member Jay Belloli played a lead role in organizing the event, drawing upon



his years as a professional art curator to ensure smooth execution from start to finish. Jay says, “The Foster Care Project Art Show was very gratifying this year because all the art sold. The most memorable moment for me was meeting a young woman whose art had not sold. She looked very sad. I told a friend about {the situation} and she bought the young woman’s art. When I told the young woman her artwork had sold, a huge smile appeared on her face.”

Foster Care Project would like to thank our generous and appreciative art supporters. We congratulate our young artists and salute their willingness to share their thought-provoking, inspiring, and oftentimes deeply personal works of art.



**Senator Anthony Portantino**, a longtime FCP supporter, and his daughter Bella, show off their Art Show finds.



# Helping Kids Go Back to School in Style

**A**t 8:00 a.m. on July 28th, 29 children and youth in foster care arrived at Target Pasadena to participate in one of Foster Care Project's most enjoyable events: the annual summer shopping spree, hosted by our Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program. Each young person was matched with one or two volunteers, who helped manage a \$200 donated gift card and served as "personal shoppers," offering individualized attention and guidance on the purchase of essentials—shirts, pants, school uniforms, jackets, socks, and shoes—ensuring that each shopper felt like a "king" or "queen" for the day.

Some volunteers were enthusiastic "newbies," while others had served as assistant shoppers before. Ann and Mike Brady were among the returning FCP volunteers; they also helped support the shopping spree financially. An ACAC coordinator matched them to an eager, rambunctious boy, and they proved up to the challenge! Ann recalls the moment their young shopper spotted the perfect item—a Pikachu jacket: "He took the sweatshirt off the rack and held it to his chest and said, 'I can't wait to wear it.' I told him we had to pay for it first, and once we did he pulled it out of the bag and slipped it on. It didn't matter how hot it was outside, he was wearing that darn yellow sweatshirt with the ears." (See accompanying photo.) She adds, "Mike and I love the shopping spree, especially getting to take a boy (age 8) around, since we raised three boys



Mike and Ann Brady pose with their young shopper as he models his coveted find—a Pikachu sweatshirt! DCFS social worker Eric Pan holds more of the little boy's back-to-school purchases.

ourselves. It is a wonderful chance to give back, but we get so much pleasure from it — the gift is really to us!"

A special shout-out goes to Target's own Kristine Cato, who helped with logistics and oversaw donation of a \$200 gift card to FCP on the store's behalf. Thanks also to Target's employees who were friendly and helpful at checkout. And finally, much appreciation to Ann, Mike, and all the volunteers who got up early on a Saturday morning to ensure that our kids will start the school year in confidence and style. We couldn't do it without you.

## ACAC Backpack Donors Set New Record



Backpack Bounty: A sample of the backpacks and school supplies donated during FCP's highly successful 2018 backpack drive.

**F**oster Care Project's annual backpack drive was a huge success, as 34 volunteers went all out—providing 51 personalized backpacks—and smashing previous records for both participation and donation. Conducted under the auspices of the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program, point person Beth Gertmenian coordinated the drive, which was held over a six-week period starting early this summer. In a scene straight out of *The Blob*, an enormous pile of donated backpacks and school supplies soon filled Beth's dining room and threatened to spill over into her living room. Beth says, "We've come a long way from the days when a couple of us got the best deal we could on fairly drab backpacks and stuffed them with essentials. These days, our volunteers buy stunning, trendy

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## Caps off to Our Graduates:

# ACAC Hosts Graduation Lunch for Foster Care Youth



**Social Work Support:** Clarissa Emlings, from Guardians of Love Foster Family Agency, and Sylvia Cortez, from Pasadena's Department of Children and Family Services, showed their support at ACAC's graduation lunch for foster youth.

On June 18, the team from FCP's Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program hosted a delicious luncheon at El Portal restaurant in Pasadena in honor of three youths in foster care who are bound for college. Honorees included Lesli, who will attend Cal State University, Los Angeles; Lea, who will attend Pasadena City College; and Julia, who will also attend Pasadena City College. These amazing young

women overcame significant obstacles in their quest to graduate from high school and pursue their goal of higher education. Each received a \$75 Target gift card, a \$25 Starbucks gift card, and an invitation to ACAC's annual back-to-school shopping spree.



**Inspiring Others:** Former foster youth and special guest Randall Trice (with his young son Jordan and ACAC coordinator Beth Gertmenian) spoke movingly of his journey toward success and fulfillment.

Emlings (from Guardians of Love Foster Family Agency). Former foster youth and special guest Randall Trice also attended with his young son Jordan and spoke movingly of his journey toward success and fulfillment. As a teenager, Randall went to Pasadena High School. A few years later, he benefited from supportive services from Hillside's Youth Moving On. Next spring he will graduate from Azusa Pacific University with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work; he has an eye on a Master's Degree in Social Work after that. Randall is currently employed by Pacific Clinics.

According to the Alliance for Children's Rights, only 58% of those in foster care graduate from high school. Only 3% make it to college. Through hard work and a drive to succeed, Lesli, Lea, and Julia have overcome the odds and are determined to move forward. With great pride, we recognize them for their academic achievements and their commitment to create good lives for themselves. Caps off to our graduates. Well done!

FCP steering committee member Kim Miles chatted with all three girls about college resources. (Kim assisted students in foster care during her past employment at Pasadena City College and currently works at Cal State University, Los Angeles.) Four social workers joined the celebration: Sylvia Cortez, Ruth Lee, and Eric Pan (all from Pasadena's Department of Children and Family Services) and Clarissa

### BACKPACKS continued from pg. 5

backpacks and fill them with essentials as well as lots of wonderful extras." She adds, "One volunteer even purchased a Chromebook for a graduating senior, saying she wished her family had been able to do that when she went to college."

Our volunteers bring passion and commitment to the project. Veronica Smith says, "My husband Jeff and I look forward to our backpack shopping spree every year! It's an opportunity to give a gift to our young scholars that we hope will be used day after day throughout the school year.

It brings us true joy to fill the bags with fun school supplies, and we feel that these backpacks may be the first step in guiding kids to look forward to going to school." Diana Grajeda says, "Shopping for school supplies is one of my favorite volunteer activities. I hope this year's project will prove successful in helping the children feel confident and ready to focus on the joy of learning."

Thanks to all our backpack donors for ensuring that our kids set off on the first day of school feeling confident and well-prepared!



# The Power of Advocacy

*“If we don’t stand up for children, then we don’t stand for much.”*

– Marian Wright Edelman

For the past 15 years, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) has focused on standing up for children. Since 2004, FCP’s Public Policy Committee has worked hard to establish relationships with federal, state, and local elected officials to promote issues affecting the lives of foster, homeless, transitional, and incarcerated children and youth. We have partnered with agencies serving foster youth, such as Hillside and John Burton Advocates, and have coordinated our advocacy with the church’s Rapid Response Team. Of the 121 bills we supported in the state legislature and Congress, 58 were passed by both houses and signed into law.



receive services from 18 to 21, for density bonuses in housing for transitional-aged youth, and for providing services and support for transitional-aged youth in public colleges and universities.

In 2008, Congress passed and President Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, the most significant legislation related to foster care in a decade. This act allows states to continue to receive federal reimbursements to support foster care services for youth until the age of 21. Several bills were immediately introduced into the California State Assembly and the Senate to implement the provisions of this act. One of these bills was AB 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act.

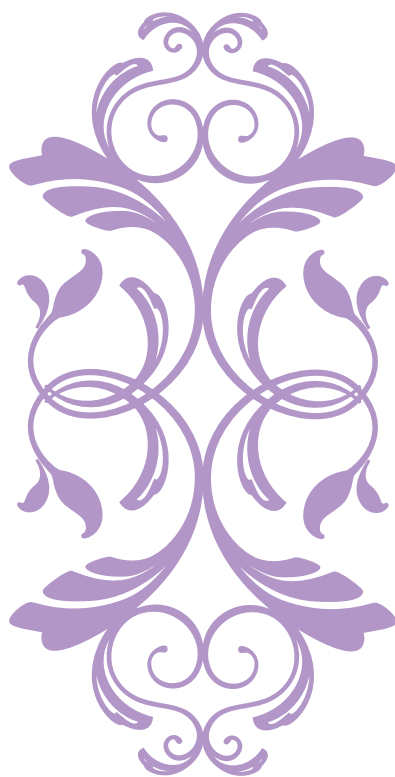
On October 10, 2010, representatives from All Saints Church were invited by Governor Schwarzenegger’s office to the signing of AB 12, which extended transitional foster care services to eligible youth between 18 and 21 years of age. Twenty-five percent of the letters in support of the bill came from All Saints Church. Juliana Serrano, from All Saints Office of Creative Connections, was on hand for the signing in Los Angeles.

In 2016, in direct response to a meeting with members of the Committee, Assemblymember Chris Holden carried a bill, AB 2442 (Density Bonuses), which

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Strategic advocacy can have a profound effect on the lives of children and young people. Over the years, members of the Committee have identified and met with individuals and groups well-positioned to promote positive change, including: Federal Senators, members of the House of Representatives, members of the Assembly, State Senators, Los Angeles County Supervisors, the Mayor of Pasadena, Pasadena City Council Members, the Pasadena Superintendent of School, and members of the Pasadena Board of Education. We have attended lobby days for foster care advocates in Sacramento and in Washington, D.C. Committee members have testified before the State Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the Pasadena Board of Education, and the Pasadena City Council.

The Committee has focused much of its effort upon addressing the challenges faced by youth transitioning out of foster care. We advocated for extending the age that youth in foster care could



## 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)  
Children's Law Center of California  
COLORS  
County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services  
County of Los Angeles Probation Department  
Cultural Brokers  
EOPS Resilient Scholars Program, California State University Northridge  
First Place for Youth  
First United Methodist Church  
Five Acres  
FosterAll  
Friends of Foster Children  
Hathaway-Sycamores  
Hillsides  
Hillsides YMO  
Holy Family Services Adoption and Foster Care  
Junior League Los Angeles  
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  
Pacific Clinics  
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



### ADVOCACY continued from pg. 7

allows housing developers to obtain multiple density bonuses from local government if the housing development sets aside ten percent for former foster youth, disabled veterans, or formerly homeless individuals. A multiple density bonus is a zoning tool that enables developers to build more units than normally allowed. In a statement to *Pasadena Now*, Holden said, "I'm proud to author this bill as it came directly from a constituent, Jeanette Mann, who has been active in All Saints Church and the 41st Assembly District, helping foster youth and the community at large."

Working with other agencies serving foster youth, such as John Burton Advocates, the Committee has successfully advocated for legislation that increases the success of foster youth attending public colleges and universities through the creation of publicly funded campus support programs (SB 1023), the creation of priority registration for foster youth (SB 906), the expansion of the Chafee Education and Training Voucher (state budget), and the expansion of the Cal Grant Program for foster youth (SB 940).

This year the Committee has focused on the issue of food insecurity on college campuses. In a national survey 50 percent of community college students and 47 percent of four-year college students reported food insecurity. Students of

color face more insecurity, with 57 percent of African American students and Latino students reporting difficulties securing food. (Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students.) The Committee advocated in support of AB 1952 (Social Services: Access to Food). This bill would require that appropriate state agencies develop a plan to end hunger in California no later than January 1, 2020. It would authorize the use of EBT cards on college and university campuses. This bill died in the Senate Appropriations Committee, but the Committee will continue to push for legislation that addresses the issue of food insecurity.

For the past 15 years, we have made an intensive effort to establish productive working relationships with elected officials and make them aware of the challenges facing foster youth. We are gratified by the mutual trust and support that has developed. We are proud of the legislative protections we have championed and will continue to stand up for the rights and needs of our children.



For Volunteer Opportunities  
visit our website:  
[www.fostercareproject.org](http://www.fostercareproject.org)  
or email  
[inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

**Joe Kelly: Art/Design**  
**Jeanette Mann: Writing/Editing**  
**Anne Riffenburgh: Writing/Editing**