



THIS IS FAMILY

**Foster and adoptive families
make a difference
to kids in need**



SACRAMENTO
COUNTY

Child Protective Services



DEAR NEIGHBORS,

More than 2,300 children in Sacramento County are currently in foster care, and 500 of them are in need of permanent adoptive homes. Here in Sacramento County, we've concentrated our energy for several years on carefully refining how CPS, court officials and law enforcement investigate child abuse or reports of neglect, and how they make decisions about whether to intervene in families' lives. It's a critically important responsibility we don't take lightly.

But after the court assigns custody to CPS, after a child is removed from a dangerous family situation, what happens then? How do we enable that child to have confidence in a trusted adult's guidance? How do we ensure that she succeeds in school and in life? All of us, as a community, need to pay more attention to what happens to children whose lives have been disrupted.

After we remove children from their homes, we have an obligation to give them the opportunity to thrive. That opportunity doesn't come from the court, or the police officer, or the social worker. It comes from a loving foster parent, an adult who earns the trust of children by providing stability and confidence and affection and laughter. That's not always easy. But you will see in the stories that follow that the satisfaction is great.

As a community, we owe it to the children to find families that will nurture them when they're most in need. If your heart goes out to the children awaiting homes and families, I hope you'll come out to the Heart Gallery of Sacramento Adoption Gala Event at 6 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 15, 2014, at the Citizen Grand Hotel in Sacramento. I'll be there, and so will many parents and kids who can share their experiences and answer questions about foster care and adoption. You're sure to find it an inspiring evening.

We need you. It's not enough to get children out of immediate danger. We need to make Sacramento a place where children grow up healthy and confident and with faith in their future.

Sincerely,
Sherri Z. Heller, Ed.D.
Director

Sacramento County
Department of Health
and Human Services



LOOKING FOR LOVING HOMES

Foster and adoptive families needed in Sacramento County

by Evan Tuchinsky

All too frequently, law enforcement and child welfare officers encounter kids in dire situations. These children may be abused and neglected; exposed to drugs, violence and poverty; or living in conditions that demand immediate intervention.

When a child is unsafe at home, Sacramento County Child Protective Services (CPS) finds alternate care and housing. The number of kids in the foster system is considerable: currently about 2,300 countywide.

When removing a child from a home, the County's primary goal is to ensure the child's safety and well-being while providing services to the biological parent(s) to enable reunification. Typically half of these children will reunify with their parent or a family member within a year. Sometimes reunification takes longer. Sometimes it never happens, as is the case with about 500 children currently awaiting adoption in Sacramento County.

CPS is always on the lookout for resource families for foster youth. Resource families can be any home that cares for a child, whether foster or adoptive, both short-term and long-term.

"It's a huge commitment, and we understand it's a huge ask," says Luis Villa, division manager for Sacramento County CPS. "But we know children do better in a family home; government does not make a good parent, unfortunately."

Especially valuable are "forever families": homes with foster parents who would consider adoption or guardianship if the child can't return to biological parents. The County only places infants and toddlers with foster parents who want to adopt, thanks to the amount of willing

volunteers, but finding foster-adoptive parents for older children is just as important.

"We really want to get away from the notion that long-term foster care is the best alternative for kids — it really isn't," Villa says. "We want children to live in a loving home through legal permanence, which is adoption, legal guardianship or reunification. Our preference is reunification, but that is not always possible."

The impact of a forever family is significant — not just on the child, but on the community. Compared to others,

children who are in foster care until adulthood have lower graduation rates and higher rates of homelessness, criminality, mental illness, health problems and out-of-wedlock births.

"Common sense and all the research on child development tell us the same thing, that all children need permanent, loving homes," says Frank Mecca, executive director of the County Welfare Directors Association of California. "Sadly, for children who are unable to establish these important lifetime connections, their outcomes can often be bleak."

"But for youth who are able to establish those connections, we're all as a society better off because they're healthier, they achieve better educationally, they're more productive adults, and many, many of these former foster youth who thrive in families turn around and provide the same type of loving support for other children who are in their shoes."

For foster-adoptive parents, Villa and Mecca stress there is no prototype.

"If you've got a loving home and you're interested in helping children, you might just be a good foster parent or adoptive parent," Mecca says. "Please check it out."

Read on to find out more about how foster and adoptive families can change the lives of kids in our community!

"If you've got a loving home and you're interested in helping children, you might just be a good foster parent or adoptive parent."

Frank Mecca
Executive director of the County Welfare
Directors Association of California

THE GIFTS OF BEING A FOSTER PARENT

Couple transforms lives by giving kids a home

by Mike Blount

When Billie Lara made a promise to her daughter's friend in 1993, she didn't know it would lead to 21 years of her and her husband providing love and care for more than 90 children in the foster system. But looking back, the 62-year-old says she wouldn't have it any other way.

Billie and her husband first became foster parents to provide a home for their daughter's friend, who was living in an abusive home at the time. But a visit from a social worker convinced them that they could help even more children.

"The social worker said that she had a couple of girls who needed homes and thought that I would be perfect for them," Billie says. "She asked me, 'Would you consider it?' My husband and I talked about it and we took both of them in the next day."

Recently, Billie and several of her former foster kids, now adults, gathered for a family reunion at her home in Rancho Cordova. Billie says seeing her children go on to lead happy and productive lives fills her with joy. But in the beginning, she was unsure.

"I had fears about whether I could make an impression," Billie says. "I worried that I wouldn't be able to give them what they needed or that they would even listen to me."

Billie says it's important for new foster parents to be realistic and focus on the long-term commitment before taking on

the responsibility. As the chairperson of the Sacramento County Foster Parent Association, Billie tells people who are thinking about becoming foster parents that the children might take some time to warm up to them at first.

"I think a downfall for a lot of new foster parents is that they think the child will be instantly grateful for taking them in or that the child is going to trust them as soon as they walk in the door," Billie says. "For them, you're part of a system that they may resent. It's not going to be a bed of roses. Most of them will appreciate you, but it takes time."

For Billie, the investment of time and love has been well worth it. Many of Billie's children have gone on to college. They keep in touch with her and let her know what they're doing. They still come to her for direction. One of those children is 24-year-old Roberta Knorr, who has been with Billie since she was 7 years old.

"If I had stayed with my real parents, I probably wouldn't be where I'm at today," Roberta says. "[Billie] made sure that I learned responsibility and that I focused on my education."

Billie and her husband continue to foster children to this day, including six kids they currently have living in their home. She hopes more people will discover the joy of becoming foster parents.

"There's a lot to the positive side of being a foster parent," Billie says. "They have given me more gifts than I have given them. I know why I am here on this earth, and it's for my kids. I love my kids."

Billie Lara is pictured with children of her former foster children, who are now adults, at a recent family reunion. Billie has fostered more than 90 children since 1993. Billie says she believes she was put on earth to be a foster parent to children who need homes.
PHOTO BY MOLLY WASSENAAR



"They have given me more gifts than I have given them."

Billie Lara
Foster parent and chairperson
for Sacramento County Foster
Parent Association

DID YOU KNOW?

50%

of children in foster care in Sacramento County return to their parents within the **first year**.

65%

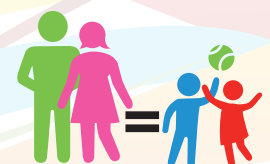
of children reunify with their parents within the **first 18 months**.



There are more than **2,300 children and youth** in foster care in Sacramento County. Approximately **500** of them are currently awaiting adoption.



From Jan. to Aug. 2014, **174 children** have been successfully adopted in Sacramento County.



There are as **many teens** as there are younger children in foster care in Sacramento County.

Christina and Anthony Charles adopted twins Janessa and Justin two years ago, making their plans of starting a family a reality.
PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL



TAKING THE LEAP

Destiny calls couple to make adoption dreams a reality

by Evan Tuchinsky

Anthony and Christina Charles long talked about adoption, but until two years ago, the Sacramento couple never took the first step.

"We got busy with life, and that got away from us," says Anthony, who's 57 and a technician for heating and air conditioning systems. Christina, 46, is a teacher.

Circumstances changed when they learned that two young twins who are related to Anthony needed a permanent home. The Charleses didn't know the children well, and the thought of becoming middle-age parents of toddlers gave them pause.

Just briefly, though.

"We believe in the Lord," Anthony says, "and he always works 19 miles upstream. He's always in front, shaping and arranging things through people and situations, and this was a perfect testimony to that. We had no clue this was coming down the pipe, but once it was brought to our attention, it didn't take us long to decide."

The twins, Justin and Janessa, initially stayed over with the Charleses, off and on, then lived with them for the remainder of the foster-to-adoption process, which took almost a year. The court finalized their adoption in July 2014.

Parenthood wasn't a shock to Anthony, who previously helped raise Titus, the son of a former girlfriend. Titus is now 28, with two kids of his own. But it was brand new to Christina, who

credits classes and support from the nonprofit organization Better Life Children's Services — along with her husband — with helping her learn to care for two youngsters in an even greater state of flux. But despite the challenges, Anthony says Christina was simply elated at the opportunity to have children.

"There was pretty much an immediate bonding," Anthony says. "She has really stepped up to the plate, persevered and weathered some pretty tough storms."

So have Justin and Janessa, who turned 5 in September. They had witnessed violence and experienced poverty, to the extent that when they first came to the Charles home, they'd devour every meal as if it were their last. They had been bounced from house to house, as their parents got repeatedly evicted, so the twins also needed regular reassurance that this would be their last stop.

It is.

"Now we're really attached — we're all a family," Christina says. "Janessa goes around singing about her family all the time, and Justin draws pictures of our family all the time, so it's nice to see the dynamics and how they've really changed."

Adds Anthony: "The journey started two years ago, and the journey will continue for years longer. We wouldn't change it for the world. It's been an eye-opening experience for sure, a humbling experience, but it is well worth it, and I would recommend it to anyone."

"We wouldn't change it for the world. It's been an eye-opening experience for sure, a humbling experience, but it is well worth it, and I would recommend it to anyone."

Anthony Charles
Adoptive father of twins

WHO CAN FOSTER OR ADOPT?

Nearly anyone can foster or adopt a child. Married or single. Gay or straight. Any ethnicity. Any religion. According to adoption and foster home licensing program manager Stephanie Lynch, as long as you provide a caring, safe and healthy family environment for a child, there are few restrictions on who can foster or adopt.

Foster or adoptive parents can be any age over 18. They can rent or own a house or apartment. They don't need to have parenting experience. Lynch says the most important requirements for being a foster or adoptive parent are to meet the financial requirements, have the time and space for the child and a willingness to work with the child's biological

mother and father.

Here is a breakdown of the different types of caregivers needed:

Emergency care

■ An emergency caregiver can be anyone who is able to provide temporary shelter when a child is removed from their home by Child Protective Services. Non-related or extended family members can give a child a safe place to stay with someone who they know during a traumatic time. Emergency caregivers go through an approval process, but they do not need to be licensed by the county or state.

Foster parent

■ A foster parent is anyone who acts as a guardian for a child in place of the child's biological parents for an extended period. Foster parents need to have a license given by the county or state.

Adoptive parent

■ An adoptive parent is anyone who makes a long-term commitment to a child to provide a permanent home through a court process. Adoptive parents are responsible for the child legally, financially, emotionally and physically.



Lois Collins, left, fostered Marie Ary, right, from the time she was 3 months old until she turned 18. Marie says she is blessed to have her foster parent in her life. PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

FROM THE SYSTEM TO SUCCESS

Former foster youth shares her story

by Mike Blount

When Marie Ary was 3 months old, she was placed into the foster care system. Her single mother was battling a drug addiction. Her aunt was already caring for Marie's older sister when she was born and couldn't raise another child, so a family friend named Lois Collins became her foster parent in 1989.

Marie grew up calling Lois "mom." Speaking about her experience, she says it was the best thing to happen to her.

"It was a responsible choice to make, and I'm who I am because of it," Marie says. "I went through the things that every kid goes through growing up, but my mom really grounded me and taught me the important things in life. She was very serious about academics and made sure that I worked hard in school. I became passionate about learning because of her."

Marie and her foster mom were a close family. They ate dinner together in their home in Alameda County and talked. They said "I love you" to each other. Lois made sure to take Marie to her aunt's house so she could also stay close with her sister.

"My mom stressed the importance of maintaining a relationship with my sister," Marie says. "I saw my aunt and my sister every weekend. I was fortunate in so many ways to have my mom."

When Marie was 13, she and Lois moved to Elk Grove. Marie completed high school and went on to graduate in 2011 from Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina with a degree in computer science and information systems. She is currently working for AmeriCorps as a youth mentor and will be helping youth learn independent living skills and succeed at school.

Though she says there are several people who have contributed to her achievements, Marie's foster mom and the foster care system gave her the foundation she needed to succeed in life.

"I am so thankful I had my mom and the permanency with her," Marie says. "Because of the way she raised me, I have had many opportunities in life. She taught me how to carry myself and how to talk to people. She's always wanted the best for me and wants to see me continue to succeed."

THE PATH BACK HOME

Grandparents foster five grandkids until reunification with mom

by Evan Tuchinsky

When Richard Baumgarte learned his daughter lost custody of her five children in the summer of 2012, his grandfatherly instinct kicked in. He and his wife, Siriwan, took in the oldest, Christopher, that September, then moved from their modest home in Modesto to a larger house in North Highlands to accommodate the whole family.

By then, the other four siblings had gone to foster homes: Elijah in one, Matthew in another, Jocelyn and Isaiah together in a third.

"My grandkids were very well taken care of in that system," Richard says. "They did get to spend a lot of Sundays together ... The foster parents were very good foster parents."

Still, he wanted all his grandchildren living under the same roof — his roof.

He didn't know how long they might have to live with him and Siriwan, as his

daughter grappled with marital and personal issues. In his custody quest, he found allies in Sacramento County Child Protective Services and the nonprofit Lilliput Children's Services, two agencies that aim to keep families together whenever possible.

"When kids come into foster care, our goal is to get them back home as quickly and safely as possible so that whatever caused them to come into foster care doesn't happen again," explains Karen Alvord, CEO of Lilliput. "The first choice is always back with birth parents if that can safely happen. Second choice would be with a relative to at least minimize some of that trauma of being taken out of their entire family system."

With guidance and advocacy, the Baumgartes had all five children by Thanksgiving. Siriwan quickly transformed into a mother figure — she'd never had children.



Richard Baumgarte, left, and his wife Siriwan, far right, fostered Richard's five grandkids until they could be reunited with their mother (clockwise from top): Christopher, 12, Isaiah, 5, Elijah, 6, Matthew, 3, and Jocelyn, 7 (not pictured). PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

In June 2014, almost exactly two years from when the children were removed from their mother's home, she regained custody and they all moved back with her. Though Siriwan is happy the children were reunited with their birth mother, she also values the relationship she was able to build with them while they lived in her home.

"I miss them a lot. I go to see them every week that I can," she says. "But they're happy to be with their mom, the mom that they belong to."

Though she's happy the children were reunited with their birth mother, Siriwan also values the relationship she was able to build with them while they lived in her home.

OPEN YOUR HOME TO A CHILD!

HERE'S HOW.

by Mike Blount

The process of fostering or adopting a child can seem daunting at first. There are many things you will need to do before you're ready to become a resource family — an adoptive or foster family for a child in need. But you'll get lots of support along the way. People like Foster Parent Association President Myrna Terry and Stephanie Lynch of Sacramento County CPS are ready to help guide you step-by-step through the process of changing a child's life forever.

ATTEND AN ORIENTATION

Held once a month, orientations provide an overview of the foster or adoption process. Terry says that the orientation is a good opportunity for parents who are curious or considering fostering or adopting to decide if it's right for them, and get answers to their questions.

"They show you videos about children and what you need to do as a foster parent to meet their needs and what is expected of you as a provider," Terry says. "It's not a part-time job. It's hands-on, 24 hours a day and seven days a week."

Orientations are held in the evening and last for three hours. To find out when the next orientation is being held, call 916-875-5543.

SUBMIT AN APPLICATION

At the end of orientation, you will receive a packet of forms to fill out. Potential parents need to submit to a criminal background check and complete medical paperwork. Lynch, the CPS adoption program and licensing manager, says you will need to submit an application within six months of attending an orientation, or you will have to start the process over.

"The one thing I would say is to be honest," Terry says. "The reason they're asking a lot of the things they are asking is to make sure they are providing the child with a trouble-free home. They are looking for an environment that will protect the child and give them an opportunity to succeed."

SIGN UP FOR PRIDE

The Parent Resource Information Development and Education (PRIDE) program is an eight-week course that lasts for three hours one evening each week. Lynch says PRIDE is much more extensive, and helps prepare new parents for bringing a child into their home. Some of the topics covered include how the foster system works, how the court is involved and how foster and adoptive parents can help a child overcome trauma they have experienced.

"We encourage our participants to get to know everybody in the room," Terry says. "We have biological parents, foster parents and adoptive parents come in and share their experiences. It's a great resource."

RECEIVE A LICENSE

Once all training, evaluations and paperwork are completed, you will receive a license. At that point a social worker will help you determine how many children can come into your home and what kind of child you might be interested in. The social worker will also explain how to obtain financial assistance and medical coverage through Medi-Cal. You will need to go to a first aid and CPR class, which are both free. Lynch says the process is different for each parent.

"Depending on the age range, ethnicity and whether you're looking for a boy or girl, the usual time frame to have a child placed in your home is between four and six months from the start of the process," she says.

ADOPTION

If you're looking to adopt a child, Lynch says you'll also go through the Home Study Process — a much more intensive assessment of your home, family and background. Social workers interview anyone living in your home. An additional background and psycho-social assessment is also required to ensure that you are making a long-term commitment to the child. Time frames for adoption vary, depending on the circumstance.

"I gave a child a home — but not only a home — I provided them with love and care," Terry says. "For me, it was bringing a child out of the cold and into a warm, loving environment."

Arobia Battle is a Human Services supervisor for Child Protective Services of Sacramento County.
PHOTO BY LOUISE MITCHELL

WHAT TO EXPECT AS A FOSTER OR ADOPTIVE PARENT

Q&A with Human Services Supervisor Arobia Battle

by Mike Blount



What kind of qualifications do you need to adopt or foster a child?

In order to adopt or become a foster parent, you have to be certified by a foster care agency or by the State or County. For the County, we require that you attend an orientation that lasts three hours and covers everything you'll need to know.

What happens next?

If you decide you want to move forward, you'll need to send us an application within six months. You have to submit to a fingerprint and background check. We'll look into your history for child abuse charges. You'll need to get a physical and medical checkup to make sure you are able to care for the child. We'll go through your home and make sure the environment is safe. We'll do an in-home interview and make sure you have the space, time and financial requirements for fostering a child. There are a lot of things you'll need to do, but we guide you through the process.

What is the role of a social worker during the process?

Our role is to listen to families — what their concerns are — and help them with whatever they need. We are transparent so they know what our expectations are. We give them clear timelines so they know when they need to have paperwork or evaluations completed. We support them in any way we can.

How long does the process take?

A realistic expectation for fostering a child is about four to six months before you receive them into your home. There are many things that can cause delays, but it's really all about the matching. If the parents want a certain age range or certain ethnicity, the process can take longer. Being open about the target age and ethnicity of the child you want to foster can really expedite the process. An adoption can take much longer — sometimes several years.

What are some misconceptions about adopting or fostering a child?

That it's fast. You can be licensed and have a child within your home within 90 days, but a more realistic expectation is four

to six months — and that's if there is no criminal history and the foster parent was diligent about submitting paperwork. Another big misconception for some is that fostering a child is a good way to make supplemental income. People who approach foster care from this perspective will quickly learn in orientation that stipends go toward the expenses of caring for the child, and there is not really any extra money after those expenses are paid. The real reward is in helping a child.

Do you encourage families to consider fostering or adopting older kids?

I love older kids and I'm a strong believer of adopting them. A lot of people think that older kids are set in their ways — that the longer they've been in the system, the more damaged they are. It's important to remember that they were removed because of what their parents had done, not for anything they did. I think people forget that and think that the kids are the problem.

What are some things that foster or adoptive parents should know to set realistic expectations?

One thing we tell them is that their first reimbursement won't come until after the initial 60-90 days they are getting licensed. They need to make sure they are financially able to take care of a foster child. We tell them they need to make arrangements to accommodate the child's needs. There may be visits with [the biological] parents, counseling sessions or school functions. Each child has their own unique needs. We tell them each child is different and that they need to go into it with no expectations.

How can fostering or adopting a child change their life?

Kids need permanency. You can give these children stability and structure. You can support them and be there for them. Make the situation the best one possible. Even if you don't adopt, make a commitment to be there for them. You can change their lives.

“Kids need permanency. You can give these children stability and structure. You can support them and be there for them.”

Arobia Battle
Human Services supervisor

OPEN YOUR HEART TO A CHILD IN NEED

By now, you've seen the statistics: 2,300 Sacramento County children in foster homes, with 500 of them awaiting adoption or legal guardianship.

Behind those totals are individuals — young people with unique stories, unique personalities, unique talents, who need the support of caring adults.

"We have many children in our community who need loving, stable homes and came into our system through no fault of their own," says Michelle Callejas, deputy director for Child Protective Services.

You can see some of their faces at the Heart Gallery of Sacramento Adoption Gala Event on November 15, 2014, an annual photography exhibition featuring portraits of local kids hoping for forever families. There, you also can meet families who've adopted through the County.

As you can imagine, the need is great for

foster families, particularly those willing to provide permanence.

"There's no profile for who a foster or adoptive parent is," Callejas says. "It could be a neighbor, it could be a teacher, it could be somebody connected to the child who's never even considered being a foster parent or an adoptive parent. It could be a single person; it could be a gay or lesbian couple. Our foster or adoptive parents come in all different shapes or sizes, all different backgrounds."

It also could be a couple who's pondered adoption through a private agency. While private adoption can cost upwards of \$20,000, public adoption includes government subsidies and support.

You don't need to be perfect to be a fantastic foster or adoptive parent. Please attend an orientation meeting or the Heart Gallery Adoption Gala Event if you have room in your heart and home for a child in need.

Have you ever thought about fostering or adoption? Take the next step to find out more:

Contact Sacramento County Child Protective Services for more information about foster home licensing and foster-adoption:

916-875-5KID (5543)

tinyurl.com/foster-adoption

Attend a foster parent/resource family orientation, offered twice monthly from 6-9 p.m. on rotating weekdays at:

3701 Branch Center Road

Sacramento, CA 95826

Call 916-875-5KID (5543)

THE HEART GALLERY

The Heart Gallery is a photographic and audio exhibit created to match children in foster care with families who are looking to adopt. Meet a few children in need of a forever home in Sacramento County:



CHAZITY

Chazity is a young girl with boundless energy and a personality to match. While she loves to draw, play with her Barbie dolls and play dress-up, at times she just needs to run. Chazity is looking for a forever family with the ability to appreciate her larger-than-life personality.



ARTHUR

Arthur is described as bright and enjoyable, with a good disposition and a kind heart. His interests range from sports to art. On any given day, he might be found playing basketball with friends or creating cards and pictures. Arthur is seeking a permanent home with a family willing and able to nurture him into adulthood and beyond.



DEMETRIUS

Demetrius will astound you with his amazing memory and his ability to figure out complex puzzles and manage intricate LEGO sets. Like most boys his age, Demetrius likes computer games and outdoor play. Change is something Demetrius has become accustomed to. He would very much like to settle into a home where he can grow into a strong, independent young man.



SAMUEL

Samuel has been described as an engaging, personable, kind young man. He enjoys sports and outdoor activities, but loves basketball most of all. Samuel is succeeding in school, but struggles in other areas of his life. He is anxious to find a forever family where he will receive the love and support he craves.



RAQUEL

Raquel is a bright and engaging young lady who is very capable of articulating her wants and needs. She has a flair for the dramatic and is particularly drawn to the arts. Raquel would love to find a permanent family to call her own.

Join us!

You're invited to the Heart Gallery of Sacramento Adoption Gala Event

6 P.M. ON SATURDAY, NOV. 15, 2014

CITIZEN GRAND HOTEL, 926 J ST., SACRAMENTO, 95814

View more photos and stories of area kids in need of loving homes, meet adoptive families and find out more about adoption and fostering.

You can make a difference in the life of a child!



www.sacheartgallery.org