



FOSTER CARE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Gail Bardin

Jay Belloli

Patrice Gibson

Rosemary Hyde

Isabel Ramirez

Liz Jackman

Natasha Mahone

Jeanette Mann

Kim Miles

Anne Riffenburgh

Judi-anne Simmons

Melanie Williams

Pamela Wilson

Anne Wolf

ACAC Appreciation Luncheon: Recognizing Those Who Have “Heart for Our Community”

On February 13th, more than 40 committed volunteers, caseworkers, and community supporters gathered at the Pasadena office of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) for an appreciation luncheon in honor of those participating in the highly praised Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program. The ACAC Program has received ongoing support from All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) for the past 15 years. FCP contributions to the program include Christmas presents, Easter baskets, a celebratory luncheon for graduating high school seniors, an annual back-to-school shopping spree, and donations of clothing, diapers, cribs, strollers, groceries, and gift cards. Four FCP-ACAC volunteers--Beth Gertmenian, Rosemary Hyde, Anne Riffenburgh, and Anne Wolf—support DCFS caseworkers Ruth Lee and Sylvia Cortez, organizing donations and activities to fulfill ACAC needs.

The seed that became the ACAC Program was planted in 1998 by Lynn Gillins, a longtime member of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS), La Cañada Flintridge. Lynn envisioned a program that would assist caseworkers on the front lines, as they strove daily to improve the lives of children and families in foster care, often with limited resources and support. With help from her LDS ward, Lynn collected much-needed supplies, loading items into her truck and ensuring that furniture and other necessities reached caseworkers and their vulnerable families. Lynn recalled two early, heartfelt interactions: a five-year-old boy, who jumped for joy and wrapped her in a bear hug at the sight of the bed she'd brought him, and an eleven-year-

old, who was thrilled with the comfortable leather sofa he could sleep on instead of a cold concrete floor.

Since its inception, the ACAC Program has attracted scores of allies, but none has served as a bigger champion than Virginia Culbertson, Children Services Administrator, who harnessed her notable enthusiasm and organizational skills to expand and



Muzeyyen Balaban, Regional Administrator, and Christian Daly, Supervisor Barger's representative, lend their support, as FCP-ACAC volunteer Rosemary Hyde displays her certificate of appreciation.

strengthen the program. The ACAC Program began with a handful of churches and caseworkers. Today members from ten churches have “adopted” 11 caseworkers (with five more caseworkers on the waiting list); together they tend to the needs of 350 children and families annually.

The luncheon opened with a warm welcome from Muzeyyen Balaban, Regional Administrator, who addressed the theme of gratitude. Caseworker Melissa Scheer shared stories

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.

League of Women Voters: An Outpouring of Support to Vulnerable Children

In emergency situations involving abuse, neglect, or abandonment, children may be removed from their homes with no supplies and little clothing. On February League Day, sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Pasadena, several speakers discussed the challenges faced by children in foster care. Jeanette Mann, a founding member of All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP), invited League members to supply Emergency Kits to children in need. League members responded to FCP's request for help with an outpouring of support—providing more than 150 Emergency Kits to be used when children are removed from an unsafe environment. Kits were created with a variety of necessities: toothpaste and toothbrushes, washcloths and hand towels, shampoo and conditioner, mini tissue packs, lotions, diapers for infants and toddlers, snacks, water bottles, and more. Many of the



Rosa Gomez, Supervising Children's Social Worker, displays just three of the more than 150 Emergency Kits that League members assembled for vulnerable children.

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of families on her caseload who benefited deeply from ACAC involvement. One of the most touching moments came with the remarks of a young man named Randy, a former foster child, who spoke of the supportive care he received from caseworker Christy Parkin, during his teen years in the early 2000s. "I'd never had proper insurance; I'd never seen a dentist." Christy rectified these oversights, linking him to a male mentor and providing gift cards, clothes, and food donated by the ACAC Program. The involvement made a difference: "I definitely... turned out better than most of the people around me. I was very well taken care of." Today Randy has a good job, is a father himself, and makes sure he pays it forward by helping others in need.

ACAC volunteers were awarded certificates of appreciation from Pasadena DCFS as well as commendations from Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger. Rosemary Hyde and Anne Riffenburgh were on hand to represent FCP-ACAC and receive these tangible expressions of appreciation. Toward the end of the program, Christian Daly, Supervisor Barger's representative, spoke movingly to those assembled: "Miracles do exist. They are still happening today. Thank you for being the miracle workers... Thank you for the heart you have for our community."

kits also included a small cuddly toy or blanket to serve as a comfort item.

On March 12, an enormous delivery of Emergency Kits made its way to Pasadena's Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to the surprise and delight of staff. Several social workers commented on the inclusion of comfort items in the kits. "In a scary, unfamiliar situation, it makes a huge difference to have something to hold onto."

Rosa Gomez, Supervising Children's Social Worker, explained why donation of Emergency Kits is so needed and helpful. "Sometimes police detain the child, so we pick up the child from the police station with no supplies. Other times it's the social worker who is serving a warrant and removing the child from an unsafe situation. For the safety of everyone, it's sometimes better for the social worker to take the child and leave quickly. The parents can be upset, highly emotional—even aggressive. The last thing they want to do is pack a bag. And we've seen conditions be so unsanitary it wouldn't be appropriate for children to bring things out of the home."

FCP thanks members of the League of Women Voters, Pasadena for helping to make a difficult process a little bit better. We are profoundly grateful for the League's tangible demonstration of love and support on behalf of some of our community's most vulnerable children.

When Action Meets Compassion

Late last fall, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) volunteer Beth Gertmenian was honored for her exemplary service to Hillside, one of FCP's longtime partnering agencies. Hillside is a Southern California residential and community foster care and mental health agency "dedicated to healing children and young adults, strengthening families, and transforming communities through quality comprehensive services and advocacy." Beth received the Hillside Lifetime Achievement Award at the organization's

"Thank you, Hillside for being here for our kids. And for giving me the opportunity to be the person I am."

--Beth Gertmenian

annual Circle of Excellence dinner, held in Old Town Pasadena on November 15, 2018. She was also awarded a letter of commendation from Los Angeles County Board of Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

Beth got hooked on helping at Hillside ("and one does get hooked") more than 40 years ago, when her youngest child was at Cottage Co-Op Nursery School. It was there she met

fellow parent Charles Harrison, then-president of Hillside board of directors, who encouraged her to get involved with the agency. While tackling assorted projects there, Beth considered a career as an art therapist working with children. She discussed the idea with former Hillside CEO John Hitchcock, who said, "Oh, Beth, just get an MSW and you can do whatever you want." Beth notes, "I did, and... I did. And I still am."



Proud Family: Bennet, Colin and Ryan support their grandmother Beth Gertmenian, who received Hillside Lifetime Achievement Award.



Former foster youth and YMO graduate Randall Trice with mentor Beth Gertmenian. Randall is pursuing his Master's Degree in Social Work from Azusa Pacific University.

After a social work career that included working with the homeless mentally ill population on the streets and in emergency shelters in Orange County, as well as with at-risk children and families in El Monte, Beth retired in 2006. Circling back to Hillside, she established a mentoring program for Youth Moving On (YMO), a transitional program for youth leaving foster care. Beth's YMO involvement over the years has proven particularly rewarding: "It's a real thrill to see some of our graduates thriving."

Former foster youth and YMO graduate Randall Trice had this to say: "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... Beth constantly inspires me to strive for greatness and to never give up on my dreams. I am not only lucky but grateful to have met someone like Beth who cares enough about my future to invest their time and love into my success."

Beth has no plans to slow down any time soon. For the last 15 years, she has worked closely with All Saints Church Foster Care Project, serving as a Foster/Adopt coordinator and point person for FCP's highly regarded Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker Program. In addition, as a representative of FCP's Public Policy Committee, she meets with the Hillside Government Affairs and Public Policy Committee on a regular basis.

A wise person once said, "When action meets compassion, lives change." We salute Beth Gertmenian, who has made a lifetime commitment to combining action with compassion to heal and transform the lives of children

73 Children Served: ACAC Easter Basket Project Sets New Record



Enthusiastic volunteers Jane Burtis and Lynn Tuitte help assemble Easter baskets for children and youth in foster care.

Every year the coordinators of FCP's Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program harness their "bunny rabbit energy" to ensure that children and youth in foster care are surprised and delighted on Easter morning—and this year was no exception. Seventy-three children (infants through older teens) on the caseloads of our "adopted" DCFS caseworkers received personalized baskets, nearly doubling the number of children served last year.



An Easter basket for a teen girl contains a magazine, throw blanket, bunny pillow, hair supplies, and more.

The personalized Easter baskets overflowed with goodies—stuffed animals, art supplies, bath and body lotions, cuddly blankets, hygiene items, books, toys, Easter outfits, and more—all donated by ACAC coordinators, FCP steering committee members, and generous community supporters.



Cuddly stuffed animals grace these Easter baskets designed for younger children.

In addition to the plethora of Easter baskets, 30 families also received bags stuffed with much-needed groceries and household supplies.

We offer our sincere thanks to the many contributors who reached out to fill baskets with goodies and hearts with joy this Easter season.

Angels in Our Midst: A Surprise Donation

In December 2018, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) received a most welcome surprise: an anonymous donor at California Community Foundation generously provided FCP with \$40,000 for Family Connect, a family visitation program designed to promote family reunification.

Family visitation is a vital service that allows children living in out-of-home placement and their parents to spend quality time together. Family Connect creates a "safe space" to foster reconnection and healing. The visits help families to build parenting skills and strengthen bonds of attachment through play-based activities and a supportive relationship with a trained Coach-Monitor.

FCP salutes our "mystery angel" for this very generous donation in support of Family Connect and the family reunification process.

May Is National Foster Care Awareness Month

In honor of National Foster Care Awareness Month, we invite you to consider supporting All Saints Church Foster Care Project with a gift to our annual appeal fund. Through the generosity of many, we have enhanced the quality of life of foster, homeless, transitional, and incarcerated children and youth and given them hope for a brighter future.



For over fifteen years the Foster Care Project has provided needed funds, resources, and volunteers who serve at-risk children and youth.

Last year our volunteers promoted, assisted, guided, tutored, and mentored over a thousand children and youth and provided birthday and Christmas gifts to another thousand. Some examples are:

- **Ricky:** One of the youngest shoppers at our annual back-to-school shopping spree for children in foster care raced around showing off his new batman pajamas (complete with cape) and jumped and turned cartwheels in his new shoes.
- **Becky:** A young girl previously living on the streets of Hollywood after selling a painting at our Annual Art Show completed a GED and enrolled in a local community college to study art.
- **Jorge:** A fourth grader living in a foster home played campout with his brothers using a tent brought by their father in the tiny visit room during our Family Connect reunification program hours.

As stewards of this legacy we invite you to consider making a donation to the Foster Care Project so we can continue to make a difference in the lives of so many. Your tax-deductible checks should be made out to the Flintridge Center – Foster Care Project and sent to Anne Wolf, Treasurer, Foster Care Project, at 1249 Canedo Place, Pasadena, CA 91105. If you prefer, you can make your donation online with a Visa/MC/American Express card at www.fostercareproject.org by clicking on “Donate” and completing the secure donation form.

We appreciate your consideration of this request. Your contribution will grow strong children and families and help build bright futures. Thank you!

Each of us can play a part in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. Your involvement can make someone’s future brighter.

Contact inbox@fostercareproject.org to learn more about how to:

- Donate
- Volunteer
- Obtain resources or further information.



Longtime FCP supporter Silvia Sowell drops off new and gently used toys and clothing for use in the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker Program. Our volunteers and donors form the backbone of the Foster Care Project.

FCP Welcomes New Steering Committee Members

Natasha Mahone

Motivated by her experiences as a former foster youth, Natasha has devoted much of her adult life to advocacy and service in support of the betterment of youth in our communities. Born and raised in Southern California, Natasha graduated from California State University Northridge with a double major in Psychology and Pan African Studies.



With over 20 years of involvement in youth leadership and community programs, Natasha is committed to preparing students and families for college. Her wealth of experience ranges from Director of Programs to individual academic counseling. Her passion to fulfill the needs of our community was acknowledged by the Pasadena Unified School District in 2016, when she was recognized as Volunteer of the Year. Natasha has volunteered in Pasadena and with PUSD since 2007 and has served on numerous educational councils. She was elected as the parent representative for Collaborate PASadena and has served on that council for over four years. She is not shy and is known for rallying parents/guardians to volunteer and support their children's education.

Natasha knows that striving for higher education is challenging and not sought by all students, but believes all should be afforded the opportunity. As a high school junior, she was told that "pursuing a four-year degree would be a challenge for a youth with her background and circumstances" (i.e., minority, low income and foster youth). Determined to prove her counselor wrong, she applied to several four-year colleges and was accepted by seven out of nine schools. She vowed to be a voice of encouragement for youth to strive and reach beyond their current circumstances. In spring of 2016, Natasha joined College Assess Plan (CAP). Working with CAP has allowed Natasha to continue to pursue her passion for supporting higher education for all. She is thrilled to serve the parents and middle school students of PUSD in her role with CAP.

Natasha has been happily married for 20 years and resides in the local Pasadena community with her husband and two children.

Isabel Ramirez



Isabel was born in Mexico City, the second of six siblings. Her interest in the arts, history, and photography was fostered by her father, a photographer. In 1996, Isabel moved with her young son to Pasadena, where she worked hard to adapt to a new life, culture, and language. The fact that her studies were not considered valid in the U.S. created an additional challenge.

Isabel worked tirelessly to learn English and earn her high school diploma, all the while caring for her child with little money or support.

In 2001, Isabel began taking adult school photography classes and was soon fascinated by "the power to capture time on paper." She also developed the ability to observe an object from different viewpoints, which helped her "to perceive the contrasts of the social fabric." Isabel's passion for photography motivated her to become a freelance photographer, at isaramphotography, specializing in commercial and advertising photography. In 2015, she enrolled at Pasadena City College to pursue her dream of completing a degree in social studies.

Motivated by a keen understanding of the difficulties migrant families must overcome to educate their children, Isabel founded "Pasadena En Español" an online portal, using her photographs and social networks to inform Spanish-speaking parents about events, resources, activities, and opportunities available to improve their children's education and family life in general. Isabel serves on numerous advisory boards and has received several awards for her community service.

Isabel lives in Pasadena with her son and her younger brother.

FCP APPLAUDS NATASHA MAHONE AND ISABEL RAMIREZ for their courage and perseverance in overcoming significant obstacles on the road to success--as well as their commitment to "paying it forward." We welcome both to the FCP steering committee and look forward to their valuable contributions toward improving the lives of children and families in our communities.

Make a Difference in a Child's Life



*To make a **difference** in someone's life, you don't have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful, or perfect. You just have to care.*

--Mandy Hale

Please join Foster Care Project (FCP) in commemorating National Foster Care Month by making a difference in a child's life. Here are three ways you can help:

Contribute to the Annual Backpack Drive

From July 1 – 26, you can help by participating in FCP's annual backpack drive. Fill one backpack (or more!) with school supplies and help a child or teen in foster care set off on the first day of school feeling confident and ready to focus on the joys of learning.

Serve as a Personal Shopper at the Annual Back-to-School Shopping Spree

Join us on Saturday, July 27, for one of FCP's most enjoyable events: the annual summer shopping spree, hosted by our Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program. Each young person will be matched with a volunteer, who will help manage a donated Target gift card and serve as a "personal shopper," offering individualized attention and guidance on the purchase of essentials—shirts, pants, school uniforms, jackets, shoes, socks, and underwear—ensuring that each shopper feels like a "king" or a "queen" for the day.

Consider Fostering or Adopting a Child

At any given time, roughly 500 children are waiting to be adopted into a loving home in Los Angeles. If you would like more information about the challenges and rewards of fostering or adopting, we have experts who can provide information and help you navigate the course. We also have mentoring opportunities available. Offering love, stability and connection to a child or teen is one of the greatest gifts anyone can provide.

For more information on these opportunities, please contact: inbox@fostercareproject.org.

Children in Foster Care

Facts and statistics on foster care in Los Angeles County are stark and sobering. According to the Alliance for Children's Rights:

- 28,000 children are currently in foster care in Los Angeles County.
- Children who have experienced child abuse are 42% more likely to be abused and neglected again.
- Nearly half of youth in foster care have learning disabilities or delays.
- By 3rd grade, 80% have had to repeat a grade.
- 75% of students in foster care perform below grade level
- By 11th grade, only 20% of students in foster care are proficient in English language arts.
- Only 5% are proficient in math.
- 87% of youth in the juvenile justice system have learning disabilities.
- Only 58% of those in foster care graduate from high school.
- Only 3% graduate from college.
- Half of youth who age out of foster care end up homeless or incarcerated.
- Nearly 2,000 young adults 18-21 are enrolled in extended foster care in Los Angeles County.
- Teen girls in foster care are 2.5 times more likely to become pregnant by age 19 than those who are not in foster care.
- Half of young men aging out of foster care have become fathers, as compared to 19% of their peers who are not in foster care.

Join us in our mission to change these statistics for the better. Become involved in Foster Care Project's efforts to enhance the lives of foster, homeless, transitional and incarcerated children and youth.

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
League of Women Voters
Learning Works Charter School/ Home Boys
Maryvale (Rosemead address)
My Friend's Place
National Congress of Black Women
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

The Challenges of Housing Transitional Aged Youth

For the past fifteen years the Foster Care Project has worked with local community agencies as well as with local and state elected officials to improve the quality of life of transitional aged youth. One of the major obstacles which they face is the lack of housing.

On April 8, Kim Miles, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) Co-Chair, and Jeanette Mann, Chair, FCP Public Policy Committee, testified at a Pasadena City Council meeting in favor of using the historic Julia Morgan YWCA building for housing Transitional Aged Youth, youth eighteen and over in foster care, and former foster youth transitioning out of foster care. We believe that housing these youth would be compatible with the original purpose of the building, built in 1921, which was to provide safe, affordable housing to young women.

There is a critical shortage of housing for Transitional Aged Youth in Los Angeles County. In April of 2018 there were 2,534 youth 18 and older in foster care in the County. As of January 2019 there were 144 youth in foster care attending high school in Pasadena: 42 in the 11th grade and 36 in the 12th grade—78 youth in Pasadena, who, in the next 15 months, will be in need of housing. Los Angeles County's Transitional Housing Program for Transitional Aged Youth has 382 beds, and there are approximately 50 units of private, transitional housing.

It is very difficult to determine the number of Transitional Aged Youth who are homeless. The



2015 Homeless Count in Sonoma County found that 33% of youth under the age of 25 had been in foster care, and nearly 9% of youth under 25 experiencing homelessness had been in foster care immediately before becoming homeless. Many experts estimate that as many as 50% of foster youth will become homeless. Although the City of Pasadena's Homeless Count only identified 43 unaccompanied homeless in 2018, Hillsides' Youth Moving On, a resource center for homeless youth in Pasadena, served 150 homeless youth in 2017.

"We have found that homelessness lies at the heart of the challenge facing young people in their journey to become productive, self-supporting adults," Mann said. "Not having a place to live impacts opportunities to complete job training and/or college programs; it limits access to medical care; not having an address interferes with the ability to find jobs and keep them. Too often living on the street leads to the crimes necessary to survive on the streets--prostitution, theft, and drug dealing--and into the pipeline from foster care to prison."

Members and supporters of All Saints Church Foster Care Project remain committed to improving the lives of some of our most vulnerable youth by reducing homelessness and improving access to safe, affordable housing.



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