

# A Family for Every Child

HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN IN SUTTER AND YUBA COUNTIES NEED CARING  
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES. **CAN YOU HELP?**



Sutter County Welfare & Social Services | Yuba County Health and Human Services

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# Changing the Life of a Child

## FOSTER CHILDREN IN SUTTER AND YUBA NEED LOVING HOMES

**G**rowing and learning constantly, children need a stable and safe environment in which to thrive. But sometimes, a child's home environment doesn't provide the safety and security they need. Every year, an average of 77 children in Yuba County and 80 in Sutter County enter the foster care system due to abuse or neglect.

These children face a difficult situation, through no fault of their own. They may feel confused and uncertain of their future. But a loving foster home placement can dramatically improve outcomes for these children.

"When a child connects with an adult who cares, that child or teenager is more likely to do well in school, stay healthy and have a better chance at healing," says Frank Mecca, executive director of the County Welfare Directors Association of California. "This is why foster parents are so critical — they can truly be the difference in a child's life."

To fill the need for loving, qualified homes, Yuba and Sutter counties have combined forces to encourage more local individuals to step forward and become foster parents.

"The best thing for these kids is to stay in a home that is close to their community and their school," says Lori Harrah, director of Sutter County Welfare and Social Services.

Successful foster families can take many forms. Often, individuals who have a relationship with a child who enters the foster system, such as teachers, coaches, neighbors and family friends, prove the perfect match to provide the caring home the child needs. Others are moved by the opportunity to make a real impact.

"People become foster parents because they have a loving home and want to help children and teenagers," Mecca says. "A lot more people fit that description than they might think, and we encourage them to consider becoming a foster parent or adoptive parent," says Mecca.

All it takes to get started is the willingness to find out more. Potential foster parents can attend an orientation to learn more about the process and discover if fostering is right for them.

"Passion is an important part of what it takes to be a good foster parent," Harrah says. "Often people don't realize they have a passion for fostering kids until they try it."

While the parents bring passion, the counties add practical support. All the necessary training to become a foster parent is provided free of charge. Funds are provided to help cover the children's living expenses, and health care coverage is provided through Medi-Cal. Foster parents also receive the support of a social worker who can provide guidance and assistance, and department staff is on-call 24/7 to answer questions or assist in case of emergency.

**Foster parents  
are so critical —  
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**FRANK MECCA**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS  
ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA

There are few greater rewards than those that come from caring for a child in need. Foster children are our community's most vulnerable members, and it's up to our community to care for them.

"I believe one of our community's most valuable resources is our children," says Jennifer Vasquez, director of Yuba County Health and Human Services.

"It is essential to promote a community of opportunity which allows them to flourish. These children grow into future leaders and fellow citizens that shape our communities."

**Keep reading to learn more about how  
hundreds of families are making a  
difference for kids in our community —  
and how you can, too.**



Pete and Chalice Hall opened their home to children in need — three of their five children are adopted. Today, they're one big, happy family.  
PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER

From left, Lori Harrah of Sutter County and Jennifer Vasquez of Yuba County are working together to spread the word and reach potential foster parents in the area.  
PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER



## WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITY

With so many children entering the foster care system each year, there is great need for more foster parents in both Yuba and Sutter counties. The two counties have come together to collaborate on spreading awareness and encouraging more participation. As neighboring counties, Yuba and Sutter already share resources to help children in our greater community. Now they share a common goal as well: to increase the number of foster and adoptive homes available to children when they need it most. When a child is separated from his or her biological parents due to abuse or neglect, the child needs a safe home to provide stability. Yuba and Sutter counties are looking to partner with local families to meet the needs of children in our communities.



# A Guide for the Journey



Justin Jones is grateful for the support he received from his foster family. Today, Jones gives back by working with foster youth.

PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER

## FORMER FOSTER YOUTH GIVES BACK BY MENTORING FOSTER KIDS

by Matt Jocks

It is Justin Jones' task to help kids in foster care get where they are going. But it is his gift to know where they have been. As a former foster child, today he works to provide the kind of support to kids that helped him when he was in their shoes.

In his position as a Health and Human Services Department aide for Yuba County, Jones' primary duty is transporting the children and their families to meetings, like family visitations or doctor appointments. But he often also has the opportunity to share his personal experiences and act as a mentor.

"Once I've told them that I came through foster care, pretty much my whole life, they are usually a lot more open," Jones says.

Just having a chance to get things off their chest can make big difference, Jones says. As kids share what they're going through, he listens and acknowledges how they feel. He sympathizes with their feelings of uncertainty.

Jones knows every child's situation is unique. But no matter what the outcome of each child's story, the one thing Justin can offer them all is hope.

"If I'm talking to a kid — and it doesn't matter if they're 5 years old or 15 — I always try to tell them the best thing they can do is keep a positive attitude and things will work out either way. And I think that that's helped, because I can tell them from my perspective."

Jones was placed in foster care at age 5 when his home environment became unstable. He recalls feeling confused when he went to live with his foster family, but their support ultimately helped him get through.

"I had a really loving, caring foster family from a young age," he says. "What they gave me was a constant feeling of having a family. A family that loved me and would do anything for me."

His foster dad came to all his basketball and soccer games. His foster mother would always help him with his homework and

push him to do his best. Jones says he never felt different from his foster brother, who was 10 years older.

The stable, nurturing environment in his foster home laid the foundation for his success as an adult. As he neared 18, Jones also received support from the county that helped smooth the transition to living on his own. He participated in life skills and computer classes and received assistance in finding and paying for his first apartment.

Today, Jones has been working for the county for a year and a half and is enrolled at Yuba College, with an eye toward a career in social services. Jones says if he can make a difference to just one child, his efforts are well worth it. He loves having meaningful work and the opportunity to give back to kids in need.

**What they gave me was a constant feeling of having a family. A family that loved me and would do anything for me.**

JUSTIN JONES, FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

"I definitely plan on staying here a long time," he says. "I'm very impressed with what the county does and what they do for the kids. All the social workers and everybody that works here, they really are pulling for these kids and they want to see them have a good life. I think it's amazing."

## SERVICES HELP FOSTER YOUTH SUCCEED AS ADULTS

Support to help foster youth grow into strong, self-sufficient adults doesn't end at age 18. Sutter and Yuba counties have a comprehensive program to help foster children make the transition to adulthood. Thanks to AB12, passed in 2010, eligibility for assistance extends past age 18 for participants who maintain education and/or work-related goals.

In Sutter and Yuba counties, the backbone of transition services is the Independent Living Program. According to Carol Ullrich, who works in

support of youth in the Sutter Independent Living Program, classes cover a variety of practical life skills, including résumé writing, job interviewing skills, computer skills, nutrition, budgeting and money management. Participants can also be referred by a social worker to receive a laptop computer and printer to support their transition to higher education and career.

This program augments the assistance provided to all foster care participants through their individual

social workers. Housing programs also provide financial assistance for rent and expenses when participants are ready to be on their own.

Depending on the circumstances, these programs extend assistance to age 21 or 24. The programs also provide the opportunity for those who opt out to later opt back in. The programs are currently helping dozens of former foster youth in the two counties achieve independence and adult success.



# One Couple — One Hundred Lives Touched

FOSTER FAMILY DEDICATED TO HELPING CHILDREN FOR 35 YEARS

by **Brittany Wesely**

**M**aking the momentous decision to become a foster parent means committing to nurturing and supporting a child in need. The role of foster parents is critical. They offer a stable environment for foster children while a path to permanency is sought, either through reunification with the biological parents, placement in an adoptive home, or being adopted by the foster parents themselves.

Marilyn Penterman and her husband have been foster parents since 1980. They have provided a temporary home for more than 100 foster children and adopted two of them. Penterman says that foster parents have a special ability to transform the lives of children who are experiencing trauma and uncertainty.

"We're there to help these kids with whatever they need, whether it's their health or learning how to color and play outside," Penterman says.

Children in foster care often haven't had much stability in their lives. Penterman says she helps the children who come in her home feel safe and secure by having consistent, predictable routines

with meals and activities. She also is attentive to the needs of each child.

"Every child I get is a new experience. I learn something new each time," Penterman says. "It's a different story for each child who comes into my home."

Paula Kearns, Sutter County Social Services program manager, has worked with the Pentermans many times over the years. She says what has made the couple successful foster parents is their flexibility and willingness to prioritize the needs of the child.

"The Pentermans are front and center in supporting transition plans when children move to placement with relatives, reunify with parents or establish another permanent living plan," Kearns says.

For Penterman, it's important to facilitate healthy relationships with biological parents. To help encourage the parents, Penterman began placing a disposable camera in the child's bag before each visit. The parents would get to take photos with their child, then Penterman would create a scrapbook for the parents to keep.

"I might have their child, but at least with the photos they can kind of have that baby with them," Penterman says. "It doesn't matter how they live their lives, all parents really do love their children."

No matter how long the children are in her home, Penterman takes great effort to make each one of them feel special.

**It's not the quantity of children you get placed with or how long they're with you, but the quality of the time you have.**

**MARILYN PENTERMAN**  
FOSTER PARENT

She and her husband have a tradition for the first night children are placed in their home. They all walk to a neighborhood restaurant and have dinner, then they take the children shopping for clothes, shoes and toys.

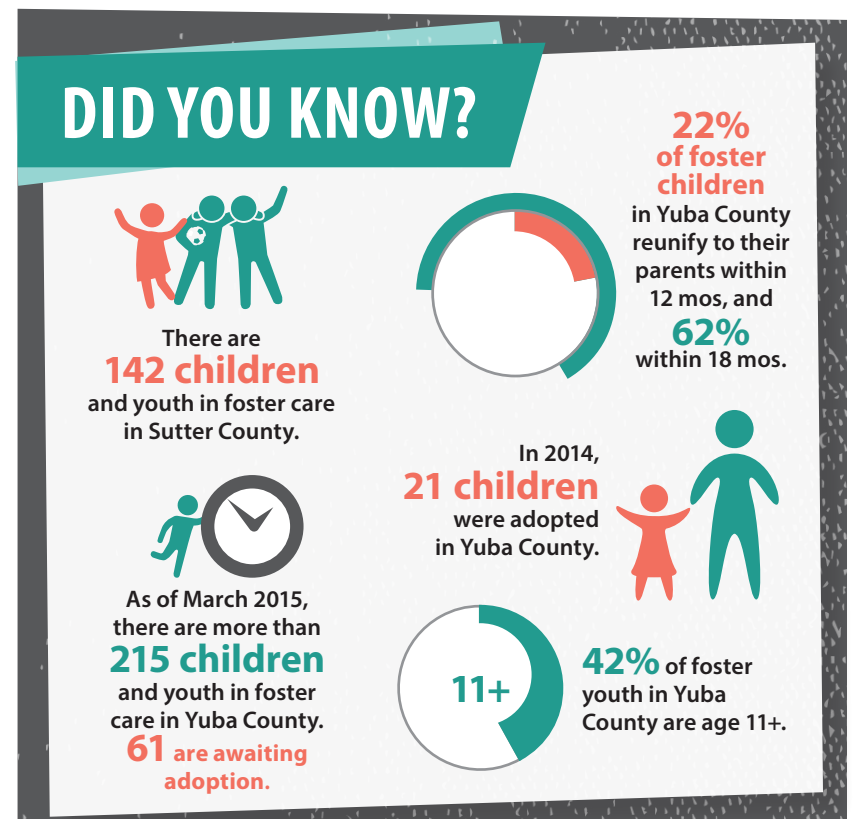
"It's not the quantity of children you get placed with or how long they're with you, but the quality of the time you have," Penterman says. "No matter how long you've had the kids, you've made some kind of impact on them."

Kearns says that the Pentermans are a great example of how members throughout our community can come forward to make a lasting impact on the life of a young person — whether it's by fostering one child or one hundred.

"The Pentermans' story showcases what foster parenting is all about," Kearns says. "If you are interested in making this type of commitment, we have many children in Sutter and Yuba counties who are in need of you to make them part of your family."



The Pentermans have provided foster care for more than 100 children over the course of 35 years.  
PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER





# A Lasting Gift

## LOVING FOSTER MOTHER INSPIRES DAUGHTER TO VALUE FAMILY

by Lexi Brister



Foster mother Edna Johnson, left, with Diane Washburn and her family in 2011.  
PHOTO BY LISA QUILLIN

**“My own experience in foster care showed me that you don’t have to give birth to a child to love a child.”**

**DIANE WASHBURN, FORMER FOSTER YOUTH AND ADOPTIVE MOTHER**

**D**iane Washburn says she wouldn’t be the same person she is today without the love and support of her foster mother, Edna Johnson.

Washburn was 15 when she went to live with Johnson. She admits she was a handful, having been accustomed to a lack of structure, but Johnson set high expectations for her.

“She pushed me because she saw something in me that I never could,” Washburn says. “When I finally settled in and realized I was home, I just knew I was right where I was supposed to be.”

Washburn also credits the support she received from the county as critical during this difficult chapter of her life.

“I had amazing social workers all the way through. Social workers that took time to get to know me — who I really was,” Washburn says. “They saw my potential and told me they believed in me.”

Washburn thrived with Johnson, and she grew to love her foster mother. The two remained close until Johnson passed away in 2012. The three other teenage girls that Johnson fostered are now Washburn’s “Sisters by Heart.”

“We fought, we laughed, we helped each other and grew very close, very quickly, and I love them so much,” she says. “If you saw us all together, you would never even question our connection.”

Due in part to Johnson’s lasting legacy, family continues to be a central value of

Washburn’s. Now 37, Washburn says she and her husband consider themselves the luckiest family in the world. Their flock consists of two biological children, Haleigh, 12, and Wyatt, 10, and two adopted sons, Anthony, 6, and Ryder, 2.

Washburn’s two adopted sons came into her life in 2009 when she learned her nephew, Anthony, was going into foster care. After pursuing Anthony’s adoption for nearly three years, his half-brother Ryder was born, and the Washburns offered to take them both. When the adoptions were finalized, she says it was like all her prayers were answered at once.

“We’re so grateful that they’re adopted. It gives them permanency, stability and, most importantly, it gives them love,” Washburn says. “I’ve always known that my one calling was to be a mom, and we have four amazing kids that I get to be with at home at the end of the day.”

Washburn says she encourages anyone with a desire to be a parent to consider fostering or adopting and take the opportunity to provide life-changing love and support to a child in need.

“My own experience in foster care showed me that you don’t have to give birth to a child to love a child. ... I know that is what I needed at 15 years old and it is what our boys needed at 4 months old and as a newborn,” Washburn says. “It’s what all four of our kids need today. It’s what every kid needs every day.”

## SUPPORT FOR FOSTER FAMILIES

### KARES

If you are considering fostering or adopting a child, you are not alone. Yuba College offers several foster/kinship classes each week through the Kinship and Relative Education Program (KARES). Attendees network and support other foster parents in classes that teach various topics regarding child care, including communicating with children, working with birth parents and

family members, and disciplining a child. All classes are held in Marysville at Yuba College, located at 2088 N. Beale Road, Collins Hall, Room 1321.



For more information about KARES or to sign up, contact the Yuba College Kinship Care Education Office at 530-741-6750.

### FOSTER FAMILY SOCIAL WORKER

County social workers also serve as valuable partners in supporting foster parents. Pamela Cook of Yuba County says she and other social workers are available to answer any questions and provide access to community resources, such as first-aid training.

“I am at the ready to lend assistance — whatever you might need as a caregiver for foster children, I will help you in any way I can,” says Cook.

Pamela Cook,  
Yuba County  
social worker.



Contact your county today for more information on foster care and available resources.

**Yuba County**  
530-749-6762  
fosterparenting@co.yuba.ca.us  
**Sutter County**  
530-822-7151  
fosterhomes@co.sutter.ca.us



Together, Diana and Kevin Roberts have adopted seven children from foster care and provided long-term care to two additional children, as well as short-term care to many more. They say they've seen their share of challenges, but the rewards far outweigh the difficulties.

PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER



## HELP CHANGE A CHILD'S LIFE

Yuba and Sutter counties are in need of qualified, caring families who have room in their hearts and homes for foster children.

### PARTNERING WITH PARENTS

Flexibility and a willingness to do whatever is best for the well-being of the child are key qualities of foster parents. Often, foster families will work closely with the biological parents as issues in the home are addressed and reunification with the child's biological parents is pursued.

### OFFERING PERMANENCY

If reunification is not possible, foster parents may pursue adoption or continue to care for the children while adoptive homes are identified. Yuba and Sutter counties need more licensed foster parents willing to open their hearts and consider adoption if reunification is not possible.

### HELP A CHILD YOU ALREADY KNOW

There are many children in the community who are in need of long-term foster care. Nonrelated extended family members — like coaches, teachers and family friends — make excellent caregivers because they can provide a safe place where children already feel comfortable. If you know a child who is in need of care, please consider becoming a foster parent and changing the life of a child today.



To find out more about becoming a foster or foster-to-adopt family, call 530-749-6762 for Yuba County or 530-822-7151 for Sutter County.

# Family Ties

ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER FAMILY SHOWS THAT LOVE BUILDS A FAMILY

by Sarah Cassanego

**D**iana Roberts of Yuba City has always had a full house. But each time she needed to, she's managed to find a little more room in the family for a child in need.

Roberts first became a foster mother in the 1980s, when she worked in group homes. At the end of the six-month residency limit, many of the children in her care had nowhere else to go.

"That kind of broke my heart, so I started taking the girls in," Roberts says. "There were times I had like four or five girls in my house."

Since she first became a foster parent, Roberts has cared for more than 60 foster children. She also raised three biological children of her own. Her family just kept growing, sometimes in unexpected ways.

When the county called one day in 2004 to ask if Roberts and her husband, Kevin, would take in four children for a two-week stay, they initially hesitated. With a newly empty nest, they had just purchased an RV and had plans to travel.

"They didn't have anybody. I always try to take the kids that don't have families. And so, that was it — we didn't get to travel," Roberts laughs. "Two weeks turned into 11 years. I'm still raising them now ... we adopted them and they're our children."

In 2012, the county called again with a tough case, a short-term placement for two homeless children.

"I decided to take them until they could find a place. And of course they never found a place. So, I kept them," Roberts says. "Those two kids now are the best kids."

Roberts and her husband understand that one important part of being a foster or adoptive parent is facilitating a healthy relationship with the child's biological parents, if at all possible.

"I think it's really important if you can keep those relationships in place," Roberts says. "It helps the kids not feel so abandoned and sometimes they get their questions answered."

Roberts' 9-year-old son wanted to stay in touch with his biological family after he was adopted. He maintains a relationship with his maternal grandmother and biological mother by talking to them on the phone and spending quality time together regularly.

"I think it's really important to his well-being," Roberts says. "He truly loves them and they love him, too. I wouldn't ever want to take that away from him."

**Our rewards are when we see them grow up and be productive in their lives. That's what makes us proud.**

DIANA ROBERTS, FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE MOTHER

Roberts and her husband have adopted seven children and have provided long-term care to two other children. Currently, the couple have four adopted children at home between the ages of 6 and 13.

"I would encourage people to adopt," Roberts says. "It can be challenging at times, but that is what brings you close and you just get through it. Our rewards are when we see them grow up and be productive in their lives. That's what makes us proud."



# How to Become a Foster Family

1

## ATTEND ORIENTATION AT THE COUNTY OFFICE

Orientations provide a basic overview of the foster care process. By attending, you'll have a chance to get your questions answered and will obtain an application packet.



2

## SUBMIT APPLICATION

Within six months of attending orientation, you must submit a completed application, including personal information, references and criminal record statements and disclosures. You will also be required to complete a criminal background check and a health screening report, as well as obtain CPR and first aid certification.



3

## ATTEND TRAINING

Learn all about the foster system, early childhood development and trauma-informed care during the training. Yuba and Sutter counties require 12 hours of training, which are offered in four different courses at Yuba College.



4

## HOME VISIT

A social worker will visit your home to get to know you and your interests, and help make sure that the home is a safe environment for children.



5

## PLACEMENT WITH A CHILD

You decide what type of placement your family is interested in receiving. There are two options:

### FOSTER PARENT:

Children who are in need of a more stable home while reunification is sought with the biological family often get placed in foster family homes. Foster parents provide the children with stability and support for a few weeks to 24 months, or sometimes longer depending on the circumstances.

### EMERGENCY CARE:

Emergency foster parents provide a temporary safe haven for children in need. The children typically stay for a few days to a few weeks, or sometimes longer if an adequate home isn't found.



## WHAT TO EXPECT AS A FOSTER PARENT

Q&A WITH SUTTER COUNTY SOCIAL WORKER SUPERVISOR JENNIFER RAMIREZ



Jennifer Ramirez is the social worker supervisor for Sutter County.  
PHOTO BY MARK ANTHONY CARTER

### Who are the children in need of foster homes?

They're children who are in need of a safe home away from their parents or caregiver if they're experiencing abuse or neglect. Children are not in foster care because of anything they have done.

### What qualities make a good foster parent?

We want people who are willing to open their hearts and homes to help children in need. They should also have a willingness to participate in that child's life, whether that means pursuing a family reunification plan or a long-term plan of adoption.

### Do you need special qualifications to become a foster parent?

There are no income requirements. You can have any marital status and do not have to own your own home. You do not have to have a certain level of education or be of any specific ethnic background. You do have to be able to provide a safe and nurturing home for a child or teen. You will have training and support to help you be successful.

### How long will a foster child remain in my home?

It depends on the circumstances. In some cases it's just a few days at a time. When a child is in foster care, our first goal is returning the child to the biological parent's home as soon as possible, as long as it is safe. In case reunification isn't possible, we begin looking for permanency for that child, whether through adoption or family guardianship. We often pursue these goals at the same time in the event that the parent does not successfully reunify.

### Why should people consider becoming a foster parent?

There are children out there who are in need of a safe place to live. It's very rewarding for families to provide a loving home for a child — it's something every child deserves. Community families have the opportunity to open their homes and hearts to children who desire a lifelong connection.





# SHARE YOUR HEART. OPEN YOUR HOME. BECOME A FOSTER PARENT.

There are 58,000 children in foster care in California. In Yuba and Sutter counties alone there are 328 children who are in out-of-home placements and are awaiting either reunification with their family members or adoption.

In order to thrive, children in foster care, like all children, need safe and healthy homes with caregivers who can nurture, protect and love them unconditionally. Local homes throughout both counties are needed to help children remain in familiar communities.

Being a great foster or adoptive parent doesn't mean that you're perfect. Many people are eligible to be foster or adoptive parents, regardless of their age, income, marital status or sexual orientation. You don't have to be wealthy, own your own home or be a stay-at-home parent.

These children are some of our community's most vulnerable members. As a community, let's surround them with the support they need to thrive. Can you provide a home for a foster child? Attend an orientation and get started today!

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT BECOMING  
A FOSTER OR ADOPTIVE PARENT  
AND TO LEARN ABOUT ORIENTATION, PLEASE CONTACT:



1

**Yuba County Health and  
Human Services Department –  
Children's Services Division**  
5730 Packard Ave., Suite 100  
Marysville, CA 95901  
530-749-6762  
[fosterparenting@co.yuba.ca.us](mailto:fosterparenting@co.yuba.ca.us)



2

**Sutter County Human  
Services Department –  
Welfare & Social Services Division**  
1965 Live Oak Blvd., Suite C  
Yuba City, CA 95991  
530-822-7151  
[fosterhomes@co.sutter.ca.us](mailto:fosterhomes@co.sutter.ca.us)

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR FOSTER PARENTS:

**Yuba-Sutter Foster-Adoptive  
Parent Association**  
2785 Plutte Road  
Marysville, CA 95901  
530-743-8437

