



## 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

Anne Wolf

## 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.

## Raising Awareness: Foster Care Project Shines on Featured Ministry Day



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaraphotography

**RAISING AWARENESS:** Rosemary Hyde, Kim Miles, Beth Gertmenian, Jay Belloli, and Jeanette Mann take part in FCP's Featured Ministry Day.

On Sunday, May 19, Foster Care Project (FCP) was showcased during Featured Ministry Day at All Saints Church, in recognition of May's National Foster Care Month. Throughout the year, FCP partners with local agencies to connect people with ways to become involved, including mentoring children and transitioning youth; monitoring families during the reunification process; volunteering at one-time events; or learning about becoming a foster parent.

Sunday's event was spearheaded by Featured Ministry Chair Kim Miles, with assistance from FCP Steering Committee members and other supporters, who helped staff a table laden with cupcakes, strawberries, and informational items. Despite a gray day and rainy weather location under an awning, those staffing the table received a number of inquiries about FCP activities and partnerships. Several volunteers were recruited on the spot.

Kim Miles was pleased with the response, saying, "I want to thank everyone who took time to help with this year's Featured Ministry. So many people stopped by to share their

love for the Foster Care Project at All Saints Church and to express their appreciation for all we do."

At 7:30 p.m., All Saints Church capped off the special day by bathing the church property in blue light, as part of the "Seen Campaign," organized by FCP's partnering agency Five Acres. The symbolic blue light served as a beacon to raise awareness of the more than 20,000 children in Los Angeles in need of permanent families. FCP salutes our partners and community supporters as we continue our ongoing efforts—encouraging volunteerism, donations, and fostering--on behalf of our most vulnerable children and families.



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaraphotography

**A SYMBOL OF COMFORT:** A teddy bear graces the Foster Care Project information table on Featured Ministry Day



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaraphotography

**CUPCAKES AND CARING:** Visitors pick up information—and a Foster Care Project button—at FCP's table.

## Art that Matters

# 11th ANNUAL FCP ART SHOW, 2019

**F**or children and teens in foster care, many of whom have experienced varying degrees of trauma, happiness can be elusive. So it should come as no surprise that many turn to art as an avenue of expression and healing, a way to tell a story or convey an emotion when words fail.

On Sunday, May 5, a number of promising young artists shared portions of their stories through their vibrant, original artwork, as part of Foster Care Project's 11th annual Art Show at All Saints Church. Once again, curator and organizer extraordinaire Jay Belloli provided the logistical "heavy lifting" for the popular event, with an able assist from a small army of Foster Care Project volunteers and supporters.

This year's show included children and youth from five agencies—Five Acres in Altadena, Hathaway-Sycamores and Hillside in Pasadena, Maryvale in Rosemead, and My Friend's Place in Hollywood. An established young adult artist, formerly in foster care, presented as well. Participants eagerly discussed their work, basking in the warm glow of interest and recognition conferred upon them by parishioners, community members, and others. At the conclusion of the exhibit, all the artwork had sold, with 100% of the proceeds going to the artists. The event was capped by lunch for the youth in the Guild Room—pizza was served, with a healthy dose of celebration on the side.

Sweetland Hall hummed with palpable energy as attendees examined the professionally displayed artwork. Many people leaned in for closer contemplation when a piece resonated with them. A wide range of art beckoned—from uplifting florals to geometric abstracts to



**EVERY PIECE TELLS A STORY:** Event organizer Jay Belloli presents work by promising young artists at the 11th Annual FCP Art Show

peaceful, bucolic scenes. Some works were soothing, others inspiring. A few were shocking, offering tangible confirmation of the observation that "art is not always about pretty things." A devastating acrylic on canvas called "Broken Home" depicted a house pierced by a jagged tear.

A stunning piece entitled "Coping" featured a woman's silhouette adjacent to a mass of real hair. A doughnut, cigarette, pill bottle, mini alcohol bottle, and razor blade nestled within the hair—reflecting the myriad ways that people in pain self-medicate.

We would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to our generous and appreciative art supporters. When you take home a piece from the Art Show you are doing far more than purchasing something interesting for your wall. You are sending a powerful and moving message to our young artists in foster care: "Your art speaks to me. Your art matters. You matter."



**IT TAKES A VILLAGE:** A "small army" of enthusiastic volunteers and supporters who helped ensure the Art Show's success this past spring.

PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

“Art is something that makes you breathe with a different kind of happiness.”  
 --Anni Albers



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

**EXPRESSING A PAINFUL AND PERSONAL TRUTH:** A young man named Alex from My Friend's Place offers "Broken Home."



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

**CREATIVITY AND CONTEMPLATION:** Anne Peterson pauses to examine some of the Art Show's offerings.



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

**PACKING A PUNCH:** Spectators view several emotionally charged pieces, including a powerful contribution by a teen girl from Maryvale, entitled "Coping."



PHOTO: Isabel Ramirez of isaramphotography

**PROUD PURCHASE:** An FCP supporter displays her Art Show find, while volunteers Natasha Mahone, Jane Stockly, and Rosie Chuong share in the moment.

## “Wonderfully Overwhelming” ACAC Backpack Donors Go All Out



**HELPING HANDS:** Elise Robson, Nikoo Berenji, and Annie Arakelian display some of the backpacks donated by FCP supporters at Berenji & Associates.

This year’s backpack extravaganza proved to be a “wonderfully overwhelming” success, in the words of Beth Gertmenian, who once again served as point person for the annual drive, conducted under the auspices of the Adopt a Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) Program. Fifty donors went all out—providing over 100 personalized backpacks to children on the caseloads of our “adopted” caseworkers at DCFS, smashing last year’s record of 51 backpacks.

Scores of well-stuffed backpacks made their temporary home on Beth’s living room floor throughout July and August, until pickup could be arranged. The care and thoughtfulness lavished by our donors (individuals, groups, and families) on this project was truly amazing. A plethora of themed backpacks were selected for the younger children, including the ever-popular “Frozen” motif and the highly requested themes of unicorns, sports, and superheroes. (Much cooler backpacks found their way to the teenagers.) Berenji & Associates, the law firm of former FCP Steering Committee member Nikoo Berenji, purchased and put together more than 30 backpacks. Members of Soroptimist International of Altadena/Pasadena donated eight backpacks as well as cash for supplies. Our village stepped up.

It’s hard to describe the impact of this project. When one our social workers, Thomas Nolan, came to pick up 11 backpacks for children on his caseload, he noted that the children are thrilled to receive these well-stuffed backpacks, and their parents are equally thrilled to see their kids excited about returning to school. All of the families appreciate the help with hard-to-afford school supplies. In addition, the social workers benefit from the positive impact that occurs when they come to a potentially difficult visit with such wonderful gifts in hand. The ability for the social workers to build a trusting relationship with their families is a key factor in making positive changes.

Ruth Lee, another of our social workers, reported that two boys on her caseload requested high-end backpacks. When she explained that the brand was too expensive, they were disappointed, but accepting. The donor, Chris Aristo, did some research, found a deal, and was able to fulfill their wish. When Ruth presented the boys with the backpacks at the DCFS office, they jumped up and down, screaming with delight—creating such a ruckus Ruth had to shoo them out of the reception area into a private room. Ruth was so moved by the Aristo family’s generosity, she emailed Chris: “{The boys} were overjoyed with the backpacks and everything in them. They opened everything and read your letters in my office. I was honored to see their expressions and receive their hugs. I am sure they will forever remember how they were blessed by you.” Chris wrote back to say: “It is truly my pleasure. My wife teared up knowing we were able to provide some joy to these young men.”



**PACKED WITH LOVE:** Annie Arakelian takes a moment to fill a backpack with personalized goodies.

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## Volunteer “Helpers in Life” Show Up for Foster Kids at Shopping Spree



**ALL SMILES:** Foster Care Project’s Anne Riffenburgh, Kim Miles, and Beth Gertmenian expressed their appreciation for Target store manager Bobby Hernandez, who helped ensure a smooth event.

FCP  
Shopping  
SPREE

At 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, July 20th, 15 children and teens arrived at Target Pasadena to take part in Foster Care Project’s annual back-to-school shopping spree, hosted by the Adopt a Child Abuse Caregiver (ACAC) program. Some were raring to go, others appeared a bit sleepy and bleary-eyed, but all were soon swept up in the excitement of being paired with an adult for a fun morning with their own “personal shopper.” (An additional 15 young people, who were unable

to participate on the scheduled date, received new clothes at a later time.)

Volunteers helped manage a \$200 gift card and provided individualized attention and guidance on the purchase of shirts, pants, school uniforms, jackets, shoes, and socks—ensuring that each child would go back to school “in style,” with bolstered confidence. The kids bonded with their volunteers, sharing immediate goals (“to do well” in the coming school year) and future aspirations (“to be a mechanical engineer”). One boy grilled his male volunteer with questions about the “old days.” What was it like in the retro 80s and 90s?



**“I FOUND THIS JACKET WITH MY SPIDEY SENSE:”** Spider-Man, a perennial favorite—need we say more?



**GOING THE EXTRA MILE:** Our “adopted” DCFS social workers, Thomas Nolan and Ruth Lee, came out on a Saturday to support their families and assist with the FCP shopping spree.

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## BACKPACKS

Beth added a postscript to the story, saying, “Ruth was so moved by the generosity of our donors that she wanted to write personal notes to each one. I think we have persuaded her that one note, sent to all the donors, will be quite sufficient. Her time is better spent working on the needs of the children and families, which she continues to do so well.”



**A BEVY OF BACKPACKS:** Our “adopted” DCFS social worker Ruth Lee fills her car with donated backpacks for children on her caseload.

Until a couple of years ago, three members of the ACAC team bought a number of standard, not-very-interesting backpacks and filled them with the basics. That early effort got backpacks and school supplies to a small circle of children who needed them. Then we opened up the project to the community, and the community responded with joyful enthusiasm, significantly expanding our reach. Thanks to all who participated. We are wonderfully overwhelmed.



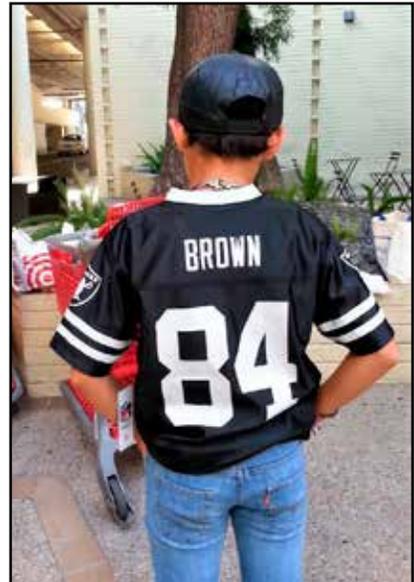
**SETTING OUT:** Starting school with confidence and enthusiasm... and a new backpack!

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## SHOPPING SPREE

As always, our volunteers seemed to enjoy the experience as much as the young people they were matched with. Longtime supporter Cynthia Juvinal said the six-year-old she shopped with was delighted to go home with sparkly new shoes. She added, “This is a great opportunity to show kids there are helpers in life. I hope to be back next year.”

We hope that all our volunteer shoppers will be able to return next year, and that we’ll add new volunteers as well. We offer our sincere appreciation to all who turned out on an early Saturday morning to demonstrate to our young shoppers (and their families) that there is a community of people who care. Thank you for taking the time to be “helpers in life.”



**TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL:** This young man models a newly purchased football jersey of his favorite team.



**THUMBS UP!** One of our young shoppers was thrilled to find a jacket based on the character “Loot Llama.”

# Nancy Dannevik

## An Appreciation



Nancy Dannevik volunteered at My Friend's Place (MFP), a partnering agency of Foster Care Project (FCP), for fifteen years. Earlier this year she moved to Sacramento. As we look back at her legacy of contribution and service, we salute Nancy's commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable youth in our community.

### ***Who inspired you growing up?***

I remember asking my mother when I was about 12 why she volunteered so much. Brownies and Girl Scout troops, Sunday School, PTA, March of Dimes, day camp for scouts, and there were more. She was usually the leader or director. She noted that her mother had said that because their family had been given much, it was up to our family to give in return. And these were modest families by today's standards. My mother has most certainly been my inspiration. When I was no longer leading a Cub Scout troop or serving in PTA, I realized that I needed to be helpful in some way. Walk the walk, if you will. And there was All Saints laying out the possibilities for me! Karma? The Holy Spirit?

### ***How did you become involved with My Friend's Place?***

All Saints had a big lunch meeting and there were speakers from many agencies invited by Foster Care Project. They talked about their work and asked for volunteers. Because I lived in L.A., and MFP was only about 15 minutes from my house, that helped me decide to volunteer there. MFP's Heather Carmichael presented at the meeting and was most persuasive. I had been especially interested and concerned about teens that aged out of the system and what became of them.

### ***What did you like best about volunteering at My Friend's Place?***

Over the years I did various things at MFP: the Bra Project {which provided well-fitted undergarments for teen girls}, cooking classes, helping serve lunches, and jumping in when asked by the staff. Being part of Foster Care Project gave me an opening to invite volunteers and provided some funding to facilitate our activities.

I especially enjoyed writing letters for James. He was autistic and couldn't write himself but he had many questions. He dictated and we wrote to the L.A. Zoo, some TV stations, the AIDS Project, the weather bureau, NASA, and more. Sometimes we got responses and he was quite happy about that. Cooking classes gave me a great feeling of joy. The youth were very happy to be in a small group with me and excited for the attention. We talked about careful shopping, food values, etc. Then they all tasted. Whether or not they would ever get a chance to cook themselves in a kitchen of their own wasn't really that important, but the experience for all of us was lots of fun.

### ***How would you describe the mission of MFP?***

The mission of MFP is first to get the youth to return home, if that is appropriate. If returning home is not possible, the goal is to help them get off the streets and become self-sufficient. It was amazing to me how grateful the youth were for anything we did for them. The real reward is for us volunteers.

**Joe Kelly: Art/Design**  
**Jeanette Mann: Writing/Editing**  
**Anne Riffenburgh: Writing/Editing**

### 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  
Children's Law Center of California Fresh Outfitters  
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  
Learning Works Charter School/ Home Boys Shelter Our Students  
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  
STARS at PCC  
The Alliance for Children's Rights  
Victor Treatment Center  
Violence Intervention Program  
Vista Del Mar Child and Foster Care Program  
United Friends of the Children  
Young and Healthy

## The Fight for School Stability: PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Over the past three years, All Saints Church Foster Care Project has worked very hard on the issue of preserving school stability for students in foster care: namely, the right of students to continue attending their school of origin. Early in 2017, at the request of Supervisor Antonovich's office, Susan Flaming, a member of the Public Policy Committee, testified at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors on the devastating impact that changing schools has on children and youth in foster care.

When children and youth in foster care are forced to change schools, the effect is overwhelmingly negative. It is estimated that four to six months of academic progress is lost each time a child changes schools. According to Voices for Children, 75% of adults who were formerly in foster care experienced seven or more school changes. Currently, 75% of children in foster care are working below grade level; only 50% graduate from high school or receive a GED, a mere 15% will attend college, and only 3% will complete a degree.

In 2015, in recognition of the deleterious impact that changing schools has on foster children and youth, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act, which President Obama immediately signed. This act includes a provision that local school districts and child welfare agencies must jointly develop plans to transport students in foster care promptly to their school of origin. (The school of origin is the school the young person was attending when they were placed in foster care.) In December 2017, Los Angeles County implemented a pilot plan to keep foster children and youth in their schools of origin, both when they were removed from their homes and when they changed placements.

This two-year pilot provided transportation to foster children and youth through



reimbursement of: 1) foster parents; 2) bus rides via routes in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); or 3) a private vendor called HopSkipDrive. (Youth who used tap cards on Metro buses or light rail were not included nor were bus rides via routes in districts other than LAUSD.)

Over the two years of the pilot, which included one summer, 1,131 youth were served. The average distance of the ride varied for a median of 12.89 miles with the private vendor and 24+ miles for those using bus routes. (Pasadena Unified School District transported 20 riders with 777 rides during this period. Because the data is broken down by school year and summer, there may be overlap of individual riders.)

The positive impact of the program is reflected in the favorable experiences of individual students. Melody, for example, had attended four different high schools in four years. With HopSkipDrive she was once again able to attend her school of origin. Melody noted that her return enabled her to rekindle lost friendships, renew her enthusiasm for learning, and reclaim the feeling of "the old me." Melody had to work twice as hard her senior year to make up for lost credits, but through the private vendor she was able to arrive at school at 7:00 a.m. and stay until 4:30. Melody graduated with awards and accolades; she completed her first year of college in July.

"We are delighted that the County is providing young people in foster care the opportunity to continue with their school, their teachers, and their friends when everything else has changed and is new and different for them," said Jeanette Mann, Chair of the Public Policy Committee. "School stability plays a crucial role in reducing stress, enhancing quality of life, and building a path to future success."

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