

SANTA CLARA COUNTY



SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY



Foster a **Future**

Become a Resource Family and change a child's life



It's Time to Be a Child's Forever Family

by Natasha vonKaenel

Become a Resource Family, the new term for foster parent, and give stability to a child during one of their hardest moments

In an ideal world, children would never be taken away from their birth parents. But when a child must be removed from an unsafe environment, Jana Rickerson, Assistant Director of SCC SSA Department of Family and Children's Services, knows it's a joint effort between DFCS and the community to step in and make sure our most vulnerable children are protected and nurtured as they grow up.

"Every child needs a safe home. That's my bottom line," Rickerson says. Research supports her claim: Children who are placed in a family environment, as opposed to a group living environment, fare much better, with a staggering more than 90 percent of children placed with families reporting that they "like who they are living with" and "feel like part of the family."

In Santa Clara County, about half of children in the foster care system are placed with a relative, or kinship family, a model praised for keeping families together, and mitigating the trauma children go through when taken away from their birth parents.

"Removal is trauma enough," Rickerson says, "and every child who experiences that trauma deserves a caring Resource Family," the new term for foster parent.

Rickerson started out as a "case-carrying social worker," and knows the pain caused by not having enough available Resource Families. In particular, she recalls the pain of splitting up large sibling groups, and the disappointment of seeing teens "age out" without

ever finding a family to guide them through the challenges of adult life.

"If we as a society are judged by the well-being of our children, we cannot have children aging out of the system without a sense of belonging and support," she says.

Rickerson hopes more people will look into becoming Resource Families, especially for children who are often difficult to place, like children with special needs, large sibling groups, victims of commercial sexual exploitation, LGBTQ youth and others.

"You can be a stable rock for a child who may need support," she says. "It's a chance to help children feel good about themselves, and be part of knowing you have contributed to a child's success."

In January 2014, DFCS received a grant from Wendy's Wonderful Kids to find permanent homes for children who had not yet found a "forever family." Roughly 50 percent of the children assisted by this program have been in foster care for more than four years, and 30 percent have had six placements or more.

Giving these particular children a sense of permanency, stability and support is of the highest priority for Rickerson.

These Resource Families "have enough love in their heart to hold this kid no matter what they do," Rickerson says. "They are ordinary people doing extraordinary things."

"You can be a stable rock for a child who may need support."

Jana Rickerson
Assistant Director of SCC SSA Department of Family and Children's Services



Jana Rickerson, Assistant Director of SCC SSA Department of Family and Children's Services, hopes more people consider becoming a Resource Family in Santa Clara County, the new term for foster parent.

COURTESY MICKI VARGAS PHOTOGRAPHY



DID YOU KNOW?

As of July 2016,
1,175 children
are currently in
foster care in Santa
Clara County.



44.2% of
foster children were
**reunited with
their parents**
within the first year,
according to the
most recent UC
Berkeley study.



48%
of foster children
are **over the
age of
11.**



Only 4%
of all children in
foster care, ages
0-21, are in care for
**more than
5 years.**



Children with the highest need:

- Large sibling sets
- Children with special needs
- Teens, including those pregnant or parenting
- African-American children
- Children discharged from psychiatric hospital care
- LGBTQ children
- Children dually involved with child welfare and juvenile justice
- Youth at risk of commercial sexual exploitation

RESOURCE FAMILY 101



What does 'Resource Family' mean?

The new term for foster parent, or an individual, couple or family that is prepared to mentor, strengthen and support foster youth who cannot be cared for by their birth parents.

Who can be a Resource Family?

- A child's relatives (grandparents, aunts/uncles)
- An adult with a connection to the child (coach, teacher or neighbor)
- An adult with no relation to the child

What does a Resource Family do?

- Provide high-quality parenting
- Respect a child's culture and background
- Maintain a connection to the biological family
- Mentor birth parents
- Maintain a lifelong commitment to the child

How are Resource Families supported?

- Financial reimbursement to cover a child's basic needs
- Child care for family emergencies
- Resource Family support groups
- Continual educational training and much more!

We are always looking for Resource Families excited about working with a child's birth parents toward reunification. **If you are ready to give a child love, support and stability during their time of need, please call (408) 299-KIDS (5437) to find out when an informational meeting is happening near you.**

Mikaela and David Rojas share a meal with their four foster children. While her foster children's reunification with their birth parents is difficult for Mikaela, she says making a difference in a child's life makes it worth it.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



"The whole goal when we got those children was to reunify them with the mom. And at the end of the day, they did, which was great."

David Rojas
Resource parent who works towards reunification

Resource Family Helps Kids Reunify With Birth Parents

by Anna Quinlan and Natasha vonKaenel

Beauty of reunification makes difficulties worth it

David Rojas never considered becoming a Resource Family for foster children, until Mikaela came into his life.

"When I met my wife, she's all about that," David says. "I didn't really know what I was getting into, but I was open." Mikaela grew up watching her aunt and uncle care for foster children, later adopting a girl who became Mikaela's cousin — a bona fide member of the family.

"As I watched the whole adoption process, it totally opened my eyes," says Mikaela, now 29, explaining how she knew she wanted to be a resource parent one day. Now, the Rojas family has had four different placements (either single children or sibling sets), and hope to eventually adopt.

Watching children they would have loved to adopt be reunited with their birth parents hasn't been easy, Mikaela explains. But they both know they're filling an important role in the lives of all the kids they've cared for.

"In the short time we have had them, they are starting to make pretty big leaps," says David, who tries to read to the younger children each night before bed and work with the older children on completing their homework. David is proud of the young children's improvements in basic skills like reading, writing, potty training, speaking and following direction.

After seven months in the Rojas' home, two brothers, ages 7 and 8, went back to live with their birth mother. Mikaela made a scrapbook from their time together to help both herself and the boys deal with the transition.

"I really wanted [the kids] to have good memories of their time in foster care," she says. After receiving the scrapbook, the boys' mother texted Mikaela to let her know how much it meant to them.

Mikaela notes that even though being a resource parent and experiencing the reunification process has been very challenging at times, it has been worth it.

"Part of you emotionally goes with the kids," Mikaela says. "It was bittersweet. [The kids] really did have an amazing connection with their mom, and we thought it was really great that they got to go back to her."

David agrees. "The whole goal when we got those children was to reunify them with the mom. And at the end of the day, they did, which was great," he says. David hopes to improve the life of each child that comes through his door, regardless of how long or short their stay is.

"I'm just hoping long term, we had a positive impact on them," he says.

Linda Pasters encourages all of her daughters, foster and biological, to work hard at all aspects of their life. With that discipline, she says they can all succeed. They are seen here enjoying a meal together.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



"Sometimes it takes a long time ... but then one day their eyes open and they realize: I can't fix my parents, but I can work on me."

Linda Pasters
Resource parent for more than 38 years

Resource Mom Makes a Difference That Lasts a Lifetime

By Anna Quinlan

Mentoring teen girls to be better than their circumstances

As the oldest of nine children, Linda Pasters knew a thing or two about taking care of kids.

"I babysat all my life. That's the thing I knew how to do," she says. By her early adulthood, she figured she'd had enough child care responsibilities for one lifetime.

"By the time I was grown I didn't want any children," she says. "I figured I'd had my share." She did eventually have a daughter of her own, but her mother urged her to consider caring for foster children as well.

"My mother kept telling me that I was really good with kids, and that I'd make a good foster mom," says Pasters.

After going through the foster parent licensing process (recently renamed Resource Family approval process), she initially cared for younger children before realizing she preferred having preteens and teenagers in her care.

"Teenagers say what's on their mind and I like that. I'm a no-nonsense person, so it works," she says, adding with a chuckle. "They're not great communicators but they will text!"

Pasters currently has seven girls with ages ranging from 12 to 18 in her care. She explains that having a few non-negotiable rules in place is the key to keeping order. In her family, Pasters is clear that no matter what, every child has to go to school, do their chores and attend church with her on Sundays.

Her approach appears to work. With 38 years of foster parenting experience under her belt, she has countless stories of watching children defy the odds and go on to be happy, successful adults.

"No one wants to be in foster care," she says. "I'm here to help these kids better their lives."

Serena, a 17-year-old who has been living with Pasters for two-and-a-half years, recently graduated high school with honors and was accepted into two historically black colleges and universities with scholarships. Pasters texted photos of the graduation to Serena's grandmother, who responded, "I know God put you in Serena's life to do what we couldn't do."

Several of the girls that Pasters has cared for have come to her suffering from depression and very low self-esteem. She observes that many of the girls have been told — whether overtly or subconsciously — that being in the foster system means they will never amount to anything.

"When people tell you stuff like that," Pasters tells them, "prove them wrong."

Pasters says watching kids make a commitment to do well in school and focus on their future makes her proud. "Sometimes it takes a long time ... but then one day their eyes open and they realize: I can't fix my parents, but I can work on me."



OLDER KIDS NEED A STABLE PLACE TO CALL HOME

Young children and babies are not the only ones that need permanent homes. Older foster children deserve a permanent, stable place to live and grow up just as much as any other child.

Why you should be a Resource Family for older children:

- Roughly half of the children currently in foster care in Santa Clara County are over the age of 11.
- Older children and older sibling groups are often one of the hardest groups to place with Resource Families.
- It's a great way to gain parenting experience if considering adoption or biological children.
- By providing a loving home and considerate mentorship, Resource Families can make a huge difference in an older child's life.

Even though you didn't see a child walk for the first time, you can see them walk at graduation. **For information about being a Resource Family for older children or older sibling groups, call (408) 299-KIDS (5437) to find out when an informational meeting is happening near you.**

Child Gives Resource Mother Special Understanding

by Matt Jocks

Caring for children with special needs takes patience and lots of love

While Brooke cannot communicate verbally with her foster mother, her message of love is heard loud and clear.

"[Caring for Brooke] has changed my perspective," says foster mother R. Scott, who declined to have her first name published. "It's easy to take life for granted. But I tell people, 'You never know what the future is going to bring.'"

Scott has devoted her life to others' children: first in day care and now as a Resource Family. Since taking an early retirement, she has fostered more than 100 children, mostly on a short-term basis. Then Brooke entered her life.

Nonverbally autistic, Brooke was only 3 years old when Scott took her in.

"At first, I didn't know what I was doing at all," Scott says. But then, with the help of SCC SSA Department of Family and Children's Services, she says, "I took classes and the instructor was wonderful."

Scott studied nonverbal communication, the complex needs of autistic children and how to anticipate, understand and deal with children's outbursts. Scott says it has been an unpredictable, but rewarding journey. Special outings, like birthday parties, can be derailed by what Scott calls "melt-downs."

"You know, I'm not going to tell anyone that I never get frustrated," Scott says. "But when I do, I put myself in a timeout. I don't put her in a timeout. I breathe. I get a book. I make a phone call."

Scott says she knows through her training that outbursts are caused by chemical imbalances, and one look at Brooke cuts through whatever frustration is mounting.

"After she has had an outburst," Scott says, "she'll hold out her hand to me. And it will bring tears to my eyes. It's like she's saying, 'I'm sorry. But I can't control it.'"

Scott's birth son is grown, leaving her and Brooke alone. However, she gets help from a friend, as well as constant access to the DFCS staff, who offer advice and monitor Brooke's progress.

Brooke's medical needs are fully covered and Scott receives financial assistance to care for her.

There is also the sense of community that comes from interacting in group outings with other foster parents who deal with children with special needs.

"That is a big plus," Scott says. "We exchange experiences. We learn from each other."

It's at those times Scott is reminded of her upbringing in rural Georgia.

"I didn't even know the phrase 'foster parents,'" she says. "Everybody just took care of everyone's children."

When Scott retired young, she says she yearned to spend her time doing something she felt passionate about.

As a Resource Family, Scott says, "It really does take a village to raise a child."

"After she has had an outburst, she'll hold out her hand to me. And it will bring tears to my eyes. It's like she's saying, 'I'm sorry. But I can't control it.'"

R. Scott

Resource Family for more than 100 children



R. Scott reads a book with her foster child, Brooke, who is nonverbal autistic. Scott says Brooke helped change her perspective on life and love.

PHOTO BY JEN VAZQUEZ



**CHILDREN WITH
SPECIAL NEEDS
DESERVE
FAMILIES WHO
CARE**

There is a great need for Resource Families to take in children with special needs. While this can seem like a lot of responsibility, social workers will make sure to provide you with the training and resources necessary to ensure your success.

Reasons children might need special care:

- Diagnosed with autism
- Developmental delays, learning disabilities or serious behavioral problems
- Drug exposure as an infant
- Physical abuse (head trauma, shaken baby)
- Require special medical equipment (injections, feeding tubes, etc.)

In addition to the assistance provided to all Resource Families, **those who foster children with special needs receive:**

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

These children deserve permanency, love and support. **If you think you are the resource family that can provide it, please call (408) 299-KIDS (5437) to find out when an informational meeting is happening near you.**

Everyone Can Be a Resource Family

Get started today!

Providing stability and love for a child during one of the hardest times of their life is something both you and the child will remember forever. Stop just thinking about it! Become a Resource Family and make Santa Clara County a more loving, supportive community to grow up in.



- 1 Attend an informational meeting** held 3-4 times a month in either English, Spanish or Vietnamese. There you can:
- Do fingerprinting for free
 - Submit information for the required background check



- 2 Complete Pre-Approval Training** lasting 27 hours over nine sessions. This training helps Resource Families understand the unique needs of foster children. Lessons include working with birth parents, developing healthy eating habits, encouraging positive self-esteem, recognizing abuse and much more.

While you complete your training, make sure to:

- Become certified in CPR and first aid
- Pass your home inspection
- Submit your TB test results



- 3 Submit your application** and be approved as a Resource Family!



- 4 Accept placement of a child** and provide love and stability for as long as the child needs

Find out about upcoming informational meetings in your language by calling
(408) 299-KIDS (5437)



FAQ FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES

Who makes a good resource family?

Resource families must provide a caring, safe and healthy family environment for a child and understand that reunifying the child with their biological parents is always the ultimate goal.

Do I need to have parenting experience?

No. Before a child is placed in your home, resource parents are required to have 27 hours of Pre-Approval Training to learn what it takes to meet their child's needs.

Do I have to be married? Straight? Own my own home?

You can have a partner or spouse, be single, LGBTQ, straight, own or rent a home or apartment.

Will I get help?

Santa Clara Family and Children's Services provides financial reimbursement, child care for family emergencies, parent training and education classes, multilingual support services, mentor program services, support groups and more.

FOSTER A FUTURE ● (408) 299-KIDS (5437) ● www.sccgov.org/resourcefamily ●

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