



ALL SAINTS CHURCH FOSTER CARE PROJECT

# Newsletter

FOSTER KIDS ARE OUR KIDS  
All Saints Church  
Foster  
Care  
Project  
20th ANNIVERSARY

September 2024

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Eric del Rosario  
Jane Stockly

## Graphic Artist

Joe Kelly

# FCP'S Back-to-School Shopping SPREE

**We shopped 'til we dropped, and then we shopped some more.**

On July 27 nine enthusiastic volunteer shoppers rolled out of bed early on a Saturday morning to meet up with 11 children and youth (ranging in age from five to 20) at Target Pasadena. The goal: to pick out "fun" clothes (examples: jeans, T-shirts, leggings, pretty dresses, high-top sneakers) as well as necessities (uniforms, underwear, socks) to carry our young people through the first day of school and into the fall in comfort and style. The Foster Care Project (FCP) back-to-school shopping spree is made possible by our generous donors, who once again provided upwards of \$6,500 in support of this annual event.

Thomas Nolan, MSW, and Sylvia Cortez, MSW, two of our "adopted" Pasadena Office of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) social workers were on hand to provide an able assist. Wenceslao Lopez, Target's Human Resource Process Team Leader, helped



**DYNAMIC DUO:** Ariana and volunteer Gaby Diaz join up to form an excellent shopping team.

Photo: Anne Riffenburgh



**MAKING IT HAPPEN:** DCFS social worker Sylvia Cortez; ACAC coordinators Rosemary Hyde, Anne Riffenburgh, and Beth Gertmenian; and DCFS social worker Thomas Nolan joined forces to organize a successful FCP Shopping Spree.

with logistics, while various other Target employees checked on our status throughout the morning to ensure that all was proceeding smoothly. (It was!)

If you've never volunteered at FCP's Back-to-School Shopping Spree, you might give it a whirl next summer, when the call goes

**Continued on Page 2**

## 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 from Page1

out again for helpers. You really haven't experienced shopping until you've accompanied a 7-year-old girl, who announces that "black, khaki, and blue jeans" are her favorite colors, and that she only uses "excaltators" because elevators are scary. Best quote from her (after raising a pair of sandals to her nose and sniffing delicately): "These shoes are stinky. I think someone just tried them on."

As you can imagine, a lot of laughter and bonding takes place during the shopping experience-especially when volunteers stay open and attentive to the needs of the children. Matching a caring and enthusiastic volunteer with a young shopper helps ensure that each child feels super special. This year's event was especially successful, with two of our volunteers asking to become mentors to their student shoppers.

Thomas Nolan, MSW, who works with older youth, had this to say about the day:

I want to send a very special thank you for how amazing the shopping spree was the other day. I was a little nervous, as the youth I brought are generally pretty shy, but they all loved it so much. The comments I received, beyond expressions of gratitude, were that everybody was really genuine, and that it seemed that the people there truly care. Also, Ariana, who arrived before I did, texted me when she got there, "I'm here already ... These ladies are like super nice!"

They are right. You are all super nice. I know that Ariana and Angie {over 18} both exchanged numbers with their assigned shopper volunteers, which is just amazing! Thank you so much for another great year. I know the organization for an event like this is time-consuming and can be difficult, but the full change in attitude from the time the shy youth showed up to the smiling faces and sharing when they left was truly amazing. Thank you all for all you do!

Many thanks to our donors, volunteers, DCFS social workers, and Target staff members for making it a fun day and helping the children and youth to feel confident and ready for the new school year. This is one of our most important and meaningful annual events, and we couldn't do it without you!

Continued on Page 3



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**A GOOD MORNING:** Angie, with volunteer Irene French, was happy with her shopping experience



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**SHARING THE "MOM CARE" VIBE:** Volunteer Veronica Smith (who has an adult son), was happy to be matched with Kevin for shopping.

***"I loved seeing the before and after demeanor(s). Great kids! Great day!"***

**--Beth Gertmenian, Co-coordinator, Adopt a Child Advocate Caseworker Program**





Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**OUT OF THE BOX AND ONTO THE FEET:** A young shopper puts on his new shoes with excitement.

**PAJAMA PARTY TO FOLLOW:** A seven-year-old shopper examines sleepwear options during FCP's Back-to-School Shopping Spree.



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

## FCP's Back-to-School

## Shopping SPREE

***"I left the event feeling really good . . . I was so happy to be able to help this little boy. I look forward to working with you in the future."***

-Shirley Cameron, Shopping Spree Volunteer

***"I know that both Christine {Stewart} and I share in the sentiment of gratefulness and joy when we talk about our experience. We enjoyed shopping with the teen-aged boys. We each have a son (now adults), and it meant a lot to spend time with Joshua and Kevin. They were shy at first but within minutes reached a level of comfort and a sense of 'mom care' with us."***

-Veronica Smith, Shopping Spree Volunteer

***"Joshua was excited to tell me that after the event the volunteers who went shopping with him {Veronica Smith and Christine Stewart} went to his café where he was working to have breakfast. That is so awesome to me. They were able to make such a quick connection in a short time."***

-Thomas Nolan, MSW, DCFS Social Worker

***"This was an opportunity for {11-year-old} Melanie to practice some new skills--from reading labels to asking Target staff where items were located; (the latter} saved us a lot of time going up and down the elevator!"***

-Hannah MacLaren, Shopping Spree Volunteer



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**IN SYNC:** Volunteer Christine Stewart enjoyed helping Joshua shop for new clothes for fall.

# ***Spotlight on Our Partners in the Community***



## **The Mentoring Program at Five Acres: Connecting Through Shared Experience**

Five Acres offers a unique and comprehensive program for families and children going through the adoption process. According to Jill Mattinson-Cruz, Program Supervisor for Adoption Promotion Support Services (APSS), the mission of the program is to support children and families throughout their adoption journey. Jill, who has been with the program for 12 years, states that every day of her work life she feels honored to be part of this program, which she notes is unique in Los Angeles County. The level of training the staff receives--and the holistic focus on the impact of adoption on the whole family and on each of its members--distinguishes it from others. With administrative offices in Altadena, Pasadena, and West Covina, Five Acres has a significant presence and outreach throughout Southern California, and APSS is one of its programs.

Under the umbrella of APSS, the mentoring program focuses on recruiting and training volunteer mentors with lived experience and matching them with a child or family going through the adoption process. A volunteer must be an adoptee, an adoptive parent, or former foster youth. According to Adriana Luquin, APSS Group and Mentor Supervisor, the goal of the program is to support children whose Permanency Plan through DCFS is adoption. Adriana recruits, trains, and supports volunteer mentors and facilitates two support groups – a caregiver group for adoptive parents and a children/youth group for adoptees. According to Adriana after DCFS refers an adoptive family, the family is assigned a case manager who identifies adoptive parents or adoptees who may benefit from having a mentor.

Foster Care Project (FCP) has proudly supported Five Acres' commitment to quality foster care and adoption services for the past 20 years. Currently FCP Point People, Rosemary Hyde and Ann Jopling, assist with mentor recruitment.

## **Mentoring as a Powerful Tool of Support for Children and Youth**

Mentors with lived experience are uniquely positioned to serve as positive and valued role models. Their interactions with children and youth can be both healing and transformative.

Adriana recalls the impact of one mentor who came to visit the children's support group. When introduced, the mentor shared that she had been adopted as a child. The children's eyes lit up, and they hung on the mentor's every word. Adriana notes that seeing an adult who looks "happy, professional," like they "have it all put-together" and who shares their experience as an adoptee, gives these children tremendous confidence that they can become like that adult.

## **Connection Through Shared Experience**

To promote further connection, Adriana attempts to match mentors to mentees based on shared interests. One mentor, an artist, was paired with an older teenager interested in art.

Through that relationship, the mentor supported the youth's participation in an outside art program. The youth, whose isolating behavior had been of concern to the adoptive parents, met regularly with the mentor to learn how to use public transportation to attend the art program. Step-by-step, the youth, with the mentor's help, gained confidence, mastered the transportation system, and became comfortable traveling alone to art class.

**Continued on Page 5**

## Support for Adoptive Parents and their Children

Mentors for adoptive parents are particularly helpful because many have experienced the challenges of adopting a child who has experienced trauma. Such children may exhibit what Adriana refers to as “big behaviors and big emotions” or they may tend to isolate. For adoptive parents, providing structure and consistency to a child who has experienced trauma may look different than limit setting for children who have not experienced trauma.

Adoptive parents sometimes feel that other parents do not understand their child’s behavior or the choices they make about how to handle “big behaviors.” A mentor with lived experience can help the adoptive parent understand that the challenges the child faces may be lifelong, and that they, too, learned how to handle similar behaviors with their child. In addition, the mentor is well-positioned to help the child manage challenging behaviors by being a consistent person outside the family circle, someone who has intimate knowledge of what the child may be experiencing.

## How You Can Help

If you have experience as a foster or adopted child/youth or adoptive parent, consider becoming a mentor to a child/youth or parent currently going through the adoption process.

While prospective mentors are completing the training, they can be paired with a mentee concurrently and may opt to attend the monthly supervision group for mentors.

To learn more about becoming a mentor, please contact: [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

## The Shared Joys of Mentorship

***“When adoptees spend time together everyone wins.”***

I had the joy of being an APSS adoptee mentor for five years. I am not sure who benefited from our time together more, me or my mentee. As I am an adoptee myself, my sense is that when adoptees spend time together everyone wins.



**DIANE CAMPBELL, Past Volunteer, The Mentoring Program at Five Acres**

Photo: Diane Campbell

Over the years, my mentee and I ate meals together, found our favorite ice cream place(s), went to classes, took the metro, explored new neighborhoods, encouraged each other to be brave, learned new skills and shared our favorite music. Some of my favorite times together were when we were driving in the car, and my mentee would DJ their favorite songs. We would talk about the rhythm, the lyrics, the artists they loved the most.

For me mentoring was not just about the activities we shared, but more importantly, about the quality of the space we created together. As we learned about each other, we were able to listen more deeply, to respect the other’s perspectives and opinions, and to honor our similarities as well as our differences.

Adoptee mentor/mentee time together is an opportunity to explore a unique connection that can be planned or spontaneous, serious or playful, active or easygoing. That is one of the things I valued most about the mentoring relationship--the ability to fashion time together that was uniquely our own, driven by our interests, curiosities, desires, and needs at the time.

As a mentor, whatever we were doing together, I was grateful for the opportunities to reflect back to my mentee their innate goodness, to support their aspirations, and witness their explorations.

Continued on Page 6





*"At the heart of it, mentoring helps meet the basic human need of letting young people know they matter and are not alone." - 2023 MENTOR study*



Photo: Jill Mattinson-Cruz

**Jill Mattinson-Cruz, Five Acres Program Supervisor for Adoption Promotion Support Services (APSS)**

*"Many children and youth report an almost instant sense of connection with a mentor through the commonality of shared experience: 'Here is someone outside of me who sees me and knows me!'"*

*-Adriana Luquin, Five Acres APSS Group and Mentor Supervisor*



Photo: Adriana Luquin

**Adriana Luquin, Five Acres APSS Group and Mentor Supervisor**

Five Acres in Altadena has been a partnering agency with All Saints Church Foster Care Project for 20 years. The organization collaborates with families across Southern California to create a permanent, safe, and healthy environment for every child. Five Acres offers a full range of behavioral health services, as well as inpatient and outpatient care. They are subcontracted by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to support children whose Permanency Plan is adoption. The Mentoring Program at Five Acres matches mentors with lived experience with children and adults currently involved in foster care and adoption.

To learn how you can assist Five Acres, please contact: **[inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)**

## FCP Stats: April to August 2024

Here are just a few of the things Foster Care Project (FCP) and its Adopt a Child Advocate Caseworker (ACAC) Program accomplished during April through August 2024, with the generous help of our donors and volunteers:

- 35:** Bags of groceries donated
- 36:** Hygiene bags donated
- 2:** "Swamp cooler" units donated to a family without air conditioning
- 3:** Beds donated
- 79:** Summer bags donated to children and youth with outfits, snacks, toys, and art supplies
- 42:** Handmade blankets for babies and toddlers, combined with baby items such as wipes, shampoo, early learning books, toys, and diapers
- 34:** Donors who contributed in support of FCP's Back-to-School Shopping Spree for a total of more than \$6,500 for new clothes and shoes
- 16:** Children and youth who participated in back-to-school shopping
- 74:** Backpacks filled with school supplies contributed by friends and supporters of FCP
- 9:** Additional backpacks provided by Pillows and Plenty for older youth in the AB 12 program, along with fifteen \$75.00 Target gift cards tucked into small black canvas bags
- 16:** Volunteers who had direct contact with children and youth as "personal shoppers"
- 165:** Estimated number of children and youth served for April to August 2024.



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**A LITTLE SUMMER MAGIC:** Just a few of the 79 festive "Summer Bags" put together by ACAC team members for children in foster care.



Photo: Anne Riffenburgh

**SEW MUCH LOVE:** Patsy Robeck displays three of the 42 handmade blankets she donated for babies and toddlers in foster care.



## FCP Serves up Sandwiches and Support at a Juneteenth Celebration Luncheon at My Friend's Place



Photo: Erin Parker

**SAVORING THE MOMENT:** Cathy Deely, Rhonda Dillon, Pamela Wilson, Shahrzad Shishegar, Tracey DeFreitas, Rosie Castro, Judi-anne Simmons, and Kate Ma provide the staffing at a My Friend's Place luncheon in June.

***"Laughter is brightest in the place where the food is."***

—Irish Proverb

On a warm day in June, laughter was bright, and stomachs were full as Foster Care Project's Judi-anne Simmons and a handful of dedicated FCP friends and supporters hosted another well-attended and highly appreciated lunch at My Friend's Place (MFP). The event was held at the organization's comprehensive drop-in center in Hollywood, where more than 1,000 unhoused youth and their children receive services and supportive intervention each year.

The "Juneteenth Celebration Lunch" took place on June 19, in observance of the federal holiday commemorating that date in 1865, when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas finally received word that they had been freed under the terms of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Volunteers gathered at Judi-anne's home on Tuesday evening to take part in food preparation.

On Wednesday pulled pork sandwiches with seasoned and spicy coleslaw and all the fixings served as the centerpiece of a wonderful community meal and celebration. Approximately 55 young people

gathered to eat with gratitude and gusto. The food was an enormous hit. In fact, Erin Parker, MP's Volunteer Coordinator, said she could not recall ever having received so many positive comments from youth about the food as she did during the Juneteenth luncheon.

In a follow-up letter to Judi-anne and the volunteers, Erin wrote, "I'd like to echo the gratitude for all of you. It was wonderful spending time with you and watching you connect with the young folks. I was especially moved by the practice of greeting young people with 'Happy Juneteenth!' Special Meals are appropriately named, and yesterday was a perfect example of that. Thank you so much for everything you brought to the space."

Foster Care Project is deeply grateful to Judi-anne Nash for her energy and ongoing commitment to My Friend's Place and FCP goals. She, in turn, voices appreciation for the wonderful volunteers who consistently turn out to assist her. "The luncheon was so much fun and so worthwhile. A big thank you to Cathy Deely, Rhonda Dillon, Pamela Wilson, Shahrzad Shishegar, Tracey DeFreitas, Rosie Castro, Kelly

Continued on Page 9





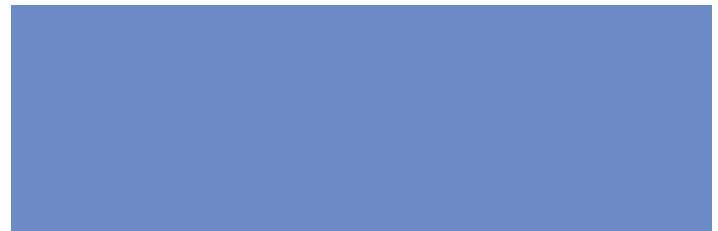
Photo: Kevin Nash

**A JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION:** Rhonda Dillon, Judi-anne Simmons, and Jessica Partida break out the mayonnaise (and other supplies) in preparation for lunch on June 19 at My Friend's Place.

Ma, and Jessica Partida for helping to make it such a success."

Judi-anne offers a special shout-out to volunteer Rosie Castro, whom she describes as "a wonderful young woman, who was previously in the foster care system for a lengthy period as a child and ultimately became a foster parent to her younger siblings when she emancipated." She adds, "Rosie very much understands the difficulties that impact young people in challenging situations. It was a joy to have her participate in this event."

Thanks to all who took the time to make this luncheon celebration a very successful one!



My Friend's Place in Hollywood has been a partnering agency with All Saints Church Foster Care Project for 20 years. My Friend's Place offers a comprehensive range of services to 1,000 youth between the ages of 12 and 25, and to their children, each year, who are experiencing homelessness and striving to attain wellness, stability, and self-sufficiency.

To learn how you can assist My Friend's Place, please contact: [info@fostercareproject.org](mailto:info@fostercareproject.org)

**"More than half of homeless youth became homeless for the first time because they were asked to leave home by a parent or caregiver."**

— Dr. Resa Matthew, Director, Division of Adolescent Development and Support, Family & Youth Services Bureau, HHS

**"Most homeless kids are on the streets because they have been forced by circumstances that cause them to think that they are safer there than in any home they once knew."**

— Jewel, Singer/songwriter/activist, who experienced an abusive childhood and homelessness.

# Our Backpack Angels Show Up Once Again

Photo John Hyde



**A COLORFUL STASH:** Just a few of the 74 backpacks provided to the children and youth in foster care by generous donors.

Once again Foster Care Project (FCP) put out the call for help with our annual summer backpack project, and our Backpack Angels came through! Three of our Adopt a Child Advocate Caseworker (ACAC) Program coordinators--Beth Gertmanian, Rosemary Hyde, and Ann Jopling took the lead on this project and were delighted to receive 74 backpacks brimming with school supplies from community donors. The generous response was appreciated by our families, many of whom are already struggling with the high cost of rent, utilities, food, gas prices, and other necessities.

Backpacks featuring unicorns and princesses remain ever-popular with the youngest children, as do characters from Paw Patrol and the Disney movie Frozen. Spiderman seems to never go out of style. The team was also thankful to receive so many black backpacks, which were coveted by our teens. One donor shopped with her 17-year-old daughter, who advised on the black backpacks and their contents. A new donor, who recently relocated to Pasadena from the East Coast, was happy to participate and understood how important it is to remember the older children and teens who gravitate toward neutral colors.

When picking up the backpacks, Nirvana Castenada, one of our "adopted" social workers at Pasadena's Department of Children and Family Services

(DCFS), commented that three teenage girls on her caseload would be especially excited to have a brand-new black backpack. Nirvana said, "I've been enjoying my home visits so much this month. All the youth and kids have been loving their backpacks and are excited for school."

Pillows and Plenty provided nine backpacks to the older youth on the caseload of Thomas Nolan, MSW, another of ACAC's "adopted" social workers, who is affiliated with the AB 12 program. In addition, the charity also donated fifteen \$75.00 Target gift cards. The gift cards were tucked inside nice black canvas bags suitable for use as a pencil case or toiletries bag. What a great surprise!

**Kudos to all whose generosity helped a total of 83 students get the school year off to a wonderful start!**



Photo Beth Gertmanian

**STEPPING UP TO HELP:** Tiffany Bussard drops off contributions to the Backpack Project.





Photo: Thomas Nolan

**A HAPPY SURPRISE:** Angie displays her new backpack and Target gift card from Pillows and Plenty.



Photo: Thomas Nolan

**ALL SMILES:** Ariana displays her new baby blue backpack.

Backpack Project organizer Beth Gertmenian said, "I am amazed at how generous our donors are and how they continue to thank us for providing this opportunity."



Photo: Thomas Nolan

**READY TO ROLL:** Joseph shows off his new pencil bag and wears his brand-new backpack, courtesy of Pillows and Plenty.



Photo: Thomas Nolan

**A SMILE THAT SAYS IT ALL:** Esther was excited to receive a Target gift card (among other goodies) from Pillows and Plenty.

# Public Policy Report

## ***Not Good Enough: State and County Fails to Prevent Homelessness among Older Foster Care Youth***

For the past twenty years the Foster Care Project (FCP) has focused much of its public policy efforts on addressing the challenges and barriers facing children in foster care in completing high school and entering college. One of these barriers has been the absence of student housing on community colleges campuses, which are attended by 88% of the approximately 35,000 current and former foster youth attending California colleges. A second barrier is the failure of the county and the state to provide housing for youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one who are still under the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

The first barrier was created with the enactment of the Master Plan for Higher Education. In 1960, when Governor Pat Brown and the legislature established the Master Plan, higher education was divided into three parts: the University of California was responsible for performing research and awarding master's and doctoral degrees; the California State system was responsible for awarding master's degrees; and the California community colleges were responsible for providing the first two years of undergraduate and career education and training. Although provisions were made for student housing on the campuses of the University of California and the California State University, no provisions were made for student housing on community college campuses. Rather, community colleges were regarded as part of the K-12 system; it was assumed that the students would live at home. Even today, only 14 out of the 116 community colleges in the state provide on-campus student housing, and all but one of these colleges are in rural areas.

A second barrier is the failure of the county and the state to provide housing for foster youth between the ages of 18 and 21. When children are removed from the custody of their parents by the state, they live in foster homes with foster parents until they turn 18. Although a few young people continue to live with their former foster parents after age 18 (often paying rent for their rooms), many become homeless. In 2019, nationwide statistics revealed

that 20% of young people who were in foster care became instantly homeless when they turned 18 (California College Pathways). In California, because of AB 12 (the California Fostering Connections to Success Act which extended transitional foster care services to eligible youth between 18 and 21 years of age), the county's responsibilities to foster youth do not end at 18 but continue until age 21. Los Angeles County provides two main housing options to these youth: free supervised housing or a stipend to be used to find a place on the open market. However, the wait for supervised housing can go on for months, and in today's housing market, it is very difficult for foster youth to find housing with a monthly stipend of only \$1,200 and no rental history.

According to a recent story in the Los Angeles Times, the agencies Children's Right, the Alliance for Children's Rights, and Public Counsel, along with the firm of Munger, Tolles, and Olson are suing the state and county because the government has not met its responsibility to provide stable housing and mental health services for older foster youth. In addition, the attorneys allege neither the county, which runs the foster care system, nor the state, which oversees the system, knows how many foster youth are living on the street. (According to data from the DCFS in June of 2024 there were 2,526 youth 18 years or older under the supervision of DCFS.) Supervisor Kathryn Barger is quoted as saying that she "wouldn't be surprised if close to half have been in our system."

"We are very concerned that neither the state nor the county monitors the number of foster youth living on the street," said Jeanette Mann, Chair, Public Policy Committee, "and hope that the lawsuit can be resolved in a way that will improve the county's system of providing housing services to older foster youth."

Source: Ellis, Rebecca, "In Foster Care but Out on the Streets," *Los Angeles Times*, B1, August 19, 2024