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Randall Trice Pays It Forward

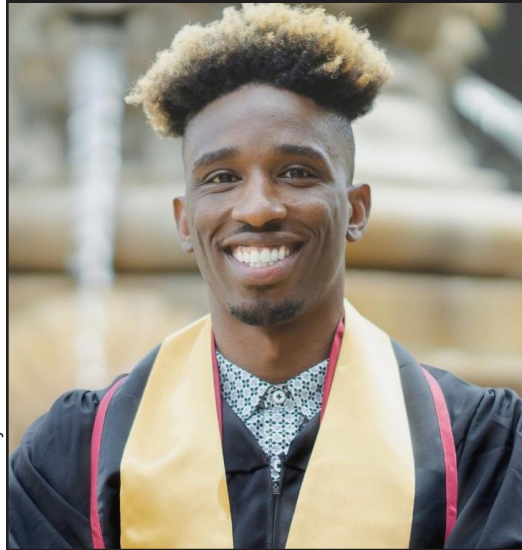


Photo: Jeff Cay

“As an African-American male and former foster youth, I wasn’t supposed to amount to anything in life.” –Randall Trice

Few things are more satisfying than believing in oneself and making dreams come true. Proving the naysayers wrong is the icing on the cake. In 2020, Randall Trice received his Master of Social Work degree from Azusa Pacific University. Today, this 31-year-old father of two is employed by The People Concern and works with the homeless population in Los Angeles County, providing mental health services. He is also the founder and executive director of Shoes4Grades, which offers new shoes to children as an incentive “to excel in school, enjoy the learning experience, and become life-long learners.” The innovative non-profit allows any K-12 student to receive a pair of shoes when their cumulative grade point average improves by 5% or they maintain a 3.50 GPA. Randall’s experiences have shaped the man he is today and spurred his commitment to

help others thrive. Of his early life, he has written:

“As a young child growing up in poverty, my goal was only to survive. Surviving in the streets that catered to my mother’s addictions. Surviving in the neighborhood that builds you strong enough to threaten anyone who disses you, yet breaks your spirit and reminds you that dreaming of opportunity is a fool’s game. Born into a system that manifests failure, questions your existence, and implies success is short-lived for people like you [us], if it comes at all. Succeeding was never my goal; preparing for a possible opportunity was.”

The road to finding those opportunities was not an easy one. Randall’s bio, which appears on the Shoes4Grades webpage, contains this summary of his childhood and obstacles he faced:

“Randall entered the foster care system at age nine, when his brother was born addicted to

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.

Randall Trice Pays It Forward

(continued from page 1)

Photo: Alison Bell Rainey



Randall Trice with friend and mentor Beth Gertmenian in 2019.

crack cocaine. He lived with seven other children in the care of an overwhelmed grandmother. He was burdened by the stigma that emanates from the label “foster” and bullied for wearing hand-me-down clothing and shoes, cast off by older boys in the home. Randall struggled to find the motivation to do well academically. He had enough self-awareness to know that, if he wanted his life to be different, he needed to start thinking differently. He started taking school more seriously to break the pattern of being just another foster kid who would never amount to anything. He was determined to prove those who doubted him wrong...

At age 18, Randall began participating in Youth Moving On (YMO), a transitional program for youth leaving foster care. There he met Beth Gertmenian, a longtime Foster Care Project member who had started a mentoring program at YMO. The two quickly established a rapport. In a 2019 interview, Randall noted, “Beth has been a strong supporter and motivator for me since I was a young man at YMO. She saw the potential I had of gaining a greater future and living a successful life before I even dreamed about [such] a life... I am not only lucky but grateful to have

“I am here to show you that with self-determination and believing in yourself, there is no limit to what you can achieve. Dream big and trust in the process.”

--Randall Trice,
Founder of Shoes4Grades

met someone like Beth, who cares enough about my future to invest their time and love into my success.”

Despite his success, Randall Trice remains humble. And he remembers. He remembers the boy he once was. He remembers the pain and indignity of growing up as a foster youth in poverty. He remembers what it’s like to feel “less-than.” He has channeled that remembrance into wanting something more for this generation of children, many of whom face struggles similar to his own. By establishing Shoes4Grades, Randall has made an investment in the promise and potential of these young people. He hopes the students will work hard to earn the shoes and build the confidence that comes from doing well academically. He hopes the mentoring piece of the program will provide opportunities for them to blossom in the light of a caring adult.

Foster Care Project salutes Randall Trice for his commitment to paying it forward. We applaud his efforts to build bright and better futures for the children in our midst.

Children must have at least one person who believes in them. It could be a counselor, a teacher, a preacher, a friend.

It could be you.

You never know when a little love, a little support, will plant a small seed of hope.

--Marian Wright Edelman

Foster Care Project Reaffirms: "You Can Count on Us in Times of Crisis"

As 2021 unfolds, we are heartened by the strides made in reducing the impact of Covid-19, but challenges continue, and the need for resources for our families remains high. Despite ongoing restrictions on outreach, Foster Care Project has been able to assist our three "adopted" DCFS caseworkers, respond to the needs of our families, and advocate for legislative improvement in the foster care system. We offer heartfelt thanks to our FCP supporters who continue to respond with commitment, helping to protect and transform the lives of our children. Here are some of the achievements made in the first half of this year:

Photo: Anne Riffenburgh



"Adopted" DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez loads her SUV with Valentine's bags for children on her caseload.

79: Number of "Valentine's bags" put together by the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) team and made possible by generous donors, who provided hygiene items, art supplies, toys, candy, and more.

123: Number of Easter baskets created with help from our FCP supporters, who supplied a variety of age-appropriate items for our infants, children, teens, and young adults. A special shout-out to Brownie Troop 70791, who donated 13 stuffed animals, toys, games, snacks, puzzles, and hygiene items.

Photo: Anne Riffenburgh



Brownie Troop 70791 donated Easter goodies and created hand-drawn cards to be tucked into the baskets.



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

Easter baskets took over the living rooms of ACAC team members, until the Easter bunny was able to deliver them to children in foster care.

Photo: Anne Riffenburgh



Jaheim enjoyed taking part in the back-to-school shopping spree and is excited about starting college in the fall.

5,800: Number of dollars donated by supporters for FCP's annual Back-to-School Shopping Spree, which enabled our DCFS caseworkers to supervise purchases of shoes and clothing at Target for 30 children. Due to ongoing Covid-19 concerns, we were unable to involve our volunteer "personal shoppers" to assist the children, but we look forward to resuming the volunteer portion of this very popular activity next year.

75: Number of personalized backpacks received for children and youth on the caseloads of our DCFS caseworkers. Backpacks were stuffed with a plethora of school supplies, as well as hygiene items. Personalized goodies reflected such disparate themes as unicorns, rainbows, Dodgers, superheroes, music, sports, cars, and more.

3: Number of ACAC mentorships maintained in the first half of 2021 (with a college student, a young mother, and an 11-year-old boy) despite the restrictions engendered by the pandemic.

82: Number of tangible donations received from January through June 2021 (with an estimated value of \$9,870), enabling the ACAC program to make targeted deliveries of diapers, groceries, gift cards, toys, books, clothing, handmade quilts, art supplies, and hygiene items to our children and families.

19: Number of legislative bills in Sacramento supported by FCP (via letter writing and phone campaigns) to improve and protect quality of life for at-risk young people. Examples of supported issues include: expanding community college campus-based support for students in foster care; funding housing programs to assist former foster and probation youth; and creating a "blind removal" strategy to reduce racial disparities in decision-making about whether to separate children from their families.



Photo: Thomas Nolan

New mother Sabrina wraps her infant son in a beautiful handmade quilt, one of many donated to FCP by Sharon Deny, Armand Deny, and Angela Cobey.



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

Volunteers Elizabeth Toohey-Francis and Jane Burtis stuff hygiene bags for children and youth in foster care.

In Memoriam

The Art of Caring: Jay Belloli (1944-2021)

By Anne Riffenburgh



Photo: Daniel Flaming

Once again, Jay Belloli had worked his organizational magic: the Foster Care Project's 2018 Art Show exhibit bustled with energy as visitors examined the professionally displayed artwork and engaged with the young participants, many of whom were eagerly discussing their work and basking in the glow of recognition. Still, Jay was worried. It was 11:00 a.m. and most of the artwork had sold, with the exception of one piece—a quirky pencil drawing of a cartoon character. The teen creator of the piece hovered nearby, bottom lip trembling; tears not far away. Jay noticed. Acting quickly, he approached one of the attendees and explained the situation. Could she help?

This interaction was quintessential Jay—his attentiveness, empathy, decisiveness, and profound kindness fully on display, an integral part of his being.

Jay Belloli's love of art, commitment to social justice, and attention to the needs of others was apparent early on. In 1970, while studying art history at UC Berkeley, he created the iconic anti-war poster, "Amerika is Devouring Its Children" in protest of the U.S. bombing of Cambodia. In his long career as an art and astronomy curator, Jay developed numerous art collections, advised and encouraged budding artists (as well as more seasoned ones), and coordinated many contemporary art books. A luminous figure in the art world nationally, as well as locally, Jay served for 20 years as exhibitions director for Pasadena's Armory Center for the Arts.

Jay was a valued part of the All Saints Community. For more than two decades, he brought his can-do energy and joyful spirit to many facets of church life. Jay participated as a member of the Foster Care Project from 2010 -2021 and served as its Chair in 2013. Jay never wavered in his commitment to improve the lives of vulnerable children. He established and organized nine annual Art Shows to showcase the vibrant, original work of children and teens in foster care, many of whom were survivors of trauma. Jay understood that art can serve as a powerful avenue of expression and healing, a way to tell a story or convey an emotion when mere words are not enough.

And what of that piece of art at the 2018 Art Show that failed to sell? Well, within moments of Jay's entreaty, the attendee had pulled out her credit card and purchased the piece. Then she sought out the young artist, who chatted happily about her love of art and drawing. Jay stood nearby, beaming.

The next time life calls out to you—"Can you help?"—you might recall the example of this warm and generous man, who never hesitated to serve or to gently press others into service. A fitting tribute might be the response, "Why, yes. Yes, I can."

And somewhere Jay will be beaming.

In Memoriam

Bringing Her Gifts to the World: Anne Wolf (1944 – 2021)

By Anne Riffenburgh and Jeanette Mann

If you drew a Venn diagram featuring passionate volunteerism, dogged commitment to social and economic justice, and a heart filled with compassion, Anne Wolf would be found at the spot where those areas intersect. Throughout her life, Anne participated in a variety of causes—including promoting the principles and candidates of the Democratic Party, empowering women, supporting military families, and protecting the environment. Anne was the recipient of numerous awards for her contributions. That recognition was well-deserved.

Anne's keen organizational abilities were honed by more than three decades of employment at Occidental College, beginning in 1980. She served as Director of the Occidental College Bookstore from 1995 until her retirement in 2011. Along the way, she brought her energy and leadership to a number of committees and campus organizations. Anne advised students and actively supported the College's Young Democrats. She played a key role in drafting the Garment Manufacturer's Code of Conduct, which helped guarantee sweatshop-free production of collegiate apparel.

After retirement, Anne might have rested on her laurels. But anyone familiar with Anne knows there wasn't a snowball's chance of that. Anne had long been concerned about young people aging out of foster care. So when she ran into Jeanette Mann (one of the co-founders of All Saints Church Foster Care Project) at their mutual hair salon, she accepted Jeanette's invitation to join the Foster Care Project. Anne served on the FCP steering committee from 2012 to this year, including two terms as chair (2015-2016) and two terms as treasurer (2018-2020).

Anne also served three years as FCP's point person for Learning Works Charter High School, an organization that helps young people in crisis and gives them an opportunity to earn their high school diploma. Anne ran a diaper drive, collected food, clothing and household items, and volunteered at commencements. When she decided a little fun was in order, she organized a Halloween Ice Cream Scoop party. Twenty volunteers, including Senator Anthony Portantino, were recruited. Tables were stocked with ice cream, cups and cones, flavored syrups, cherries and gummy bears. But when the students came out, no one approached the tables. Anne invited one young man to have some ice cream. "I'd love to," he said, "but I don't have any money to pay for it." Anne drew herself up and said with great authority, "Oh, that's all right. Roger Wolf {her husband} paid for it." That was all it took. The dam broke, and the great ice cream rush was on.

In 2020, Anne passed the role of FCP treasurer over to Kim Miles. During her time as treasurer, Anne had developed a spreadsheet program to rival that of any commercial bookkeeping product. Anne offered coaching on the multiple worksheets and formulas with kindness and a droll sense of humor. Kim recalls, "Once I got through banging my head, Anne just laughed and said she'd had to learn herself, and I was not the only one to use expletives with Excel. She was so patient with me. I told her I had her number on speed dial, and she said, 'No problem.' She would be there to help."

Many of us had Anne on "speed dial" and relied on her unflinching enthusiasm and willingness to help. All of us who were in her orbit feel her loss keenly. We will miss this upbeat, generous, dedicated soul, who brought her gifts to the world and left it a brighter, better place.



Photo: Foster Care Project archives

Meet Ann Jopling

FCP Welcomes a New Member to the Steering Committee

Photo: Ann Jopling



“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say “It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.” Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

–Fred Rogers

Ann Jopling was raised in Pasadena, where she has lived for most of her adult life. She was married at All Saints Church in 1972 and later moved to Altadena, where she attended St. Mark’s Church and actively participated in the school and church community there during her children’s school-aged years. When she moved back to Pasadena in 2004, she returned to All Saints, which she says, “Has always felt like ‘home.’” She has three amazing adult sons: Clint Cleveland lives in the Bay Area (as does her granddaughter Lucie Cleveland); Blake Jopling lives in Carmel Valley; and Miles Jopling lives locally in Pasadena.

Recently retired, Ann was employed in the mental health field since 1988. Initially, she worked as a psychotherapist in a community counseling center, later as a Children’s Social Worker for the Department of Children and Family Services. For the last twenty-odd years she served as a clinician in Family Court in Los Angeles. Ann says, “What drew me to the Foster

Care Project were experiences I had as a DCFS social worker, where I witnessed how children were affected by removal from their parents’ care. I saw how families could benefit from the DCFS recommendations which helped the family solve the issue that created the need for intervention. I also saw how important it is for children in foster care to have access to opportunities for enrichment experiences like sports or art and music.”

FCP Steering Committee member Rosemary Hyde has known Ann for more than a decade. Rosemary describes her friend and former Family Court colleague as, “Smart, conscientious, energetic, and well-equipped to put people quickly at ease.” She adds, “Annie and her wealth of experience will enrich our program.”

We are excited to welcome Ann Jopling to the Foster Care Project. We look forward to her ideas, expertise, and involvement as we work together to enhance the lives of children and families in our community.

Sometime when we are generous in small, barely detectable ways, it can change someone else’s life forever.

– Margaret Cho

We rise by lifting others.

– Robert Ingersoll

Blind Removal: A Strategy for Addressing Racial Disparity in the Child Welfare System

By Jeanette Mann, Chair, Public Policy Committee

The Foster Care Project has long been concerned about the overrepresentation of children of color in foster care. In California, although only 5.4% of the children in the state are Black; 21.7% of the children in foster care are Black. The same disparity is apparent in Los Angeles County where 24.1% of the children in foster care are Black compared to 7.6% of the children in the County. In addition, children of color remain longer in foster care and are less likely to leave foster care through reunification with their families, adoption, or legal guardianship.

The majority of children in foster care are removed from their homes because of neglect rather than abuse. (Neglect is defined in California as “failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision.”) Research has demonstrated that the act of being removed from their homes is the most traumatic incident that children in foster care experience. Many are taken directly from school to a government office before being placed in a home with strangers.

This year, through Assembly Bill 656, Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo is attempting to address racial disparities in the child welfare system through the strategy of blind removal, which would eliminate implicit bias by redacting personal information about the children’s family and neighborhood from the case summaries when the decisions are made whether or not to remove children from their homes.

Blind removal is a new strategy created by the director of child welfare in Nassau County, New York. With blind removals a committee of child welfare professionals is convened to determine if the child is to be removed. The caseworker who has already seen the family and conducted an initial assessment of risk presents the facts of the case but never identifies the neighborhood or the demographics. Discussion is focused on what occurred, relevant history, and family capacity and strength. After the presentation the committee makes a recommendation about removal. In over five years the results have been staggering. In 2010, 55.5% of the removals in the County were of Black children. By 2015, after using blind removals, the percentage of Black children removed from their homes dropped to 29 percent.

Assemblymember Carrillo’s bill would establish a three-year blind removal pilot project in seven counties that choose to participate. To reduce the potential for implicit bias, during and at the time of the removal decision-making process, all personal and neighborhood information would be removed from the file. This removal would shift the focus to the evidence in the case, to family strengths, relevant history, and the parent’s ability to protect the child.

As of now, Assembly Bill 656 is stalled in the legislative process but it will likely be carried over as a second-year bill next year. In the meantime, on July 13 the LA County Board of Supervisors took an important first step by approving a blind removal pilot project for one office in the Department of Children and Family Services. We applaud their initiative and commend Supervisor Holly Mitchell for her leadership. Blind removal seems to provide a realistic and workable strategy to reduce implicit bias in the removal of children from their homes. At Foster Care Project we have collected hundreds of “care packages” for children after they have been removed from their homes—perhaps now is the time for us to do what we can to keep them from being removed in the first place.

Partnering Agencies

50/50 Leadership
Alliance for Children’s Rights
Aspire West, Pasadena
Barrio Action Youth and Family Center
Biddy Mason Charitable Foundation
California Youth Connection
Cal Tech Y
CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)
Children’s Law Center of California
Children’s Law Center of California
Fresh Outfitters
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
Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles
Learning Works Charter School/Home Boys
League of Women Voters
Learning Works Charter School/Home Boys
My Friend’s Place
National Congress of Black Women, Inc. San Gabriel Chapter
Neighborhood United Universalist Church
Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services
Pacific Clinics
Public Counsel Law Center
PUSD Math Power Hour
Raise-A-Child, US
STARS at PCC
The Alliance for Children’s Rights
United Friends of the Children
Violence Intervention Program
Vista Del Mar Child and Foster Care Program
Young and Healthy



For Volunteer Opportunities
visit our website:
www.fostercareproject.org
or email
inbox@fostercareproject.org

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