



# All Saints Church Foster Care Project Newsletter



May 2015

## FOSTER CARE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

- Gail Bardin
- Jay Belloli
- Nikoo Berenji
- Nancy Dannevik
- Daniel Flaming
- Patrice Gibson
- Rosemary Hyde
- Laurel Lambert
- Celina Lew
- Jeanette Mann
- Kim Miles
- Sid O'Connell
- Anne Riffenburgh
- Nicole Rodger
- Lacreta Scott
- Melanie Williams
- Pamela Wilson
- Anne Wolf
- Trula Worthy-Clayton

## Message from Anne Wolf, FCP Chair

### Foster Kids are our Kids!

These past few months have been packed with activities supporting foster youth. In this issue, you will read about: Our new Adoption Guide, cooking classes at My Friend's Place, gift giving opportunities for birthdays, Christmas and Easter. Coming up is the end of school year call from Learning Works to provide tutoring for those students who are hoping to complete the requirements for high school graduation. This spring, FCP will open two additional Family Visitation Centers where children can have monitored visits with their parents. All of this is accomplished by our volunteers who do this work with one of Foster Care Project's 29 partnering agencies. It is a privilege to chair the Foster Care Project and serve as one of these many volunteers. We celebrate our volunteers. Thank you for opening your hearts and finding the time to provide support and a bit of joy for our kids.



Anne Wolf

May is Foster Child Awareness Month. On May 3rd, the Foster Care Project will be the featured ministry. Plan to stop by our lawn table and say hello and join us in the Guild Room after the 11:15 service to learn more about foster/adopt. In May, we will also sponsor a Town Hall Meeting for youth who are college/career bound. Also, the Art Show featuring wonderful artwork by foster youth is Sunday, May 17th.

There are so many opportunities to get involved. Tutor a child, donate diapers, provide a Christmas gift, become a Foster or Adoptive parent. Please do what you can, where you can, with what you have! We welcome you.

### 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.

**“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

## **FCP VOLUNTEERS HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS**

Through monthly e-mail blasts, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) recruits volunteers to assist local foster care agencies. FCP volunteers serve in a variety of interesting ways to show that they care about youth in need and their families. Among the activities this year:

- Ice skating with the children of Hillsides and face painting at Hillsides' annual carnival
- Accompanying foster youth as "personal shoppers" as they prepare for school
- Mentoring young men at Optimist Youth Home who are preparing to leave foster care
- Tutoring students for the GED at Learning Works
- Flipping pancakes for the homeless young adults at My Friend's Place
- Donating to the Birthday Club and the holiday Angel Tree for children who might otherwise not receive presents
- Providing childcare while parents take parenting classes at VIP and Aspires West
- Making Easter baskets and Thanksgiving packages for children and families in need
- Helping at holiday parties for former foster youth attending PCC
- And much more!

To join the monthly e-mail blast, contact [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org). Project coordinator Sarah Hewes will contact you to determine activities that are a good fit.

### ***FCP Makes Sure That Foster Care Children Get Visits from Santa and the Easter Bunny, As Well As Birthday Surprises***

Easter baskets, Christmas presents and birthday gifts are important ways to demonstrate to children that they are valued, but sometimes foster children are overlooked. FCP has stepped forward to work with the Pasadena Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to make sure that no child in the foster care community is passed over on these special occasions.

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## FCP VOLUNTEERS HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES (CON'T)

Every December a festive “Angel Tree” serves as a centerpiece among the holiday decorations at All Saints Church. The tree is adorned with hundreds of tags containing special gift wishes from local children and youth who will spend Christmas in foster care. As the season progresses, more and more tags leave the tree as All Saints parishioners and others include foster children on their holiday shopping list. As in past years, by the time Christmas arrived this year, there were no tags left behind. Over 750 children received gifts through this collaboration between DCFS, Children, Youth and Families at All Saints Church, and FCP.

Every spring, the FCP steering committee comes to the aid of the Easter Bunny by donating multiple bags of Easter goodies. These treats are used to fill holiday baskets and delivered to foster care children by FCP’s adopted DCFS caseworker Sylvia Cortez and others, courtesy of FCP’s Adopt a Child Abuse Case Worker (ACAC) program. ACAC coordinators Beth Gertmenian, Anne Riffenburgh and Rosemary Hyde were in charge of assembling the festive baskets. According to Beth, “This was the best Easter Basket stuffing ever. We received wonderful goodies from FCP steering committee members, as well as a load of toys and games collected by a local Bible School group last summer. We had a record-breaking 33 baskets!”

For over nine years, FCP has maintained a birthday club to supply gifts to Pasadena-area foster youth who might otherwise not receive gifts on their birthdays. DCFS caseworkers identify children in the system most in need. Birthday club manager Lorraine Cain matches the children with a birthday club member. FCP welcomes new birthday club members since the number of children has increased significantly. In the last 12 months, 268 gifts have been delivered with new children being constantly added to the list.



**“We are normal kids in abnormal circumstances.”**

❖ Former foster youth, Maine

## FCP VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION

### Young Adults at My Friend's Place Discover What's In an Egg

As they flipped pancakes for the young adults at My Friend's Place, a resource center for homeless young adults, FCP volunteers Steve and Kim Brorby discovered that many of the clients, who are trying to find homes off the street, want to know how to cook. Steve and Kim decided that a class featuring "cooking with eggs" was in order. "Eggs are an inexpensive source of protein," explains Kim, "And eggs are very versatile." So the Brorbys whipped out the pots, pans and griddles and began to demonstrate. Soon, everyone was pitching in. "We had a great time showing the young people how to make an omelet, scrambled eggs, French toast, and how to peel a hard-boiled egg. We also told them some fun facts about eggs. We made a big tossed salad, including kale and leeks that were grown in the My Friend's Place garden."

Last month, the Brorbys joined other FCP volunteers in flipping 300 pancakes and passing out sausage



and bacon for a MFP breakfast. FCP volunteers are committed to showing young people at the center that many people care and want to help.



FCP Steering Committee Member, Kim Miles (rt.) with Natalie Martinez, a former foster youth, who shared the challenges faced by foster youth as they transition into independent adulthood with the All Saints Church Women's Community at their annual holiday party. Proceeds from the party will be used to establish an Emergency Scholarship Fund for young women foster alumnae.



DCFS Caseworkers Sylvia Cortez and Shawn Chiquette deliver clothes, toys, and other gifts gathered by volunteers for FCP's Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) program for families with special needs.



DCFS Caseworker Sylvia Cortez loads some of the 33 Easter baskets and some extra treats for a timely delivery.

**I felt very sad and I knew I could not do anything about it. I had to get over it. I know how it feels to be pushed around. I have been there.**

**Einstein, Age 11**

## FCP Creates New Information Packet for Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents Trying to Understand the Foster Care/Adoption Process



The need for foster and adoptive families is huge and not diminishing. Often, FCP is asked about the adoption process and, in the past, referred these questions to one of its agencies involved with adoption/foster family recruitment. Last year, FCP realized that, given its resources at All Saints Church and in the community, its role in actively recruiting families could make a difference. A FCP task force was set up to explore the adoption process through interviews with partner agencies and adoptive and foster parents who have used the system. Research was critical says team member Beth Gertmenian. "We wanted to be sure we had an understanding of the complexities of the process before we encourage families to embark on a journey that can be fraught with unforeseen obstacles."

As a result of this research, FCP has put together a packet of information to help prospective foster/adoptive parents become more familiar with the process. This packet contains general information about the process, brochures from agencies, and a flyer from the Alliance for Children's Rights, along with contact information for each. The packet will be available upon request.

Here is some key information that was the result of research and now included in the packet:

- The process for becoming a foster parent and an adoptive parent is the same. Once certified, these parents are "resource parents" to agencies that recruit foster and adoptive families.
- Family reunification is always the first goal for children under the jurisdiction of the courts. When this is not possible, children become available for adoption. (While efforts are being made to reunite them with family members children still need loving homes.)
- Family Fostering always precedes adoption, even when a child is "available," because adoption is a process.
- The process of Family Adoption can still be a puzzling and convoluted one for prospective parents. Team member Rosemary Hyde warns: "As in any other human transaction, trust, honesty, transparency, consistency and good communication are keys to positive processes and outcomes. We learned from our conversations with foster and adoptive parents that prospective parents need to establish trusted and consistent advocates. We want potential parents not to be shy in advocating for themselves and having their needs met. It is imperative that if any part of the process is not clear, one asks questions and gets satisfactory answers. If there are mixed messages, or no messages, one must insist on good communication and clarification. Be persistent!"

To inquire about an information packet, contact: [inbox@fostercareproject.org](mailto:inbox@fostercareproject.org)

## FCP Welcomes Two New Dynamic Members to Its Steering Committee

### Nikoo Berenji

When Nikoo Berenji joined the public defender's office as a trial attorney, she was struck by the problems of former foster care children. "Many of the indigent defendants that I represented had experienced the challenges and heartaches of foster care. I began to wonder if I could find a way to reach children in the system before they reached a courtroom."



Nikoo became a children's attorney at the Children's Law Center in Los Angeles but soon became distressed with what she saw. "The problems in the system are not being addressed and the needs of these kids are not being met. Society is not fixing the problems; it is only performing triage."

When Nikoo returned to the State Appellate Panel to represent indigent defendants once more, she was determined to continue her work with foster children. She found Foster Care Project on google and was quick to sign up. As a new member of the steering committee, she has already become invaluable in FCP's work on public policy issues to promote positive change in the foster care system. Google also yielded information on Hillsides Volunteer Network (HVN), which provides weekend outings and activities for the foster care residents of FCP's partnering agency Hillsides, and Nikoo is now an active HVN member.

A busy wife, mother, attorney, and business law teacher, Nikoo says her heart remains dedicated to improving the lives of foster children. "When I look at my beautiful family and the blessings that we have, I have to ask, 'If we don't do this, who will?'"

### Nicole Rodger

Specializing in the financing of mergers and acquisitions, Nicole Rodger is a busy corporate attorney at a large international law firm. But she makes it a point to find time to fulfill her interest in child welfare. "Since I've been in practice, I have been involved with pro bono projects through my firm involving children's rights, adoptions and foster care. For example, as a part of the Alliance for Children's Rights' Foster Care Adoption Program, I represent families who seek to adopt children out of the Los Angeles County Foster Care System."



Nicole was introduced to FCP through her grandmother, Lacreata Scott, who also serves on the FCP Steering Committee. "I couldn't agree more with the FCP's statement that 'foster care kids are our kids.' We have a responsibility to these children and we must be involved--it's a mandate." Nicole relates how she was struck by the importance of finding stable homes for foster children when an adoptive mom shared the story of her young foster son. "He came to her suffering from learning disabilities and serious emotional issues. After one year in the mother's loving care most of the learning disabilities and emotional problems had disappeared."

Recently, Nicole helped with a legal review of FCP's new adoption guide and with collection of items for the Easter basket program. She has also agreed to become the point person with FCP's new partner agency Youth Build and she's looking forward to more exposure to FCP's activities through the annual Shopping Spree and Art Show. In the meantime, she is looking forward to the special moment soon approaching when she will represent two families in their court hearings to finalize their adoptions of children currently in their homes on a foster care basis, "An adoption finalization is such a happy moment. It is an honor to be part of it."

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Jeanette Mann, FCP Public Policy and Community Relations Chair

### FCP Advocates for Change in Public Policy Concerning Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

This year over 200 bills addressing issues of child welfare and juvenile justice are winding their way through the legislative process. The Foster Care Project is focusing its attention on four issues: 1) the prohibition of solitary confinement of minors; 2) the repeal of the Maximum Family Grant rule in California; 3) the over and inappropriate use of psychotropic drugs for foster children and youth; and 4) the effects on foster children and youth on the elimination of categorical funding for services in local schools.

SB 124 (Juveniles: solitary confinement) by Senator Mark Leno would prohibit solitary confinement of minors. It is similar to a bill carried last year by Senator Yee except there is a distinction drawn between youth who might be a danger to themselves or others as a result of a mental disorder or being gravely disabled and other youth. Youth who are mentally ill or disabled must be transported to a medical facility and will not be subject to solitary confinement.

Senator Holly Mitchell has reintroduced the bill to repeal the Maximum Family Grant (MFG) rule in California (SB 23, CalWORKs: eligibility). This rule, established in 1994, denies financial assistance to any child born into a household that is receiving CalWORKs. The MFG policy was intended to control impoverished parents' choices about the size of their families through the threat of economic hardship. Twenty years after implementation, there is no evidence it has this effect. Instead, it punishes children born into CalWORKs families by denying necessary aid at a time when it is most important for their development.

After a series of very negative stories about the over and inappropriate use on psychotropic drugs to the control of behavior of foster children and youth, several major bills regulating their use have been introduced. The Foster Care Project is supporting



two bills: SB 319 (Beall, Child welfare services: public health nursing) would authorize Public Health Nurses to access psychotropic prescription information and grants them the authority to monitor thousands of foster youth medicated with these drugs. SB 238 (Mitchell, Foster care: psychotropic medication) would establish training, data reporting and alert systems to identify risky practices and alert counties to address these issues.

Although several bills address the new funding formula for local school districts, it appears to be too early to evaluate the effects of the elimination of categorical funding for local school districts on foster children and youth. The Foster Care Project is supporting AB 710, (Brown, Youth on probation: LCFF: local control and accountability plans), which would include youth on probation among the groups of targeted, disadvantaged youth for whom local school districts receive extra funding.

"We are very excited about the support we have received from our local legislators in carrying bills to improve the lives of foster and homeless youth and invite everyone interested in the issues to join us," said Jeanette Mann, Co-chair, FCP Public Policy Committee.

**The best advice I have from one foster child to another is that you never give up....Never think that you are worthless.**

**Jane, Age 10**

### Partnering Agencies

Aspire West, Pasadena  
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  
Five Acres  
Friends of Foster Children  
Hathaway-Sycamores  
Hillsides  
Hillsides YMO  
Holy Family Services Adoption  
and Foster Care  
Kidsave Los Angeles Weekend  
Miracles  
Learning Works Charter  
School/Hope Works  
Maryvale  
My Friend's Place  
Optimist Youth Homes and  
Family Services  
Pasadena Well Being and  
Economic Prosperity  
Public Counsel Law Center  
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

All Saints Church

## Foster Care Project



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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)

## FCP Announces Two New Scholarships for Youth

### 10th Anniversary Scholarship for Foster Youth in Transition

In celebration of its 10th anniversary serving foster children and youth and youth aging out of foster care, All Saints Church Foster Care Project (FCP) established a scholarship for foster youth in transition out of foster care. The scholarship can be used for college expenses, job training expenses, employment expenses, or independent living expenses.

#### Scholarship Criteria:

This scholarship is for foster youth and former foster youth who are transitioning out of foster care.

This scholarship application cannot exceed \$1000.

The young person must be nominated by a FCP Point Person or by a staff member from one of FCP's partnering agencies.

### FCP' Previously Established Scholarships

#### Jane Mabie Memorial Scholarship Fund

This fund honors the memory of Jane Mabie who, as a DCFS social worker, tirelessly advocated on behalf of children and youth in foster care. It provides funds for the Aspire scholarship which helps foster youth reach a special goal in a wide variety of areas including music, art, dance, sports, outdoor camp, theatre, academics, culinary, special classes, scouting and more.

#### Scholarship Criteria

This scholarship is for high school students who are in permanent supervision of the Pasadena Department of Children and Family Services. This scholarship application cannot exceed \$500.

### Women's Community Emergency Scholarship

In collaboration with the All Saints Church Foster Care Project, the Women's Community of All Saints Church has established an Emergency Scholarship Fund for young women who are transitioning out of foster care. The scholarship can be used for college expenses, job training expenses, employment expenses, or independent living expenses.

#### Scholarship Criteria:

This scholarship is for young women who are foster youth or former foster youth and who are transitioning out of foster care.

The young woman must be nominated by a FCP Point Person or by a staff member from one of FCP's partnering agencies.

#### Mann Scholarship

The Mann Scholarship Fund was established by the FCP Steering Committee to recognize Jeanette Mann's advocacy on breaking barriers to higher education for foster youth. Scholarship funds can be used to remove obstacles that can prevent the young person from attending any post-secondary educational program. Examples include; tuition and fees, text books, other educational materials and supplies, emergency housing, transportation, and household items.

#### Scholarship Criteria

This scholarship is for high school seniors or former foster youth who are transitioning into post secondary education. This scholarship application cannot exceed \$1000. The young person must be nominated by an FCP Point Person.