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The AB12 Program: Helping Our Youth Secure a Brighter Future

“All you guys are a blessing.”

--Damyán, a youth in the AB12 program, addressing ACAC volunteers and DCFS staff members

One of the great pleasures of working in Foster Care Project’s Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) program is the opportunity to support our AB12 youth. California Assembly Bill 12 (passed in 2010 and enacted in 2012) allows young people to choose to remain in Los Angeles County’s foster care system until age twenty-one. Statistically these youth fare far better than those who emancipate at eighteen. Nonetheless, this is a challenging time in their lives as they work to gain a stable and independent foothold in the world. As of April 2023, there were 1,950 AB12 youth in Los Angeles County, with approximately 90 of them being served by the Pasadena Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

Thomas Nolan, MSW, our “adopted” social worker and longtime partner of the ACAC program, is also one of six AB12 social workers at Pasadena DCFS committed to assisting youth as they navigate the difficult transition into adulthood. Thomas had this to say about the AB12 program: “AB12 offers supportive transition services to the youth, including job preparation and assistance, educational support, and independent living skills. We help them with everything from getting a



Damyán, a young man in the AB12 program, expressed gratitude for the help he has received from Thomas Nolan, MSW, and the ACAC program.

driver’s license, to money management, to mental health, to substance abuse treatment, to cooking and cleaning skills.”

The AB12 program also offers housing assistance, the importance of which cannot be overstated. Thomas says, “We offer housing for the youth as well. The youth are able to continue living in traditional foster homes until twenty-one. However, they may also move out on their own and receive their own foster care payment (\$1,129) to support their cost of rent. We also have

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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.

FCP Spotlight on Helpers in Our Community

Brenda Sharp: Fighting to House the Unhoused



Many of us are keenly aware of the challenges surrounding issues of housing and homelessness in Los Angeles County, especially for vulnerable youth and young people

who have emancipated from foster care. According to the Alliance for Children's Rights, half of youth who age out of foster care end up homeless or incarcerated. Clearly, there are no easy fixes, but a consortium of agencies and individuals remain committed to improving this seemingly intractable situation.

One individual making a difference is Brenda Sharp, a retired businesswoman now serving as a volunteer advocate for the unhoused, a role she views as ministry. Active at First AME Church in Pasadena, Brenda felt called to take a stand against homelessness. In 2017, she formed the Homeless Housing Project--using half of her Social Security check each month to help fund the endeavor. The Homeless Housing Project offers housing advocacy and a host of navigation and case management services to unhoused people. Since its inception, Brenda and her nonprofit have helped over 100 individuals move into permanent housing, and, despite the challenges of the pandemic, they have maintained a 97% retention rate of those still housed where they were placed initially. In the interview below, Brenda describes the steps she took to help one young man secure housing.

One of the many referrals you've gotten was for Blake, a young man who received a Section 8 housing voucher in October 2021. Unfortunately, Blake was unsuccessful in obtaining a rental unit and faced the expiration of his voucher in just two weeks with no further extensions. What were the first steps you took after receiving this referral and learning of Blake's situation?

I looked for Blake's strengths. Blake spent two years living in his car after aging out of foster care transitional housing at age 24. While in the transitional program, he worked hard and saved enough money to buy a car. He slept in the car and used it to build a substantial business via Doordash. Digging further, I discovered Blake had a 780 FICO score and two years of filed tax returns and paystubs to verify the success of his business. I crafted a cover letter to that effect and accompanied him to five apartment viewings. We submitted several applications. Two days before his voucher expiration deadline, Blake was approved. We were ecstatic!

Was it a "done deal" or did obstacles arise?

Obstacles arose almost immediately. We were granted six days to complete the owner-signed RFTA packet, and we met that requirement, but due to misinformation that the unit was not permitted, the process was cancelled and the voucher was reported to be expired! By 5:30 pm that same evening, the City Planning Office found the permit, but it was too late. The property management company cancelled proceedings and put the apartment back on the market!

Take us through the next steps.

The short version: we refused to accept defeat! I asked the Pasadena Housing Office if an Incentive Bonus could be applied, and a market rate bonus of \$1,500 was offered for a signed lease. Blake and

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Connie Chung Joins FCP Steering Committee



New FCP Steering Committee member Connie K. Chung poses with a furry friend.

Connie K. Chung brings to the Foster Care Project her lifelong passion for supporting all young people in their quest to thrive in a complex, fast-changing world. She grew up in Arcadia, California, and it was the positive experiences with her teachers that led her to become a public high school teacher in California, after earning a bachelor's degree in English Literature from Harvard College and a master's degree in Teaching and Curriculum from Harvard Graduate School of Education. As a teacher, she grew a British Literature elective from 17 students to 120 students, served as a speech coach and a senior class advisor, and served on the staff development team, designing and leading sessions on diversity, equity, and inclusion with the nonprofit Facing History and Ourselves.

Before coming to All Saints Church in 2020, Connie attended churches in northern California and Boston, where she led the prayer team, co-founded and co-led a faith and justice initiative, and served on a church board. A series of spiritual experiences and reflections led her to earn a master's degree in International Education Policy and a doctorate in education, both from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

While Connie worked as the associate director of the Harvard Global Education Initiative, she became a resource parent in Massachusetts in 2014, to a 10-year-old boy. She stayed with him for almost 4 years, until he was adopted by another family; she still maintains contact with him and his family members. The experience led her to become a Foster America Fellow, where she worked with a team of staff and community partners to re-start the Foster Youth Advisory Board, strategically re-design the Independent Living Program, and build the capacity of staff and young people at a county child welfare agency in northern California. She currently serves on the board of several nonprofits focused on youth development while consulting in the fields of education and social services.

As a researcher, Connie has consulted with the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development and has written and co-edited the following books: *When We Thrive, Our World Thrives: Stories of Young People Growing Up with Adversity* (Notion Press, 2022), *Preparing Teachers to Educate Whole Students* (Harvard Education Press, 2018), *Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century* (Harvard Education Press, 2016), and contributed to *Future Frontiers: Education for an AI World* (Melbourne University Press & NSW Department of Education, 2017) and *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as Catalyst for School Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Connie feels she has found “a loving, creative, and audacious spiritual community” at All Saints Church. She has been a longtime supporter of Foster Care Project and the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) program. Over the years she has donated numerous toys, backpacks, uniforms, and other clothing items to help lift up the children and families in our community. We look forward to her insightful, knowledgeable, and creative participation in Foster Care Project as we continue our mission of improving the lives of foster, homeless, transitional, and incarcerated children and youth. Welcome, Connie! We are so happy to have you join us.

FCP Salutes Our Supporters

As 2023 unfolds, costs continue to soar in almost every facet of daily life, and the need for resources for those in the child welfare system remains high. Many of our youth and families face an uphill battle as they struggle to pay rent, buy gas, put food on the table, and obtain basic items, such as laundry soap and shampoo. Fortunately, our loyal FCP donors and volunteers continue to respond to the immense need—providing diapers, shoes, clothing, hygiene items, school supplies, groceries, gift cards and more. In the section below, we “show off our stats”—an accomplishment that would not be possible without the commitment and generosity of our community of caring supporters. Thank you for making a difference in people’s lives.

7-10: Number of bags of groceries donated monthly from December 2022 through April 2023.

355: Number of gift cards donated to the Angel Tree project in December. Fosterall, a community-based organization serving foster children and youth, contributed fifty \$25.00 gift cards.

50: Number of brand-new bicycles donated at Christmas to the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) team for distribution to children and youth on the caseloads of our four “adopted” social workers at Pasadena DCFS. The donation was facilitated by Priscilla Zamora on behalf of Target.

50: Number of \$25.00 Target gift cards used to purchase bike helmets.

16: Number of Columbia hoodies (along with 16 \$25.00 Target gift cards) donated at Christmas to older youth by the charitable organization, Pillows and Plenty.

85: Number of Christmas gift bags assembled by the ACAC team and filled with toys, games, puzzles, stuffed animals, hygiene items, and more for children and youth in foster care.

31: Number of cartons of diapers donated in December by Friends of Foster Children, along with 175 clothing items.

50: Number of “Valentine’s Day bags” containing chocolate candies, small toys, stuffed animals, art supplies, and hygiene items, put together by the ACAC team, along with an additional 16 outfits. In addition, the Pillows and Plenty charity donated 18 boxes of candy and 18 \$20.00 Target gift cards for our older youth.

10: Number of sets of socks (including five 5-pack sets of men’s athletic socks and five 2-pack sets of women’s fuzzy socks) and ten \$30.00 grocery store gift cards for AB12 youth, donated by Pillows and Plenty for Easter.

108: Number of Easter baskets filled by our ACAC team, with the generous help of our FCP supporters, who donated stuffed animals, snacks, toys, games, books, bubbles, art supplies, hygiene items, baby supplies, gift cards and more.

46: Number of clothing items and Easter outfits donated in the first quarter of 2023.

40+: Number of Birthday Club gifts donated by the National Congress of Black Women to help kick off the reopening of the Birthday Club.



Easter Baskets

This little bunny was pleased with his Easter basket filled with goodies.



Four young recipients show off the brand-new bikes they received at Christmas, courtesy of Target.



Robyn, a youth in the AB12 program, is delighted to receive a Christmas present from members of Pillows and Plenty.



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
- 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 United Methodist Church
- Five Acres
- FosterAll
- Friends of Foster Children
- Hathaway-Sycamores
- Hillsides
- Hillsides YMO
- Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend Miracles
- Learning Works Charter School/ Home Boys
- League of Women Voters
- My Friend's Place
- National Congress of Black Women
- Optimist Youth Homes and Family Services
- National Congress of Black Women, Inc. San Gabriel Chapter
- Neighborhood United Universalist Church
- Pacific Clinics
- Public Counsel Law Center
- PUSD Math Power Hour
- Raise-A-Child, US
- Simply Friends
- STARS at PCC
- The Alliance for Children's Rights
- Violence Intervention Program
- Vista Del Mar Child and Foster Care Program
- United Friends of the Children
- Young and Healthy

Helping Our Youth Secure a Brighter Future

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transitional housing programs that they can go to. In transitional housing, the youth get their own apartments in regular apartment complexes in the community, along with a roommate. They don't pay any rent, but live independently and meet with a worker weekly to ensure they are working toward their independence. These programs also set aside money for the young people each month, which they receive when they leave. The amount is usually enough to help them secure their own apartments. In addition, AB12 and the DCFS Independent Living Program (ILP) offer funding to assist with tuition costs, an annual work clothing allowance, gas and car insurance reimbursement, and money for braces/orthodontia as needed."

At a March ACAC luncheon held at the Pasadena DCFS office, Damyán, a young man in the AB12 program, spoke about the help he has received from Thomas Nolan and the ACAC program: "I've never had a social worker like him. If I need something—whether it's tools or groceries—I just have to hit him up and he comes through. All you guys are a blessing."

The purpose of AB12 is to prevent homelessness

and incarceration. However, sometimes the trauma the youth have experienced is simply too overwhelming for them to achieve stability by age twenty-one. Thomas notes, "While we work to have a plan in place for their twenty-first birthday, we know also that sometimes things happen after twenty-one, and they end up facing homelessness or incarceration. But I know that many of our young people are much more successful than they might otherwise have been, having had time to develop the skills needed to maintain work or education beyond twenty-one."

Of the youth currently on Thomas's caseload, several are thriving in college and learning to advocate for themselves. Others are working in the community and developing the skills and sense of responsibility they need to forge a successful path. Still others struggle but are endeavoring to move in positive directions. One young man is planning to join the U.S. Marine Corps. Hats off to Thomas Nolan and his AB12 colleagues as they draw upon all the resources at their disposal—including the ACAC program—to help ensure a brighter future for the young people they serve.

Brenda Sharp

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I showed up that weekend for the new open house; reapplied, citing the Incentive Bonus; trumpeted the fact that he had already been approved once; and emphasized that they would be helping a deserving young man save his housing voucher. Upshot: He got the apartment!

Congratulations! Any updates?

Blake has been in his apartment for over six months! Tay Link granted some rental assistance and helped with furnishings. Through the collaborative efforts of all involved, another unhoused individual is living his dream. And Blake paid it forward by referring to me another homeless 21-year-old youth he encountered, whose voucher was set to expire. Blake contributed funds to buy a motel stay for this young man to get off the street during the torrential rainstorms. I'm pleased to say we were recently able to secure a Section 8 apartment for this second young man.

What is the overarching message you'd like people to take away from this story?

That we can all do our share to make a difference.

And finally, tell us about the compliment you received from Blake:

I think he appreciated banding together with someone who refused to give up. Perseverance is key. He told me, "Miss B, you're a Beast!"



Housing is Key: Posing with Blake at his new apartment. Brenda Sharp has helped more than 100 people obtain permanent housing.

Birthday Club

Back in Business

The Birthday Club is back! After a three-year hiatus necessitated by complications from the pandemic, we are delighted to announce that the Birthday Club is back up and running. The purpose of the Birthday Club is to ensure that children and youth in foster care are remembered and celebrated on their special day.

You can help! Join the Birthday Club and provide a birthday gift to a child, aged one to 19. Many of the children and youth in the Birthday Club are expected to remain in foster care for several years, so if you continue in the Club, you can celebrate his or her birthday each year. If you like, you can also send small gifts and remembrances at any of the holidays and special times of the year—or not. It's up to you.

One of the most touching incidents involving the Birthday Club occurred in 2015 at a high school graduation luncheon sponsored by the ACAC program. Former Steering Committee member Jim Watterson was introduced to Carlito for the first time. (Carlito had just turned 18, which enabled the introduction to take place.) Jim steadfastly provided birthday gifts to Carlito through the Birthday Club for 14 years. Carlito's foster mom shared how Carlito



looked forward each year to a gift from the Birthday Club, how much he enjoyed the presents, and how her two sons—not foster children—would say they wished they could receive a Birthday Club gift. Upon meeting, Jim and Carlito immediately hit it off. Observing them sitting comfortably together, a Foster Care Project volunteer said, “They could be grandpa and grandson who have a close attachment—amazing.” Jim stayed in touch with Carlito, served as a mentor, and helped with his tuition until Jim's passing in 2021.

If you would like to help create special memories for a child, please consider joining the Birthday Club. To be matched with a child, please contact inbox@fostercareproject.org. Gifts may be dropped off at our partnering church, First United Methodist Church, at 500 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91101. Thank you for helping to make a child's birthday a very special day.

Addressing the Crisis: Transition-Age Youth and Homelessness

In California there are 60,000 children and youth in the foster care system; approximately 15,000 are transition-age youth. Almost 31% of transition-age foster youth experience homelessness; young men in California who were in foster care are 82% more likely to become homeless than young men in the general population. Black youth are over three times more likely than non-Black youth to be currently experiencing homelessness, and they are 75% more likely than non-Black youth to have experienced homelessness in the past 12 months. This situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Twenty-two percent of foster youth in California experienced homelessness because of COVID-19; the housing

Public Policy Report

situations of 68% of the youth were negatively impacted by the pandemic. (Alternative Family Services)

During the 2021-2022 legislative session the Governor and the legislature invested \$24,593,000 to address the crisis in homelessness for transition-age youth (former foster youth between the ages of 18 and twenty-four) and passed six bills to improve the administration of programs serving these youth. This year the presence of a \$22.5 billion dollar deficit in California has resulted in the Governor cutting back many of the child welfare programs funded last year. FCP is advocating for five bills to address the ongoing crisis of homelessness for transition-age youth.

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Transition-Age Youth and Homelessness

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Two require a review of existing programs: Supervised Independent Living Placement (also known as SILP) and Independent Living Programs (also known as ILP). Three others address funding for housing for transition-age youth by providing guaranteed sources of funds, expanding the organizations eligible to apply for existing funds, and improving the administration of programs responsible for distribution of funds.

The first bill we are supporting that would require a review of existing programs for transition-age youth is AB 525 (Ting) Improving Housing Affordability and Reducing Homelessness Among Foster Youth. In 2010, when California extended foster care to youth from age 18 to age 21, the Supervised Independent Living Placement program for foster youth between the ages of 18 and 21 was created. This is the only program where youth locate and rent their own housing. However, regardless of where the youth live, everyone receives \$1,129 a month to cover costs such as rent and food. Since the program was established, the basic rate has only increased by 41% while the cost of housing has increased by up to 113% in some high-cost counties. According to Cal YOUTH Study 2021 40% of youth residing in Supervised Independent Living Placements reported their monthly budget was insufficient to cover rent and other household expenses, a situation that places them at increased risk for homelessness. This bill will establish a Supervised Independent Living Placement payment to augment the basic rate, based on the cost of housing in the county of residence.

A second bill, which requires a review of existing programs for transition-age youth, is AB 369 (Zbur) Foster Care: Independent Living. This bill will require a review and update of Independent Living Programs (ILPs) in the counties, will extend the age for Independent Living Programs from 21 to 23, and will allow youth to accumulate savings consistent with federal law and not to be disqualified from state funding and social services.

The first bill we are supporting to address funding for housing for transition youth is SB 456 (Menjivar) Multifamily Housing Program: Nonprofit Corporations: Homeless or At-Risk Youth. This bill will make changes to the youth set-aside funds under the Department of Housing and Community Development's (HCD) Homekey program. For the first time nonprofit corporations will be eligible to apply for grants in Homekey for housing projects solely serving homeless youth, youth at risk of experiencing homelessness, or current or former foster youth.

A second bill to address funding for housing for foster youth is AB 963 (Schiavo) End the Foster Care to Homelessness Pipeline Act. This bill will require the I-Bank (under the Governor's Office) to guarantee loans made by financial institutions to qualified nonprofit and for-profit businesses for the construction, acquisition, and renovation of housing for current and former foster youth between 18 and 25 with priority given to counties with high housing inelasticity and rates of foster youth.

The third bill to address funding for housing for transition foster youth is AB 799 (Rivas) Homeless Accountability & Results Act. This bill will strengthen California's response to homelessness by establishing accountability measures and evidence-based improvements to the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program, including homelessness among youth. HHAP provides funding to homeless Continuums of Care, to counties and to large cities to support a variety of homelessness interventions. HHAP contains a 10% "youth set-aside" requiring local jurisdictions to invest at least 10% of its funding in addressing homelessness among youth.

Foster Care Project believes that safe, affordable, and stable housing is crucial to the safety and well-being of all Californians, particularly our transition-age youth. We urge your support of these five bills. With your help, we can increase funding and resources to reduce the risk of homelessness for our vulnerable young people.

All Saints Church

**Foster
Care
Project**



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