



### FOSTER CARE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

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### CELEBRATING THE GRAND OPENING OF FAMILY CONNECT BARRIO ACTION VISITATION ROOM



Making the cut: Gail Bardin and Muzeyyen Balaban wield giant scissors at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Family Connect Barrio Action visitation room. Offering enthusiastic support (from left to right): Carlos Martinez, Susie Lopez, Pat Zeider, Taylor Dudley, Maria Morales, Megan Cooper, Trula Worthy-Clayton, Juliana Serrano, and Antonio Gallardo.

### 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.

**O**n March 16th, more than 60 enthusiastic friends, well-wishers, and community leaders gathered at Barrio Action Youth & Family Center in El Sereno to kick off the Grand Opening of the center's family visitation room. The cheery room--decorated with bright colors and stocked with inviting toys and games--serves as a "safe space" for monitored, court-ordered visits between children and parents engaged in the reunification process. Carlos Martinez, Director of Operations at Barrio Action, noted that the El Sereno location provides a comfortable, welcoming alternative to meeting at a noisy McDonalds or police station. The site is also particularly convenient for local families, who might otherwise face a tiring bus ride to one of four previously established visitation sites, located some distance away. The celebration--which featured a variety of speakers and a festive ribbon cutting ceremony--received broad media coverage from La Opinión, MVP Channel and Community Beacon.

Antonio Gallardo, Pastor for Latino Ministries at All Saints Church, provided an opening prayer in both Spanish and English and later blessed the room. Muzeyyen Balaban, Regional Administrator at the Pasadena office of the Department of Children and Family Services, spoke of the commitment and cooperation between DCFS,

## PLEASE JOIN US FOR A FOSTER CARE/ ADOPTION RECEPTION



Foster Care Project and its partnering agencies, Five Acres and RaiseAChild, will celebrate Foster Care Awareness Month on Sunday, May 21, with a reception for those wishing to learn more about the foster/adopt process. The reception will be held in the Guild Room from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. Staff from Five Acres and RaiseAChild will be on hand to present a brief program, respond to questions, and help prospective parents take the first step toward becoming foster/adopt families. Foster/Adopt Coordinator Beth Gertmenian says, "Whether you are ready to initiate the process or tiptoeing around the edges, we hope you'll join us on May 21st to gain helpful information and support.

For further details contact:

**[inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)**

"If the government or those who are in power [want] to make the foster care system better, what they should do is just ask a foster kid. ... They can tell you exactly what they need. What they need is what most children and even teens need ... Someone who cares about them, someone who will listen to them and hold them when they are scared. What they need is what any child needs ... a family who loves them."

LUIS

Former foster youth, Massachusetts

### CON'T FROM PG.1

All Saints Church Foster Care Project, Pasadena Family Connect and Barrio Action—an ongoing community partnership that helped make the vision of the visitation room a reality. Taylor Dudley, Los Angeles County Children's Deputy (representing the office of Supervisor Hilda Solis) and Susie Lopez, City of Los Angeles Field Deputy (representing the office of Councilmember Jose Huizar) conveyed the support of their offices, citing the beneficial nature of the project for their respective constituents and the community as a whole.



**A threefold cord is not easily broken:** Coach-monitors Megan Cooper and Pat Zeider flank parent Maria Morales at the Grand Opening of Family Connect Barrio Action's visitation room; Morales spoke movingly of her efforts to secure a better life for her young daughter.

Coach-monitors Megan Cooper and Pat Zeider shared heartwarming stories about helping separated families to reconnect and heal, while Maria Morales, mother of a 6-year-old, spoke movingly of her efforts to fulfill DCFS requirements "to give my daughter the life she's entitled to." Recently, when ending a visit, Megan Cooper said, "Goodbye room." But Maria Morales's exuberant young daughter had the last word. "I love you, room," she said.

For information on how to become a volunteer coach-monitor in the family reunification process contact: **[inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)**

Foster Kids Are  
Our Kids

# Foster Care Project Birthday Club



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## NATIONAL CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN, INC., SAN GABRIEL CHAPTER HONORED FOR ITS SUPPORT OF FCP'S BIRTHDAY CLUB

On December 10, 2016, Foster Care Project presented a commemorative plaque to Judy Matthews, chair and founder of the National Congress of Black Women, Inc., San Gabriel Valley Chapter, in recognition of the organization's community partnership with FCP and ongoing support of FCP's Birthday Club. The presentation took place at the chapter's annual Christmas party, which was held at the Pasadena Historical Society.

For more than a decade, the Birthday Club has supplied gifts to Pasadena area foster youth who might not otherwise receive a birthday present. The past year saw a dramatic rise in the need for contributors, and National Congress of Black Women, Inc., San Gabriel Valley Chapter stepped into the gap, providing five gifts a month to children enrolled in the program. In addition, all children receiving these birthday gifts were sent Christmas gifts as well as backpacks by members of the chapter—a total of 60 Christmas presents and 60 backpacks.

The National Congress of Black Women, Inc., San Gabriel Valley Chapter is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization



**An award-winning smile: Judy Matthews, chair and founder of National Congress of Black Women, Inc., San Gabriel Valley Chapter, accepts a commemorative plaque from FCP'S co-chair Jeanette Mann, in recognition of the chapter's ongoing support of the Birthday Club.**



dedicated to the education, economic and cultural development of African American women, their families, and the community, inclusive of all people. FCP is profoundly grateful for chapter members' contributions to the Birthday Club and their tangible demonstration of love and support to some of our community's most vulnerable children.

For more information on how to provide a child with a gift through the Birthday Club, contact:  
**[inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)**



**Santa's sleigh was busy, so an SUV was pressed into service!** The National Congress of Black Women, Inc., San Gabriel Valley Chapter provided 60 Christmas gifts and 60 backpacks to children enrolled in FCP's Birthday Club.

## FCP VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

### SERVING UP BREAKFAST AND CARING AT MY FRIEND'S PLACE



**Breakfast of Champions:** My Friend's Place volunteers Kim Brorby, Nancy Dannevik, Susan Flaming, Carli Simons, Steve Brorby and Sarah King.

On January 31, Foster Care Project volunteers rolled up their sleeves and once again brought their breakfast-making skills to My Friend's Place, a comprehensive, professionally-staffed Resource Center for homeless young people. Approximately fifty youth enjoyed a meal of sizzling bacon and sausages, fluffy pancakes drenched in syrup and butter, and thirst-quenching juice and milk. As FCP volunteer Nancy Dannevik points out, "At the end of the month the young people are often down to their last dollar and are especially thankful for the hot breakfast." Six FCP volunteers cooked and served the meal and received grateful and polite thank-yous from the staff and clients. Nancy reports, "It's 'all you can eat'--until everything is gone." She adds, "We volunteers always feel energized as we pack up."

The mission of My Friend's Place, located in Hollywood, is to "assist and inspire homeless youth to build self-sufficient lives." The

organization strives to reduce the barriers (psychological, physical, and social) that often discourage at-risk adolescents from seeking and accepting social services help. Development of trust plays a key role. A variety of therapeutic interventions are employed, including but not limited to:

- 1) trauma-informed care to address issues of abuse, abandonment and neglect;
- 2) a strength-based approach to foster dignity, self-worth and empowerment;
- 3) harm reduction education to promote safety and reduce high risk behaviors.

We salute our FCP volunteers who consistently act with caring and commitment on behalf of the young people at My Friend's Place.

For information on how to volunteer at My Friend's Place or to participate in one of many other FCP volunteer opportunities, contact: [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)



# A Bounty of Easter Baskets



**For some bunny special:** an FCP Easter basket is chock-full of baby toys and supplies, a cuddly stuffed animal, and a special “Patsy blanket.”

age-appropriate goodies--stuffed animals, lotions, candy, clothing, art supplies, Dr. Seuss books and more—all donated by FCP steering committee members and community supporters.

A special donation came from longtime Pasadena resident Patsy Robeck, a retired Huntington Hospital nurse and mother of four grown boys, who provided handmade blankets,

One week before Easter, volunteers with FCP’s Adopt a Child Abuse Case Worker Program spent a busy, fun-filled morning stuffing baskets for 38 children (infants through older teens) on the caseload of “adopted” DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez. The personalized baskets were filled with

five of which were tucked into Easter baskets for babies and toddlers. (Another 17 “Patsy blankets” were earmarked for DCFS infant emergency packs). Patsy’s family history helped shape her awareness and concern for the needs of vulnerable children. Her mother, Priscilla, spent almost 10 years in the Texas State Orphanage, from approximately age six to 16 (during the 1930s to early 1940s). Patsy says, “When she grew up, my mother was always helping someone. She would be pleased to know I’ve contributed these blankets to the Foster Care Project.”



**Sew special!** Pasadena resident Patsy Robeck sat down at her sewing machine and created 22 homemade blankets to be used in infant and toddler Easter baskets as well as DCFS emergency packs.

Many thanks to Patsy and to all our contributors who helped ensure that some wonderful Easter bunny deliveries took place this year!

All Saints Church  
**Foster Care Project**



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



### Partnering Agencies

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

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Jeanette Mann, FCP Public Policy and Community Relations Chair

The Foster Care Project (FCP) has focused most of its public policy efforts on addressing the challenges and barriers facing foster children in completing high school and entering college. One of these barriers has been the absence of school stability due to the practice of moving children an average of four times during the school year and the lack of transportation to the new school.

In an effort to ensure educational stability for children in foster care, in December 2015 Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires local school districts to work with child welfare agencies to keep children in their schools of origin. If it would not be in the children's best to remain in their schools of origin, ESSA requires that they be enrolled in their new schools without delay and that transportation to the new school be provided.

Last February, the County addressed the issue of school stability by a resolution requiring regular reports to the Board of Supervisors on the progress local school districts and county agencies were making in developing transportation plans for foster children.

At the request of Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger's Office, FCP testified on this resolution on February 7. Susan Flaming reported on the experiences and concerns that foster parents and guardians brought to the Pasadena Unified School District's Foster Youth Council. Three of these concerns involved transportation. Foster parents reported district services were inconsistent or unreliable for school-hours pickup/return home and that transportation was only provided for foster children with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs)--not for all foster children. Furthermore, families reported that the District failed to provide transportation even if Summer School or specific after-school activities, such as music or sports, were mandated in a child's IEP. Finally, children were often moved to a new school in a different district at significant



times during the school year without any means of transportation to the old school--such as the senior who was moved one month prior to high school graduation. Without transportation to his old school he could not graduate with his friends.

"The simplest way to describe the lives of foster youth and their education experiences is one of continued disconnections and interruptions, rather than school stability," Flaming said.

On May 2 Board of Supervisors approved an \$800,000 pilot program to ensure that students in foster care have transportation to their school of origin. The pilot will include \$300,000 from the Department of Children and Family Services, \$300,000 from the County Office of Education and an additional \$100,000 of in-kind transportation costs from the Los Angeles Unified School District. The program will start this month and will run through the end of December. Using a combination of Metro TAP cards, reimbursements to caregivers and contracts with a "child-friendly private car service," the goal is to test what works and come up with a more robust plan in the new year.

"We invite anybody interested in public policy issues affecting foster children to join us in visiting and writing letters to our state and local elected officials, urging them to support the rights and well-being of these kids," said Jeanette Mann, Chair, Public Policy Committee.