



COULD
YOU
BE THE ONE
THEY NEED?



You can change the life of a foster child in San Joaquin County.
Call San Joaquin County Children's Services: 209-465-KIDS (5437)



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

How resource families help fill a need in San Joaquin County

BY KATE GONZALES

In San Joaquin County, there are roughly 1,500 children in the foster care system on any given night. These are children who have been removed from a parent's care due to abuse, neglect or caretaker absence. These children still deserve stability and love from a caring adult.

That's where you can help.

Resource families are needed to provide support to these children while they wait to be reunited with their parents or to find a forever home.

"Our goal is to reunify or find permanency for children," says Akkia Pride-Polk, Child Welfare Division Chief for San Joaquin County Human Services Agency.

Permanent, loving homes are what children need, and now it's easier to give children that permanency with the new resource family approval (RFA) process. In the past, families who wanted to foster children, relatives caring for children and those who wished to adopt all had different standards and paperwork. Under RFA, which began July 1, 2016 in San Joaquin County, all families follow the same process, preparing them to do whatever is best for the child. All families fulfill the same requirements, including an orientation, application process, background check, home inspection, 30 hours of training and more. In the first four months of implementing the new RFA process, 97 potential families applied with Children's Services.

Resource families that demonstrate patience, understanding and empathy are especially good candidates, Pride-Polk says. Having grown up in Stockton during the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s, she has witnessed

firsthand the impact trauma can have on children. Today, many children are removed from their homes due to neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

"We need caregivers who are willing to understand trauma ... who are going to be sensitive to that," she says.

San Joaquin County Children's Services is able to support resource families through these challenges with training for parents and access to therapy and wrap-around services for children.

"The training we offer for our families ... is very trauma-focused," Pride-Polk says.

Children most in need of good homes include LGBT youth, medically fragile children, older children (especially African-American and Latino males), sibling groups and commercially sexually exploited children. Caring individuals are needed to step up to help these children.

Because Children's Services wants to find a good match for every child who needs a home, they need a wide range of families. Resource families can be a single person living in an apartment, an LGBT couple or families who already have children of their own. The most important quality is that they can provide a stable, loving environment for a child in need.

"There are children of all ages who need a family that can provide them with the security and stability required for them to grow into healthy adults," Pride-Polk says. "We are looking for all kinds of families."

"THERE ARE CHILDREN OF ALL AGES WHO NEED A FAMILY THAT CAN PROVIDE THEM WITH THE SECURITY AND STABILITY REQUIRED FOR THEM TO GROW INTO HEALTHY ADULTS."

Akkia Pride-Polk
Child Welfare Division Chief of Human Services Agency

Akkia Pride-Polk, Child Welfare Division Chief for San Joaquin County Human Services Agency, says the county needs more resource families so the agency can have better chances of finding the best match for a foster child in need.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN

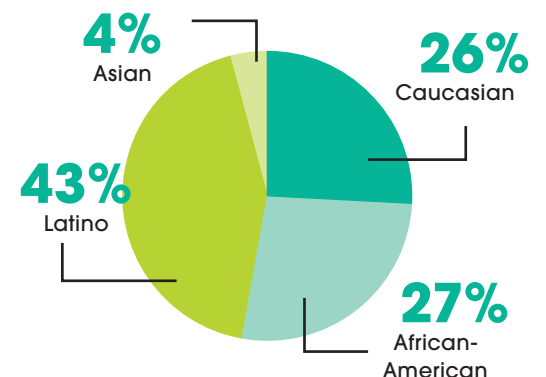


Children in need

1,500 children in San Joaquin County are placed in out-of-home care

42% are ages 12 and older

Ethnicity



Children most in need of homes

- Older children
- Commercially sexually exploited children
- Siblings
- Medically fragile children
- LGBT
- Pregnant and parenting teens



Ready to help? Call 209-465-KIDS (5437) or visit www.sjchsa.org/Assistance/Childrens-Services.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

**Resource parent makes the community a better place
– one child at a time**

BY ANNE STOKES

When his son Taylor first came to live with him, Antonio Thomasson remembers that the 9-year-old with Down syndrome had no social skills, didn't know how to bathe himself, couldn't use a fork or spoon and had a tendency to wander off. Fifteen years later, Taylor's abilities have drastically improved.

"To see him at 24 ... be able to do family things and go out socially and be appropriate is major," Thomasson says.

In addition to Taylor, Thomasson currently has three foster sons under his care: one with severe autism, one with Down syndrome and one who is emotionally disturbed. With a background in nursing, Thomasson is uniquely qualified to take on medically fragile foster children or those with special needs. Even though he has a special skill that helps him care for his sons, he credits their success to hard work, patience and persistence — something any parent can offer.

"We had him in therapy and things like that, but at home it was me," Thomasson says. "There was a lot of repetition, a lot of sitting down, putting the fork in his hand and guiding it to his mouth."

Caring for his special needs children is a full-time job. Thankfully, Thomasson has a great support system of siblings, babysitters and his own mother (who took in foster children when Thomasson was growing up). He also relies on help from San Joaquin County Children's Services, which connects him to programs and services for his children as well as special training and respite care, when he needs a break.

Thomasson advises resource parents to be aware of their own abilities and limitations when considering making a commitment to a foster child. He says it's challenging, but being able to make a difference in his community and in his children's lives is immensely rewarding. He says the experience has taught him patience, tolerance and to be more accepting of people's differences.

"I think people are put in our lives for that purpose — to make us better," he says. "I think by helping these children, it's definitely made me a better person because it's taught me how to be more compassionate [and] how to be grateful for the things I'm able to do."

Resource parent Antonio Thomasson hugs son Taylor, who has Down syndrome. Thomasson specializes in caring for medically fragile foster children, who are more difficult to place in homes. Over the past 20 years, he has taken eight children into his Stockton home.

PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN



**"I THINK BY
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Antonio Thomasson
Resource parent

Families sought for special needs foster kids

Foster children with medical or behavioral concerns often wait a long time to find a home willing to give them the special care they need. San Joaquin County social workers connect resource parents with the special training and resources needed to provide that care.

Reasons children may need special care:

- a diagnosis on the autism spectrum
- developmental delays, learning disabilities or behavioral problems
- drug exposure as an infant
- physical abuse such as shaken baby syndrome
- use of special medical equipment, such as injections or a feeding tube

Extra support for resource families:

- child-specific training
- funding for child's needs
- medical insurance for child
- medical appointment support
- support for their educational needs
- special equipment support
- respite



If you are thinking of opening your home to a special needs foster child, please call 209-465-KIDS (5437) or visit www.sjchsa.org/Assistance/Childrens-Services.

'I HAD AN ACTUAL FAMILY'

Former foster youth reflects on what family's love meant to her

BY ANNE STOKES

Shawna Basco was placed in foster care at age 10. Now 23, she credits her foster family with giving her a successful start as an adult.
PHOTO BY ELIZABETH SOLEYMAN



**"JUST THEM
BEING A PART OF
MY LIFE, MAKING ME
FEEL LIKE I HAD AN
ACTUAL FAMILY, IT
HELPED A LOT."**

Shawna Basco
Former foster teen

When she was 10 years old, Shawna Basco was removed from her mother's house and placed in foster care. Between then and her 13th birthday, she lived in three different homes. She felt embarrassed by the "foster child" label. But all that changed when she came to live with the Maldonados.

"I was really ashamed of my experience in foster care, I didn't want anyone to know," she recalls.

"But my foster mom was always open with that conversation, accepting [our situation] for what it was.

Just them being a part of my life, making me feel like I had an actual family, it helped a lot."

The Maldonados' love and support played a crucial role in Basco's successful transition into adulthood. She was the first one in her family to graduate high school, and she went on to attend community college. Now 23, Basco is a peer navigator with the San Joaquin County Office of Education, working with a caseload of foster youth going through the same challenges she did.

Research has shown that a meaningful connection with just one adult can radically improve outcomes for foster children, especially teens who may have been "let down" by other adults in their lives. Resource parent Patty LaMar has a pretty good understanding of what it takes to make a successful placement with a teenager. Over the past 20 years, she has taken in her share of foster children — "we quit counting at a hundred kids," she says — and she's a faculty member of Delta College's Foster Care Education program. She says caring for foster teens can be tough, but in the end, helping them transition into adulthood is very rewarding.

"Watching them decide what they want to do when they grow up ... and have a plan, it's exciting," LaMar says.

Both Basco and LaMar stress the importance of patience and being a strong foundation for teens, even when they act out.

"A lot of our [former foster] kids tell us now that ... they were angry at the situation they were in," LaMar says. "The one thing we try to tell our foster parents is not to give up on them."

Basco adds that compassion is also important in helping foster teens adjust — it's what made a difference for her.

"They just have to be open-minded and caring," she says. "I feel like it's really important when you go into foster care that you want to really care for these kids."

Here to help

There are many services and supports available to help ensure success for parents and children.

Training and education

San Joaquin County Children's Services offers evening and Saturday classes for new and existing resource parents at Delta College. Topics include:

- foster care rules and regulations
- discipline
- nutrition
- care for medically fragile children
- trauma-informed training

Support groups

San Joaquin County Human Services Agency collaborates with Lilliput Children's Services to host support groups for kinship, foster and adoptive families. San Joaquin County Children's Services also hosts resource parent appreciation nights, holiday parties and barbecues where RFA families and foster children can interact with peers.

Respite care

Respite care is available to RFA families for up to eight hours a day. Five business days advance notice is required.

Independent Living Program (ILP)

Weekly life skills classes are available to current and former foster youth ages 16-21. Classes cover:

- financial literacy
- career planning
- housing
- health care
- financial aid



**San Joaquin
County
Children's
Services**

**supports its resource
families every step of
their journey. Start yours
by calling 209-465-KIDS
(5437) or visit [www.sjchsa.org/Assistance/
Childrens-Services](http://www.sjchsa.org/Assistance/Childrens-Services).**

THINKING ABOUT BEING A RESOURCE PARENT?

Questions you may have

BY ANNE STOKES

New parents may have a lot of questions about the resource family approval process and whether or not becoming a resource family is right for them. San Joaquin County foster care professionals help answer some of the most frequently asked questions.

What kind of resource families are you looking for?

Foster kids come in all ages, with different abilities and from a variety of backgrounds. We're looking for resource families to reflect the identities and cultures of the many children who are looking to be placed in a home! Because foster children speak different languages, we need multilingual resource families. You can be any age, you can be single, married, divorced or a same-sex couple.

Which children are most in need of homes?

We need families who are willing to work with teens, LGBT youth, those who are able to take medically fragile children and households who can accommodate siblings.

Can I state a preference for the kinds of children I can help?

Absolutely! We are all working toward achieving successful placements, so being honest and upfront about the type and number of foster children you can accommodate benefits everyone involved. You can tell us what age range or gender you prefer, or how many kids you can take. If you're able to provide some sort of special care, for example if you are interested in providing care for a medically fragile child or one with special needs, that is also helpful.

Do I have to own my home?

You don't have to be a homeowner. You can rent a house or live in an apartment. As long as your home meets basic safety standards, the type of building doesn't matter!

How do I prepare for being a resource parent?

There are a variety of training classes for new and current resource parents. Delta College offers evening and Saturday classes to give you the basic — and sometimes not-so-basic — skills you may need, such as:

- rules and regulations of foster care
- trauma-informed training (which gives resource parents insight into foster children's behaviors)
- discipline
- nutrition
- cultural identity
- care for medically fragile children or drug/alcohol-exposed infants

Are there any initial costs to become a resource family?

The county doesn't charge you anything to go through the resource family process. If your insurance covers your health screening, which is required as a part of the application process, then you won't have to pay for that either. If you do have to make any changes or improvements to your home to ensure it meets safety standards, there could be some cost there.

What are the steps to become a resource family?

The first step is attending one of several orientations offered each month. The second step is submitting an application, which includes a Live Scan form for a fingerprint background check. From there you're assigned an RFA social worker who will enroll you in the aforementioned training and go through a household check and walk-through with you. After you meet all of the requirements, you'll be approved and ready to help a child in need!

From left, Treena Johnson and Anna Maguire recruit resource families for San Joaquin County Children's Services.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



Have a question for the recruiters? Come to an orientation (see page 6 for times/locations), call 209-465-KIDS (5437) or visit www.sjchsa.org/Assistance/Childrens-Services.

HSA
HUMAN
SERVICES
AGENCY

OPEN YOUR HOME TO A FOSTER CHILD!

Become a resource parent!

STEP 1

Attend an orientation.

Every Thursday
Delta College, Holt 310
5151 Pacific Ave., Stockton
6-9 p.m.

First and third Tuesday
of the month
San Joaquin County
Human Services Agency Office
102 S. San Joaquin St., Stockton
9 a.m.-12 p.m.

STEP 2

Submit a resource family
application, including free
Live Scan fingerprinting and
background check

STEP 3

Receive free RFA
pre-service training on
understanding childhood
trauma, the rules and
regulations of foster care,
and CPR/first-aid

STEP 5

Approval and placement!

Congratulations! You're
ready to welcome a foster
child into your home!

STEP 4

Successfully complete the
approval process, including
a household check, health
screening/TB test and interviews
by an RFA social worker

San Joaquin County
Children's Services is
looking for resource families
to reflect the diverse identities
and cultures of the many foster
children who are looking for
homes. You don't need to be
perfect, but you may be
perfect for a foster child!

You can do it!

- Education and training available for resource parents
- Single parents, married couples, same-sex couples welcome
- Multilingual households a plus
- Resource families who are willing to welcome teens, medically fragile and special needs children are especially needed
- You don't need to own your home
- There is no charge to go through the resource family approval process



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