



### 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
- Anne Riffenburgh
- Nicole Rodger
- Lacreta Scott
- Judi-anne Simmons
- Melanie Williams
- Dwana Willis
- Pamela Wilson
- Anne Wolf
- Trula Worthy-Clayton

## New Family Visitation Site Gears Up at Barrio Action

**O**n July 21, a special “meet and greet” was held at Barrio Action. The purpose was twofold: 1) to let the El Sereno community know that Family Connect Pasadena, Barrio Action and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) had partnered to provide a new, local visitation site for court-ordered, monitored family visits, and 2) to recruit volunteers, especially bilingual English/Spanish speakers, to serve as coach-monitors to assist in the family reunification process. Since



Photo: Joanna Grasso

The visitation room at Barrio Action is a bright and welcoming place for families to reconnect during court-ordered, monitored visits.

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 neglect or abuse.

All three prior family visitation sites have been located in Pasadena. The current El Sereno site was inspired by Muzeyyen Balaban of Pasadena DCFS, who requested that the next site be located closer to where most of the referred families live—an important consideration, especially for families who rely upon the bus for transportation. Tammy Membrano, Executive Director of Barrio Action, was pleased to offer a room for the visits, a tangible example of the organization’s ongoing commitment to support healthy families in the community. The Operations Agreement was signed in late July. A flurry of activity ensued as the designated room was readied with



One family bonded so well with volunteer coach-monitor Megan Cooper, they invited her to join them on Halloween.

### 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.

*Continued, pg. 4*

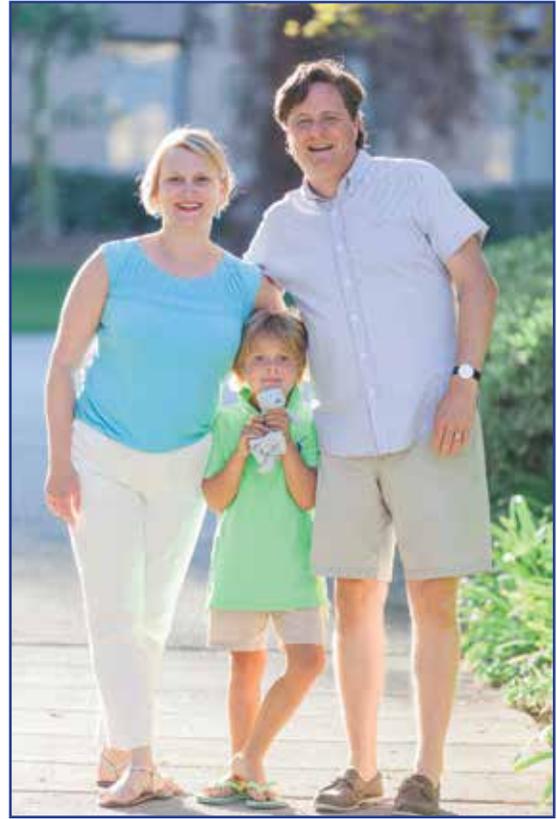
# The Many Gifts of the Angel Tree

It's looking a lot like Christmas...

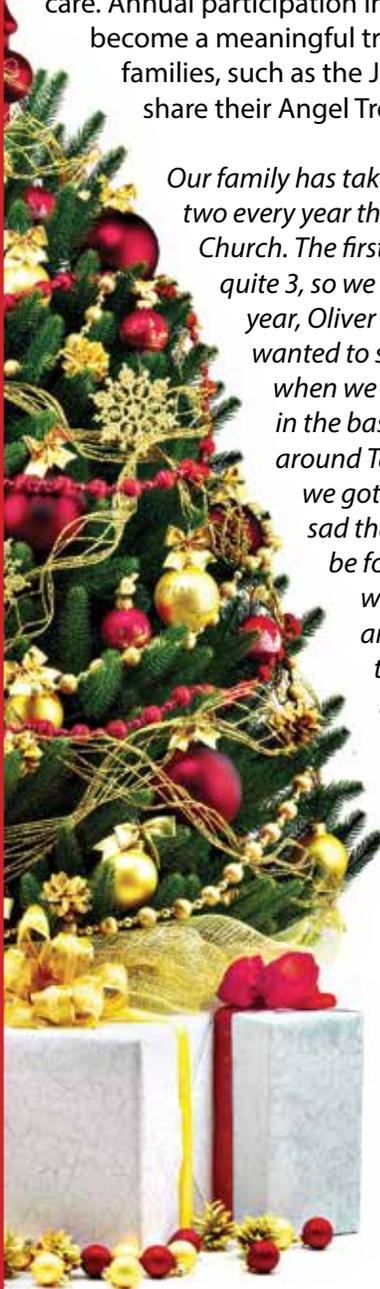
Every December a festive "Angel Tree" graces Regas Hall at All Saints Church, and this year is no exception. The tree is bedecked with the names and gift wishes of local children and youth who will spend the holidays in foster care. Annual participation in the Angel Tree project has become a meaningful tradition for many All Saints families, such as the Jones family, who offered to share their Angel Tree experience:

*Our family has taken an Angel Tree name or two every year that we have been at All Saints Church. The first year, our son Oliver was not quite 3, so we took the lead. By the next year, Oliver wanted to be involved. He wanted to select kids around his age when we chose names. Oliver rode in the basket of the buggy as we went around Target to buy the gifts. When we got to picking the toy, he was sad that one of the toys would not be for him. I told him, "The child we are buying for may not have any toys at all." I looked at him in time to see a tear trickle down his cheek. He said he wanted to buy both toys we were considering so that the child would have more toys. I hugged him and told him I was impressed by his empathy (a word he did not yet know). Ever since that Christmas, we have continued to buy gifts for the Angel Tree for a boy around Oliver's age, and he is very involved in the selection, determining what he thinks the boy will like. This is something we budget for and look forward to each year as a family. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful project.*

--Dana, Albert, and Oliver Jones



**Dana, Albert and Oliver Jones, longtime supporters of the Angel Tree project.**



Many thanks to the Jones family and others like them, who engage in the spirit of giving to brighten the holiday of a child. Last year more than 750 children received gifts through this collaboration between DCFS, Children, Youth and Families at All Saints Church, and Foster Care Project. If you would like to take part, please drop by Regas Hall to select a tag with a child's name, age and gift request. The unwrapped gift must be returned to All Saints Church by Sunday, December 11th.

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

## FCP Welcomes Two Talented New Members to its Steering Committee



**Dwana Willis**

For the past eleven years, Dwana Willis has held a challenging job as a Dependency Court attorney representing the interests of foster youth. The mandate that drew her was simple: "I wanted to make a difference for children that are abused and neglected after seeing how children were legally returned to parents--despite the parents' inability to make changes in their behavior."

Dwana has also served as a volunteer counselor for incarcerated youth, providing play therapy to children. Her interests include a strong commitment to education and social justice. Dwana met Jeanette Mann and Beth Gertmenian, members of FCP's Public Policy Committee, at the dedication of the PCC STARS Resource Room at Eliot Middle School. Dwana is passionate about developing systems and support for high school and middle school students in foster care that will not only set them firmly on the path to college but will be there for them every step of the way. "I just want to help by sharing my knowledge," Dwana says.

Dwana is deeply committed to working with LGBT foster youth to find ways to provide the counseling, resources and encouragement they need in their search for identity.



**Tim Hartley**

Tim Hartley is a busy guy. For more than a decade he has worked as a successful residential real estate agent, a career ideally suited to his warm and outgoing personality. For the past six years he has served as a coach for Pasadena's Special Olympics swim and soccer teams. Recently he became a hospice volunteer. On the home front, Tim and his husband Jason are raising two sons, Noah, 11, and Wyatt, 3. Still, Tim didn't hesitate to commit when he was invited to join the Foster Care Project's Steering Committee.

"I have two children, both of whom were adopted," Tim says. "I became familiar with the foster care system while my husband and I were exploring options for growing our family. While adoption via the foster care process didn't work for our family, my exposure sparked an interest in families and children in the system."

Two areas of foster/adoption which hold particular interest for Tim include special needs children and the impact of the foster/adoption process on families. We welcome his involvement in these issues and others as we work together to enhance the lives of our children.

**Barrio Action, Continued from pg.1**

fresh paint, bright, comfortable furniture and a wide array of toys.

Volunteer coach-monitors Megan Cooper and Pat Zeider have assisted with one family's two-hour, twice-a-week visits for some time now. While the family experienced positive interactions at each of the Pasadena visitation sites, the El Sereno location is undoubtedly most convenient for them—as it is closer to where they live and an easier bus ride. The family used the room at Barrio Action for the first time in early November, and mom commented, "That room is pretty cool." Coach-monitor Megan Cooper added, "We were all impressed with the homey feeling of the room, the bright colors and the activities, including a small basketball hoop...kudos to all involved in setting up and arranging this venue for visits."

A formal "grand opening" in celebration of the new visitation site has been planned for early 2017. But the most meaningful kick-off event has already taken place. It happened on a low-key November day in a cheery room at Barrio Action—in a safe space designed specifically to help separated families reconnect and heal.



*Those who bring  
sunshine to the lives  
of others cannot keep  
it from themselves.*

J.M. Barrie (1860-1937)

*May the love that is in my heart pass from my hand to yours.* --Traditional American Grace

## *A Thanksgiving Outpouring*



DCFS Caseworker Sylvia Cortez with the generous gifts gathered for Thanksgiving baskets.

Our ACAC Thanksgiving food drive garnered a big "WOW," thanks to the contributions of All Saints Church parishioners and local community members, including employees at Alhambra-based Riedon, Inc., who donated generously. We filled a large basket and additional bag for each of 12 families and provided a gift card for purchase of fresh items. A significant amount of canned food went to the DCFS pantry for emergency use. Heartfelt appreciation to all who helped. Maybe you're thinking, "Aw shucks, it was just a few groceries." But for these families, many of whom are struggling, the donated items not only provided tangible help, they represented a huge gesture of love and support. So, on behalf of our families, our DCFS social worker, and all of us at the Foster Care Project...many, many thanks.



## REMEMBERING LAUREL LAMBERT



On October 23, our dear friend and longtime Foster Care Project supporter Laurel Lambert passed away from complications of a devastating stroke. Laurel fought courageously for eight months to regain function, but ultimately succumbed to overwhelming infection. She was 69.

Friends recall Laurel's warmth, wit and profound enthusiasm for life. She embraced a wide array of interests: cooking, gardening, yoga, the arts, music, theater, writing, the Dodgers and more. She lived in Japan for a short time and visited a multitude of countries. She served as a docent at the Huntington Library, with special emphasis on the Japanese teahouse and Chinese and herb gardens. She rescued numerous animals and always had a West Highland terrier in the house. She was immensely proud of her lovely daughter Lisa.

The ancient Greeks revered the leaves of the laurel tree, which were used to indicate triumph and achievement. What apt symbolism for a woman who accomplished so much and gave so generously of herself. Laurel graduated from Pitzer College in 1970, after focusing on Asian studies within the Claremont College system. Later she earned an MBA from the

University of Redlands. She spent 30 years working in public relations/communications in the PBS system and formed lasting friendships there. Laurel inspired many with her profound commitment to the needs of foster children. In 2009, she joined the Foster Care Project (FCP) Steering Committee and soon became editor of its newsletter. She also served as a point person for Hillside and volunteered as a tutor and mentor at My Friend's Place. Along the way, she served countless pancakes to homeless youth, made lunches for weekend distribution, helped furnish bare apartments, organized a "Bra Project" for teen girls, and assisted in setting up archives. Most importantly, Laurel offered a listening ear and a warm smile to every child she encountered. She never failed to make time for those who needed her guidance and support.

Perhaps the most meaningful tribute to Laurel can be captured in three simple sentences: Her legacy is one of kindness and compassion. She brought light and love to those around her. And she left the world better and more beautiful than it was before.



**Laurel Lambert celebrates "The Blessing of the Animals" with her Westie Bibi at All Saints Church.**

### Partnering Agencies

50/50 Leadership  
Aspire West, Pasadena  
Barrio Action Youth and Family Center  
Cal Tech Y  
California Youth Connection  
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  
EOP 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  
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  
STARS at PCC  
The Alliance for Children's Rights  
Violence Intervention Program  
Vista Del Mar Child and Foster Care Program  
Young and Healthy

### Join Us!

For information about FCP and to learn what Volunteer Opportunities are available, visit our website: [www.fostercareproject.org](http://www.fostercareproject.org) or email [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

## Foster Care Project Public Policy Report

Jeanette Mann, FCP Public Policy and Community Relations Chair

2016 was a very successful year for FCP's legislative advocacy. Fifteen of the twenty-five bills we supported were signed into law by Governor Brown. We focused attention on five issues: 1) housing for transition-aged youth; 2) increased funding for foster youth in community colleges; 3) solitary confinement of minors; 4) the inadequacies of the Maximum Family Grant rule in California, and 5) the effects on foster children and youth on the elimination of categorical funding for services in local schools.

In Los Angeles County there is a critical need for housing for youth transitioning out of foster care. Last fall after the developers of a housing project in Pasadena, including 17 units of housing for transition-aged youth (TAY) decided to withdraw their request for the density bonus and pay the in lieu fee, members of the FCP Public Policy Committee met with Senator Carol Liu, Supervisor Michael Antonovich and Assemblymember Chris Holden to discuss ways to provide housing for TAY. All three supported amending the density bonus statute to include housing for TAY. AB 2442, introduced by Assemblymember Holden, provided a multiple density bonus for developers if the development set aside 20 percent for TAY, disabled veterans, or the formerly homeless. The bill passed the Assembly and the Senate without a dissenting vote and was signed into law by Governor Brown on September 28th.

With the expansion of foster care to cover youth up to 21 in 2012, the number of foster youth attending community colleges in California had increased 38 percent in 2014-2015 to 14,761. However, funding for Chafee grants, the federal program for current and former foster



youth attending college, remained at the 2002 level. In 2014-15, due to insufficient funds, one in four of the eligible foster applicants did not receive grants. AB 2506 provided funding for all eligible foster and former foster students who apply for a Chafee grant if they meet the September 2nd deadline. It was signed into law by Governor Brown

The committee is very pleased that two issues which they have advocated for the past four years were signed into law: prohibiting minors from being subject to solitary confinement (SB 1143) and, through the budget act, repealing the penalty which denied an increase in aid for a child born into a family receiving aid through a Calgrant work program.

Unfortunately, AB2548 which would have established a state system to hold local school districts accountable for how they used funds allocated to increase the academic achievement of targeted, disadvantaged youth--low income, English-language learners and foster youth--was vetoed by the Governor.

"We are saddened that, due to term limits, Senator Carol Liu's service in the Senate is completed," said Jeanette Mann, Chair, Public Policy Committee. "She has been a true friend of and advocate for foster, homeless, transitional and incarcerated children and youth. She will be missed."