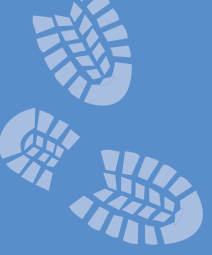




Guiding Foster Kids

to

Success



More families are needed to
provide love and permanency
to foster children.
Find out how YOU can help!



Dear Sacramento
County Community
Members,

Each night, too many foster children in Sacramento County go to sleep without the support of a consistent and loving family. These children have been victims of abuse or neglect and need safe and stable homes. This is why I am reaching out to you. We have a significant shortage of foster homes in our community and we need your help.

Children in foster care are part of our community — your neighbor, student, child's friend, etc. They have the same hopes and dreams as non-foster children. Unfortunately, without consistent adults to provide a nurturing and supportive home, their long-term outcomes fall below those of their peers. Here is where you come in. Whether you can provide a short- or long-term placement, adopt, or assume legal guardianship — we need you. No matter your gender, marital status, sexual orientation, whether you rent or own, the ability to provide a loving and stable home is all that matters.

I am hoping the stories and information that follow will inspire you to provide a loving and supportive home so the most vulnerable children in our community can heal, grow and thrive.



- Michelle Callejas,
Deputy
Director of
Sacramento
County CPS

Someone to Go With Them



More homes are needed for foster children in Sacramento County

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Today, Sacramento County has more than 2,000 children and teenagers in its foster care system. These youth are in the system through no fault of their own. Many have been the victims of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.

In the past, foster children often found themselves forced to move from foster home to foster home. Sometimes, the only place for a child to go was a group home.

"There is a plethora of research that shows that children who spend a lot of time in group homes have more negative outcomes later in life," says Michelle Callejas, Deputy Director of Sacramento County Child Protective Services. "So counties in California are developing a whole continuum of services, supports and placement options that are the best fit for the children and youth needing a placement."

Sacramento County will not be able to do this on its own. Hundreds of new resource families — the new term for foster families — will be needed to reduce the number of children placed in group homes. And Callejas says that the more families willing to step up to help, the better.

"We need to create a whole network that meets the different needs of children and youth we serve," she says.

In particular, CPS is looking for resource families who are able to take:

- teenagers
- LGBT youth
- African-American youth
- youth with medical needs
- emergency/last-minute placements
- sibling sets

**"You can
be the rock,
the person who
gives the child the
opportunity to ...
have permanency."**

**MARIAN KUBIAK,
Resource Family Approval
Division Manager**

Callejas points out that group homes will still be part of the system, but they are now going to be used as a short-term therapeutic intervention, to help children dealing with trauma.

Another result of these changes: All resource families get the training and support they need to be with a child along his or her entire foster care journey. While reuniting children with their biological families is the goal, when that is not possible, the new system allows resource parents to adopt without having to undergo another approval process. This will help create a continuous care experience for children, who will no longer have to switch homes at the point of adoption.

Whether you are married or single, gay or straight, a homeowner or renter, an aunt, teacher or simply a loving person — Marian Kubiak, an RFA Division Manager, hopes more people in Sacramento County will consider fostering a child.

"Every child deserves a safe, stable, caring home," she says. "You can be the rock, the person who gives the child the opportunity to reconnect with not only [his or her] family, but have permanency."

Anyone Can Do This

➤ Single mom turned two empty rooms into a home for teen girls BY AMANDA CARAWAY

When her two adult daughters moved out, Karla Buechler suddenly found herself with a large home and empty bedrooms.

"I love the daily parenting tasks like packing lunch and helping with homework," Buechler says. "My girls didn't need that anymore."

She reached out to Stanford Youth Solutions six years ago and has since fostered two teenage girls. Her first is now an adult attending college and her second came to live with her in August 2016.

Buechler says one of the biggest challenges is helping the girls heal and deal with their biological families. Both of her foster daughters have minimal contact with their biological mothers.

"These girls have no sense of family, home or community," she says. "They aren't used to what we consider a normal family dynamic. I had to teach them simple things like how to cut food with a knife."

A single working mom, Buechler depends heavily on the support of Stanford Youth Solutions and her extended family. Stanford provides services based on the needs of each child, and helps Buechler get her daughters to appointments. All health care is covered including the necessary psychological treatment for healing.

"Many foster kids have low self-esteem and think they were abandoned because they're bad," Buechler says. "Of course, that isn't true. These children were perfect when they were born."

Buechler says anyone can become a resource parent with the proper support. She encourages those who want a family to do it.

"People think it's expensive, but it's not," she says. "Most of the child's care is paid for. You just get to love them."

When asked why she chose to foster teens, Buechler says she feels like those kids have the greatest need. "Most of the kids in foster care are over the age of 8 and little ones get adopted pretty fast," she says.

Buechler believes it's important for resource parents to advocate for foster children and help them get all the benefits they're entitled to, such as financial aid. She believes some processes are complicated, and even things like finding a birth certificate can be a hurdle for them.

Her oldest foster daughter now advocates for foster teens as well, talking to prospective resource parents about fostering older kids and lawmakers about the importance of funding foster care.

"These children were perfect when they were born."

KARLA BUECHLER
Resource parent



Karla Buechler fosters teen girls. A single working mom, Buechler says anyone can be a resource parent with the proper support.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

BY THE NUMBERS: SACRAMENTO COUNTY'S FOSTER YOUTH

2,070

Number of foster children
age **0-17**

33%

percentage of those youth
who are between the ages
of **12 and 17**

406

average number of
young adults from 18-21 who have elected
to stay in the foster care
system. Many still need a
permanent family and adult
adoption is a possibility

56%

Percentage of foster youth
who are **reunited** with
parents or guardians within
two years of entering the
system

28%

Percentage of foster youth
who **remain in the system**
longer than two
years

35%

Percentage of **African American children**
in foster care in 2015 (African
American youth remain in
foster care longer than any
other ethnic group)



A Family Becomes Complete

➤ **Counseling services help foster child and parents deal with the effects of trauma**

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Not long after Robert Moore and Toua Thao married four years ago, the couple decided to complete their family by adopting a child.

Being a gay couple, however, they worried that foster agencies would not be comfortable with letting them become a resource family, says Moore. They turned to Sierra Forever Families, a private, nonprofit agency in Sacramento that arranges foster adoptions.

“At Sierra, being gay was a non-issue,” Moore says. “It was more about whether we could be good parents rather than whether we were gay or straight.”

They filled out documents and attended parenting classes. Afterward, their social worker began the process of matching them with a child.

The social worker told them about a 10-year-old boy named Josh. The child suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and post-traumatic stress because of past emotional and physical abuse and neglect, Moore says.

The social worker arranged for them to meet Josh at a local restaurant. After the meeting, Moore and Thao knew they wanted to raise Josh.

It was seven months, however, before Josh felt comfortable enough to move into his new home. “Bonding was a long process with Josh,” Moore says. “He really didn’t trust people, and it was hard tearing down the wall at first.”

To help Josh bond, Sierra provided a therapist who regularly visited the home to counsel Josh. The agency also offered other referrals, including a psychologist to work with the family.

Cathi Johnson, a Resource Family Approval Program Manager with Sacramento County Child Protective Services, says the county and foster agencies both offer a number of pre- and post-placement services for resource parents, including parenting classes and counseling services.

“All children have access to counseling services regardless of whether they’re with a county home or foster

“The best thing is watching the kids grow up and seeing Josh learning to trust again.”

ROBERT MOORE
Resource parent

agency,” Johnson says. “The big difference is that foster agencies are smaller and have their own social workers assigned to homes in addition to the county social worker.”

Today, Josh is 13, and Moore says his son’s adjustment to his new home went more smoothly than expected. They finalized Josh’s adoption in summer 2015. That fall, they adopted his baby brother, Zach, who is 2.

For now, Moore says they have no immediate plans to adopt more children, although they have discussed it.

“With two kids, our plates are pretty full,” Moore says. “But the best thing is watching the kids grow up and seeing Josh learning to trust again. It’s brought a sense of completion to our family.”

Robert Moore and Toua Thao adopted Josh, 13, and his brother Zach, 2, in 2015. The family received special counseling to help Josh deal with the effects of trauma and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

PHOTO BY
ANNE STOKES



SUPPORT FOR YOUR JOURNEY

Pre-placement Classes: Prospective resource parents receive four parenting classes to learn about child development and how to nurture traumatized children. Parents also learn about the legal process.

Post-placement Training: Resource parents receive 12 hours of additional courses annually on parenting and other topics like choosing the right car seat.

Counseling: Mental health services for foster children are available through Medi-Cal. Many school districts have foster care liaisons who can arrange for counseling.

Social Workers: Each resource family is assigned a social worker, who visits once a month. Private agencies often assign their own social worker, too.

Support Groups: Resource parents can join support groups to share ideas, resources and encouragement.

Respite Care: CPS and some agencies offer planned and emergency care when resource parents need a few days off.

The Hock family adopted Alex in 2016. Marty Hock was a principal at Alex's school and felt that they could be the family Alex needed.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

From Principal to Adoptive Father

School administrator saw a child in need — and stepped up to help BY AMANDA CARAWAY

Marty Hock has known his adopted son Alex for over four years. As an elementary school principal, Hock took an interest in Alex when he entered foster care halfway through kindergarten.

"Foster kids are vulnerable and I like to make sure they have good teachers and a good support system at school," Marty says.

He was impressed by his positive attitude and resilient

nature. He saw that, despite having an unstable home life, Alex had the confidence of a natural leader and was involved in extracurricular activities and student leadership.

"Alex is shockingly well adjusted for a kid with such traumatic life experiences," he says. "He's been moved from home to home, yet he has a glass-half-full attitude."

Marty was astonished Alex wasn't adopted quickly and that he kept changing homes. Eventually, while watching Alex emcee the school talent show, he realized that his family — which already included three biological daughters — was meant to adopt Alex. His wife, Kerri, agreed.

"Marty had told me how great Alex was, and that he wished Alex could find a family," Kerri says.

The Hocks are what social workers refer to as non-related extended family — people who are

already present in the child's life, like teachers, neighbors or sports coaches. These individuals make great resource parents because their existing relationship with the child makes the transition to foster care easier and often allows the child to stay in his neighborhood and school.

The Hocks transitioned Alex gradually throughout the summer of 2015, working with his foster parents to coordinate weekly visits. Eventually they invited him for a sleepover and then took him on a family vacation to Monterey.

"Alex didn't know we were working toward fostering him, so I was amazed when I heard him tell my girls they were like sisters to him," Marty says.

The Hocks were cleared to foster Alex at the end of the summer. He was greeted by a "Welcome Home Alex" sign and learned that the "guest room" he helped decorate over the summer was actually his.

"It's challenging, yet so rewarding, to help Alex reach his potential," Kerri says. "I knew there were no limits to what he could do with the advantages of a stable home."

The Hocks adopted Alex in the summer of 2016. Marty says that when the judge asked Alex why he was in court, he said, "Because I finally get my family and my home."

"I was amazed when I heard him tell my girls they were like sisters to him."

MARTY HOCK
Resource parent

STEP UP TO PROVIDE STABILITY

Removing a child from the home is a traumatic experience. Social workers try to lessen this trauma as much as possible by placing children with families that can provide a stable, loving home.

Research shows that foster children do best in homes of people who already have a relationship with the child. Sometimes this means a placement with family (kinship placement). But other times, social workers look for non-related

extended family members — people like teachers, coaches, neighbors and family friends. Even if they are not able to adopt, non-related extended family members can provide a stable environment for the child while the parents work toward reunification.

If you know a child who is in need, step up and help by becoming a resource parent!

They Showed Me the Way

➤ **Former foster youth reflects on the family that supported him**

BY ANNA QUINLAN

When he was a junior at Del Oro High School in Loomis, one of his best friends from school invited Darrough to stay with his family for some respite from a foster family that Darrough was having trouble connecting with. While there, Darrough told his friend's parents about his ongoing journey through the foster system and his struggle to find stability. "I just explained my whole life story to them," he says. "They wanted to give me a life."

After taking care of legal logistics with his longtime social worker, Darrough moved in and immediately felt like part of the family.

"I loved this family," he says of finally feeling at home. "I was nervous to bring up adoption because I wasn't sure how they felt," he says, "but I just knew that this was my family."

Darrough was 17 when he brought up the topic of adoption. "They asked me if I was sure I wanted to be part of this family," he remembers of that initial conversation. "I was like, 'Of course I do!'" After some paperwork and a handful of court appearances, it was official.

"Being adopted has given me a new start in life, a new perspective," he says of how the decision has impacted him in his transition into adulthood. "Being with a family that cares about me and wants me to succeed has given me so many opportunities. They showed me the way."

After being in and out of foster homes for most of his childhood, one of Michael Darrough's biggest fears was that he'd end up homeless one day.

"I just know that a lot of foster kids have trouble being successful, and I was nervous about falling into that category. I get a little choked up taking about it," he says as his voice quivers a little.

It isn't his old childhood fear that gets Darrough, now 22, choked up, though. It's the family that finally allowed him to release that fear.

Darrough first entered the foster system around age 5 after Child Protective Services was tipped off by a neighbor that his parents, who both struggled with drug and alcohol abuse, were neglecting Darrough and his five siblings. Due to the difficulty of finding a foster family able to take in six children at once, the kids were split up and sent to different homes. This process repeated itself numerous times until Darrough was in his early teens, his parents regaining and losing custody of the children, and the children subsequently being directed to new foster homes.

"Being with a family that cares about me and wants me to succeed has given me so many opportunities."

MICHAEL DARROUGH
Former foster youth

Michael Darrough, 22, was in and out of foster homes for most of his childhood until he met a family he connected with.

PHOTO BY
ANNE STOKES

MAINTAINING SUPPORT FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUNG ADULTS

Until recently, foster youth would "age out" of the foster system at age 18, losing their eligibility for any support or assistance. Newer programs have recognized that these young adults age 18-21 can benefit from an extension of certain programs.

"Young people do not achieve independence at a predetermined age," but rather make a transition toward successful independence based on their own unique developmental needs," says Stephanie Sandmeier, a Program Planner with Sacramento County CPS.

Becoming a responsible adult is difficult for any young person, much more so for someone who has lacked the support of a permanent family. Extending services to transition-age youth and young adults — like housing vouchers, financial education and health care — provides the guidance and support foster youth need.

This has meant more youth leaving the foster system with high school diplomas, college credit, job skills and experience, housing and permanent connections that will make a smoother transition to adulthood, Sandmeier says.

FAQ:

Charting Your

Journey

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Resource parents may have a few questions before setting out on the journey of providing a loving home for a child in need. Here, Laviennia Jackson and Rahsaan Williams of Sacramento County Child Protective Services answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

➤ **Who can foster a child?**

Williams: Pretty much everyone. Resource parents can be single, divorced, married or widowed. They can be in a partner relationship or be friends who just want to help raise a child together. They can be gay, lesbian or straight. We don't discriminate.

➤ **Do you need a large income?**

Williams: No. Applicants must only prove that they have enough regular income to pay for the basic needs of the home and some monies left over. We tell people that they cannot look to the reimbursements the child gets as a primary source of income since that money is used to take care of the child's needs. But while Social Security and disability benefits qualify as income, unemployment benefits and financial aid do not because the monies are not guaranteed funds.

➤ **What is the process like?**

Jackson: First, they have to attend orientation and fill out an application. Once they complete the application, the process starts. They'll take four parenting classes over two weeks. They also have to take a CPR class. That's just one Saturday class. Then a social worker will conduct three interviews to inspect the home, ask questions about your background and ask what you're looking for in a

foster child. The social worker will then sign off and submit their report. Approval will usually come within 90 days.

➤ **Will it hurt my chances if I have a criminal history?**

Jackson: Not necessarily. Applicants should disclose the information on their application. Often an applicant with a record for a minor offense or an expunged juvenile record can get an exemption. A team, which may include a social worker, supervisor and program manager, considers such matters on a case-by-case basis to determine whether an application should go forward or not.

➤ **What other resources are available?**

Williams: CPS has a program to pair novice resource parents with mentors who are more experienced with foster care and who can offer advice. Another service we offer is respite care. When resource parents feel as though they need a break, we have other resource parents who are available to provide respite and take care of the children for a few days or over a weekend.

➤ **Am I required to interact with the biological parents if they maintain parental rights?**

Williams: To the extent possible, resource families should support biological parents because it can reduce the stress and trauma of being in the foster care system. It is usually in the best interest of the child for resource families to support biological parents through reunification.

➤ **I have biological children. How do I tell them about a foster sibling?**

Jackson: During the application phase is a good time to talk with any biological children you have about whether they would welcome a new sibling. Explain to them what you're doing. Have that conversation, and make it so the child feels important and included in the decision.

➤ **Do foster children have to be the same race as me?**

Jackson: Not at all. I have five adopted children ranging in age from 4 to 21. One is half-Japanese, two are half-Hmong, one is half-Indian and the other is African-American. Then I have my biological son who is also African-American. I call them the "rainbow coalition" and my home a "house of love."



Resource Family Liaison
Laviennia Jackson and
Resource Family Social
Worker/Recruiter Rahsaan
Williams work for Sacramento
County Child Protective
Services and help prospective
resource parents.
PHOTO BY
ANNE STOKES

Becoming a Resource Parent:

Next Steps

**Contact
us today to
join our next
orientation!**

Sacramento County
Child Protective Services
916-875-5543
[www.dhhs.sacounty.net/
CPS](http://www.dhhs.sacounty.net/CPS)

1

Attend an Orientation

Two-hour review of
process, foster care
system

Opportunity to determine
if being a resource family
is right for your family

Held from 6-8 p.m. every
Tuesday at 3701 Branch
Center Road, Conference
Room 1, Sacramento

TAMBIEN
DISPONIBLE EN
ESPANOL el primero y
segundo martes de cada
mes de 6-8 p.m. en 3701
Branch Center Road,
Conference Room 1,
Sacramento.

2

Complete the Application

Includes employment status,
income, and health condition
Complete a background check

3

Get Training

12 hours of pre-approval
training (four classes over two
weeks)
Learn about child development
and trauma
Complete CPR class, if needed

4

Prepare for Interviews

Three in-home visits
Social workers assess home safety
and your ability to care for the child
Extensive study that will approve you
to provide foster and adopt a child

5

Welcome Your New Family Member

Typically takes 90 days to find out
if you are approved for a license
Social workers begin searching
for child that will be the best
match for your home

SACRAMENTO'S FOSTER CARE NETWORK

Sacramento County Child Protective Services has partnerships with a number of adoption and foster care agencies in the greater Sacramento region. Whether you become a resource parent through Sacramento County CPS or one of the agencies listed here, you will be helping to build permanency for youth in our community. Find them online and start your journey today!

A Brighter Childhood Foster Family Services
Alternative Family Services
American Indian Child Resource Center
Aspiranet
Atkinson Youth Solutions
Bay Area Indian Council, dba Indigenous Nations
Better Life Children Services
California Foster Families, Inc.

Central Valley Foster Care
Environmental Alternatives Foster Agency
Families for Children
Uplift Family Services
Family Connections Christian Adoptions
FosterHope Sacramento
Fred Jefferson Memorial Foster Family Agency
Helps Foster Family Agency

Home at Last
Accountable Children & Family Services
Kair-In Home Social Services
Koinonia Foster Homes, Inc.
Lilliput Families
Our Children's Keeper Child & Family Services Agency
New Horizons Foster Family Agency
Paradise Oaks Youth Services
Positive Option Family Services

Share Homes
Sierra Child & Family Services, Inc.
Sierra Forever Families
Sierra Vista Child and Family Services
Stanford Youth Solutions
Triad Family Services
V.B.R. Foundations, Inc.
Welcome Home Foster Family Agency
Wynspring Family Resource Center
Youth for Change