



SACRAMENTO  
COUNTY

# Connecting Foster Youth with Loving Families

The Sacramento County Department of Child,  
Family and Adult Services



## Sacramento County Foster Care Teens By the Numbers

**546** youth in foster care are  
between the ages of 13-17

### Statistics

- Female: 51%
- Male: 49%
- African-American: 24%
- White: 16%
- Latino: 16%
- Asian-Pacific Islander: 4%
- Native American 1%

### Placement types

- County Foster Home
- Foster Family Agency Home
- Relative/Non-Relative Extended Family Member
- Congregate (Group) Home
- Guardian Home

### Time in care

For the 546 teens in care, 24% have been in care one year or less, 28% have been in care one-to-three years, and 48% have been in care three or more years.

# Partnership in Foster Care

Setting up Sacramento County families for successful resource parenting of teens

by Elissa Einhorn

**M**elissa Lloyd wants to set the record straight about teens in foster care. “There are many myths and misconceptions about teenagers in foster care, such as they are ‘bad’ kids, that they all have significant behaviors which are difficult to handle, and that they are in foster care because of something they have done. People fear that caring for teens in foster care will be problematic because ‘these kids’ may be disrespectful and are hard to please. The reality is that teenage years can be challenging for all parents to navigate. This includes teens in foster care who, just like their peers who are not in foster care, need parents who can care for them, set boundaries, nurture and encourage them,” says the Deputy Director of for CPS, Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services.

The many supports that Child Protective Services (CPS) provides to ensure success for resource parents (formerly known as foster parents) and for teens include 12 hours of mandatory pre-placement and continuing education on multiple topics such as Nurtured Heart Parenting, Understanding Trauma, Foster Parent and Foster Youth Rights, Cultural Competency and Humility, as well as elective trainings; access to a home placement social worker and to the teen’s social worker; and access to community resources, such as WRAP services that represent a team of specialists who work with the youth, resource family and biological family to “wrap” them in a circle of support.

Point-in-time data shows 589 foster kids are ages 13-21. Of those, 115 are in group homes or congregate care and are in need of resource family homes. While it is estimated that 100 teens are in need of a resource family, the number is difficult



As Deputy Director for CPS, Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services, Melissa Lloyd makes it her daily mission to help foster youth find loving homes with caring resource parents.

Photo by Anne Stoke S

to calculate because of what Resource Family Approval Program Manager Cathi Johnson describes as the funnel of kids being placed in homes, with additional youth entering the system at the same time.

“We need to open the funnel,” she says. “At the end of the day, we want each child to be placed with a resource family with as few changes in placement as possible.”

Both Johnson and Lloyd warn against the impact temporary placements have on teens, noting the best scenario is to have one placement in one family setting.

“We’d like an abundance of homes that are willing to take in teens so we can match them with a family that understands their needs as they grow into adulthood,” Lloyd explains, adding that being moved from one placement to another is traumatic and can add to a teenager’s sense of grief and loss.

Within a stable home environment, both teens and their resource families can experience many joys and successes — what she calls “firsts.”

“Their first job, their first school dance, their first time driving, and their first application for college,” Lloyd says, adding, “The trauma these kids endured stays with them, but it doesn’t have to define them.”

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**Melissa Lloyd**  
Deputy Director for CPS, Sacramento  
County Department of Child, Family  
and Adult Services

# Finding Success After Foster Care

by Elissa Einhorn

Extended foster care services help prevent homelessness for youths



Former foster youth, Patrick “Gem” Gabbett, has endured a lot. Through that experience, they are now able to help other foster youth through difficult situations as a National Foster Care Advocate.

Photo Courtesy of Patrick Gabbett

Patrick “Gem” Gabbett, who is 21 years old, has endured a lot, including attempted suicide, being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, coming out as transgender (with a preference for gender-neutral pronouns), being illegally home-schooled, surviving abuse from their mother as well as attempted murder by one of their brothers, finding themselves in a violent foster care home, experiencing homelessness, and now walking with a cane as they await confirmation of suspected fibromyalgia.

The oldest of five children, Gabbett entered the foster care system at the uncommonly late age of 17. Gabbett’s journalism teacher, taking notice of the straight-A student’s behavior, visited their household — under the guise of gifting them an old computer — and her suspicions of abuse were confirmed.

“She was my journalism teacher,” Gabbett recalls. “It’s because of her that I am studying journalism.”

It’s also because the Sacramento City College student found their way to California’s Extended Foster Care (EFC) Program. EFC allows eligible youth to remain in foster care until age 21 if they meet certain criteria (without EFC, youths age out at 18). Among the services Gabbett receives is a supervised independent living placement, including rental and food

support that allows them to live alone in a Sacramento apartment with a shared kitchen.

“At 18, you are not ready to care for yourself,” they say. “That’s why foster youth can easily fall into homelessness.”

Open about their past life story, Gabbett prefers to tell it as an advocate.

“I hope to use my ability to speak about and tell stories of people’s struggles to survive in our country,” they say. “People who are marginalized or minorities, and who deserve to not just be talked about, but to be able to tell their own stories.”

Gabbett already has developed the skills necessary to be an advocate and has been selected to serve as a National Foster Care Advocate through Foster Club, a national organization that supports foster youth, spending two months in Oregon facilitating workshops with foster youth to help them learn how to advocate for themselves.

Their own prescription to accomplish this is to prioritize a support system, hold their social worker accountable and access online resources. More importantly, Gabbett says, “Understand that being in foster care does not diminish your worth regardless of what your family says or society says. By virtue of being a human being, you deserve a safe living environment and people who care about you.”

“By virtue of being a human being, you deserve a safe living environment and people who care about you.”

Patrick “Gem” Gabbett  
Former Foster Youth

## Steps Toward Success for Foster Youth and Resource Families

### Foster Youth

- Build and maintain healthy relationships whenever possible
- Learn financial literacy
- Take advantage of higher educational and vocational opportunities
- Find and maintain employment
- Know how to secure stable housing
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Find mentors wherever you go
- Be aware of your environment

### Resource Families

- Treat youth in nonjudgmental ways
- Understand where teens are in the moment
- Realize many behaviors shown by foster teens are a result of trauma
- Show respect for the biological family
- Support connections that teens have with individuals who are important to them
- Provide space for teens to talk and take time to listen
- Remember that foster teens are like all teens
- Provide a safe and stable environment
- Be flexible, but firm
- Being patient is key
- Keep the best interest of the teen at the forefront
- Give opportunities, as appropriate, for teens to connect with and understand the love they have for their biological family
- Take advantage of additional trainings offered by Sacramento County Child Protective Services

The Farabaugh household—Martin, Tara, Christopher and Abigail (left to right)—know the value of sharing quality time and working together to care for each other.

Photo by Anne Stoke

## Services to Support Resource Parents

To recruit loving families, Sacramento County has services to help meet the needs of resource parents.

### The Child Care Bridge Program

Provides vouchers to pay for child care. Vouchers are available for six months, and Bridge Program Navigators help resource parents find other subsidized child care.

### Kinship Support Services Program

If a relative or family friend has been put in foster care, this program includes a variety of support services.

### Respite

Allows resource parents to take a break. This service is key to providing stability and permanency to children in their care.

### Compensation

Resource parents receive reimbursement for costs associated with caring for children. A majority of foster children qualify for Medi-Cal, so resource parents are not responsible for paying medical, dental or counseling bills.

### The Source

A free, 24/7 hotline is staffed with operators trained to de-escalate situations and help callers work through conflicts. Call or text 916-SUPPORT | 916-787-7678 or chat at <https://thesourcesacramento.com/>.



# Empty Nesters Adopt Teen

Reaping the rewards of love in adoptive families

by Elissa Einhorn

When Tara and Martin Farabaugh told friends they decided to become foster parents to a teenager, the response was, “What are you doing? Get someone who doesn’t talk yet!”

And while the couple, who has three adult children, admits that a 13-year-old boy can be challenging, they have no regrets. In fact, they feel blessed to give and receive the love that has filled their empty-nester lives. “We see so much in him,” Martin says. “We know he can do great things.”

Christopher came to live with the Farabaughs after their daughter, a social worker who was fostering him, relocated for work. She asked her parents if they would take him in.

“We said, ‘Of course,’” Tara recalls. “We couldn’t send him back into the system. If people don’t step up, these kids will be on the streets searching for someone to love.”

The Farabaughs would adopt their foster son if returning to his birth family didn’t work out.

The duo attended classes hosted by Sacramento County Child Protective Services where they learned the backstories of foster youth, as well as strategies for dealing with anger, rule-breaking and refusal to go to school.

“It’s a very good support system and very accommodating,” says Martin. “It felt like a huge amount of information, but I use it in my head all the time.”

Tara and Martin are transparent about their day-to-day realities. While they have had to dig deep for patience and grow tougher skin, they also realize Christopher has come to them after a childhood of no one caring about him, having no boundaries, and a series of unsuccessful placements that forced him to attend four different schools in just one year.

“Like every child, he pushes back at the rules,” explains Tara. “I have to have the mindset that he’s not like every other kid. He comes from trauma. I have to separate my own emotions and realize his words are not targeted at me.”

Today, Christopher has good grades in school, new friends and dreams of becoming a doctor.

“When you bring a foster child into your home, every step they make — regardless of how small — is so encouraging,” says Martin. “These children need a place and someone to love them as they are and to accept all of the stuff that comes along with them.”

Tara adds, “I want Christopher to know he will always have someone in his corner.”

“If people don’t step up, these kids will be on the streets searching for someone to love.”

Tara Farabaugh  
Foster Parent

Guillermo Santana is a testament to second chances. After he mended his ways, he got a second chance at fatherhood.

Photo by Anne Stoke

# Cultivating Relationships

One father turns his life around to regain custody of his kids

by Howard Hardee



When Guillermo Santana's marriage started falling apart a few years ago, he "ended up doing what I usually do, which is feed my addiction by drinking and using again," he says. "I saw it coming and I couldn't stop."

At one point, Santana, a longtime landscaper who lives in South Sacramento, started drinking early in the morning, "just to function," he says. Following a DUI arrest, his wife's uncle called Sacramento County CPS, and his two young children — Alexis and Octavio — were taken away.

Though he was horrified at the time, Santana sees now that the removal of his children was a blessing in disguise.

"If he hadn't made that call, I don't know if I would be where I am now," he says.

Santana wouldn't have completed 90 days of substance abuse treatment. He wouldn't have completed drug and alcohol and parenting classes, which helped him develop coping skills that keep him on the right track. And he never would have developed a relationship with Matthew Blood, a resource parent in Rancho Cordova who cared for Alexis and Octavio before Santana was able to regain custody of them about a year ago.

Blood thought that he would eventually adopt the kids. But then Santana "started doing what needed to be done," Blood says. "It's been good to see him overcome his struggles. He's an inspirational person. As a father, he has stepped up."

Blood and Santana remain in close contact to this day. "We're always communicating with each other," Blood says. "I offered my help in case he was ever overwhelmed or needed a break with taking care of the kids."

Santana is still working toward getting his driver's license and his old job back, and he's immensely appreciative of Blood's ongoing support.

Though he was initially skeptical of a single man acting as a foster parent, he's come to believe that Blood is an "amazing person with a good heart."

"Right now, we haven't been hanging out like we normally do; he has a bunch of foster kids and I have my own things going on," Santana says. "But usually we'll meet up and go to the park, and Alexis goes over there once in a while to spend the night. I consider him a very special friend of mine."

From Blood's perspective, his role as a resource parent — he's fostered about 10 children over the years — is about "giving back to humanity," he says. "It's not about the foster care money, it's about what's best for the kids. I'll always be there for them."

"If he hadn't made that call, I don't know if I would be where I am now."

Guillermo Santana  
Father

## Stability in Extended Care

The most common outcomes for foster placement include reunification with the biological family, adoption and, to a far lesser extent, emancipation. One of the best results is the youth **establishing a lifelong relationship** with their resource parents.

"My hope is that if you have welcomed this young person into your home who then becomes an adult, that relationship is a positive one and your family allows them to stay," says Kelsey Meraz-Masten, a Resource Family Approval social worker with Sacramento County.

Through California's Extended Foster Care Program, youth in the child welfare and probation systems are allowed to stay in foster care until age 21, **providing that much more long-term stability** before an individual ages out of the system as a young adult.

"It extends the placement and that connection," Meraz-Masten says. "I don't want to call it a last stop, but it's a **great stepping stone** before that person is able to move out on their own."

# Learning New Ways to Adult

It's never too early to start thinking about becoming a resource parent

by Howard Hardee



**T**hough Brittany Thurman had always pictured becoming a foster parent at some point, she didn't think it would happen until she became a more established adult herself.

At 25 years old, Thurman had enough space in her home and flexibility with her finances to put up a teenage girl she met while working at a middle school in Sacramento. Thurman coached the girl's soccer team and worked in her math class, and they stayed in touch when she started going to high school on the same campus.

"When I was still working at her school, I saw everything that was happening as a result of what was going on at home," she says. "I wanted to do something at the time, but I was just too young and not in the place I wanted to be before taking that step. She was just someone on my radar."

Thurman was ready a couple of years later, when the girl, who had run away from her previous placement home, needed a temporary place to stay. She applied to take her in as a non-related extended family member through Lilliput Families, a foster family agency that partners with Sacramento County CPS.

"That's how I was able to have her come stay with me in the beginning," Thurman says. "When she came to live with us, I told her that she could stay as long as she liked,

but it wasn't determined when she first came to live with me that it was going to be long-term."

Now that it's looking more like a semi-permanent living situation, Thurman, an education specialist at Capitol Collegiate Academy in South Sacramento, is starting to think about the girl's future. They recently visited Thurman's alma mater, UC Santa Barbara, which she hoped would highlight the value of pursuing higher education.

Because she missed so much class during her freshman year of high school, the girl is behind on credits. However, Thurman has been helping her catch up through independent study from home.

"She's 100% brilliant; there have just been some challenges along the way," she says.

Providing a stable home for someone who needs it has been rewarding for Thurman on multiple levels, especially in terms of her own growth. "I've learned so much," she says. "Obviously, I'm not very old and I was just getting started on getting my own ducks in a row for finances and keeping up on doctor's appointments and normal day-to-day stuff for myself. Now, being in charge of another person, I've learned a ton about becoming a full-fledged adult."

**"Now, being in charge of another person, I've learned a ton about becoming a full-fledged adult."**

**Brittany Thurman**  
Resource Parent, Lilliput Families

## Community Benefits of Foster Youth

As principal of Paso Verde, an elementary school in Sacramento, Tonja Jarrell knows that the entire community benefits from having enough resource parents taking in foster youth.

For starters, school districts lose revenue when a student is forced to move out of a district due to relocation because of a foster placement change. In California, schools are required to track ADA—average daily attendance of their students—and receive \$70 to \$100 a day per student, Jarrell says. When a school's ADA dips, they get less money from the state.

**“We really owe it to kids to provide them a safe, welcoming and loving introduction to the school,” Jarrell says.**

And, of course, student learning is impacted when a student has to switch schools or districts in the middle of a term. A student's success upon entering a new school “depends a lot on the social-emotional approach of the school the scholar is entering,” Jarrell says. How the transition is handled can make all the difference for a student who is adapting to a new classroom, grading system, or pace of learning on top of coping with a destabilized home life.

# Making Resource Parenting Easier

Sacramento social worker offers answers to frequently asked questions



As an RFA social worker in Sacramento, Kelsey Meraz-Masten strives to clarify questions locals might have about resource parenting.  
Photo by Anne Stokes

by Howard Hardee

**K**elsey Meraz-Masten, Sacramento County Resource Family Approval social worker, says, “Fostering, adopting or taking guardianship of children and teens in Sacramento County’s child welfare and juvenile probation systems used to be confusing and time-consuming for every party involved. Each service involved separate processes with interviews, trainings and house walk-throughs.

“It took forever. I would see these grandparents and non-related family friends who had to go through all these hoops to get these children into their homes, and I’d try to explain and help them navigate through all these different processes.”

That’s why California’s adoption of Resource Family Approval (RFA) was a welcomed development for Meraz-Masten.

“When the State of California started talking about introducing RFA in 2017, I was like, ‘Yes — this is exactly what we needed to streamline this process,’” she says. “Now it’s more of a one-stop shop, in a sense.”

Getting approved to become a resource family for local foster children, including training and CPR certification, takes about 90 days. Meraz-Masten can walk you through it.

## ? What sorts of qualifications are considered?

You need stable housing, room for a foster child, and a stable income that can support your household. You cannot be financially impacted by caring for foster youth, because sometimes the foster payment comes later or it’s delayed, so there may be a need for the family to cover those expenses in the meantime.

## ? Who makes a good resource parent?

We work with a variety of people. There’s not really a one-size-fits-all. We see a lot of different people of different age ranges and family dynamics. You can have children in your home; we think that’s great.

## ? But it’s important to offer a stable, secure-feeling home, right?

The last thing we’d want to do, if you’re a family that’s already distressed financially or has unstable housing, is add stress to that situation by caring for a foster youth who has their own needs. We want to make sure that the families coming forward are stable and feel like they’re in a good place.

## ? Do you have much contact with the resource parent once a child is placed in their home?

Compared with a foster care agency, I think this is where we differ the most. As an RFA worker, I will only come out to see you once a year. Once a foster child is placed in your home, that child’s social worker will come out and see them once a month and talk to the caregivers. That’s the most contact you have with the agency.

## ? How old are most of the kids in foster care right now?

Over half of the kids are between the ages of 6 and 17. I feel like there’s this perception that all our kids are infants and toddlers, but in reality it’s our older kids who are in need of foster homes.

## ? Is it rewarding to become a resource parent?

One of the things I hear a lot from families that foster teens is that they find enjoyment in watching this person become an adult. You get to watch them go off to college or a trade school or help them get a job. Sometimes they even stay in contact for their wedding or the birth of their first child. There are all of these really big life milestones that you get to enjoy.

To find more answers to other frequently asked questions, visit:  
[dcfas.saccounty.net/CPS/Pages/Resource-Family-Approval/](https://dcfas.saccounty.net/CPS/Pages/Resource-Family-Approval/)

## Rewards of Resource Parenting

“You get to watch your foster teen make that transition into adulthood.”

**Kelsey Meraz-Masten,**  
RFA social worker with Sacramento County CPS on the rewards of becoming a resource parent.

“She’s just so much fun to have around.”

**Brittany Thurman,**  
Resource parent for a 16-year-old girl she met as an educator.

“You do what is best for the child and the family.”

**Matthew Blood,**  
A resource parent for about 10 foster youth over many years.

“It will pay off.”

**Guillermo Santana,**  
A landscaper in South Sacramento who regained custody of his young children after completing a series of rehabilitative programs.



# Discover the Fulfillment of Becoming a Resource Parent

## Learn how to become a resource parent or family

Resource families provide love, parental care, guidance and stability to children until they can be returned to their parents or move to a permanent home through adoption or guardianship. Attend a **Resource Family Approval orientation in Sacramento County on Tuesday nights from 6 to 8 p.m. at 3701 Branch Center Road.** The orientation is also offered in Spanish on every first Monday of the month. These orientations provide an **overview of what it's like being a resource family** and what is expected in order to sign up.

## Supports and services available to resource parents

There are a lot of community resources available to families who want to support a child. Referral services are also available for parents, including Sacramento County Mental Health Services for children in foster homes. Sacramento County also just rolled out a new **24/7 support line for caregivers of foster youth called The Source** – which has been a really big help for families. Resource parents should also know they will be provided continuing education every year to help them provide the best care-giving services to kids in the foster system.

Find out more about resource parenting by visiting or calling the Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services at:



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