

'I Won't Give Up On You'



Learn how
resource parents
are making a
difference in the
lives of kids in
foster care who
have faced the
greatest odds

More Families Needed for Sacramento's Kids in Foster Care

Children who have faced abuse and neglect find homes

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

In 2015, California passed legislation to decrease the amount of children in group homes and place them in families instead.

Research has shown that children in foster care fare better living with families, says Diane Partida, a resource family recruiter for foster care and adoption at Uplift Family Services in Sacramento.

"There are always more children than families," she says. "We get referrals daily to place children in resource family homes, but we never have enough families. That's the case with all agencies across the board."

Many children in the foster care system are "high-needs" youth because of past physical, sexual or emotional abuse or trauma. Others are medically fragile or have a mental health diagnosis, she says.

"The biggest challenge we have is not having enough families willing to work with teenagers. We tend to get families that want younger children and babies," says Partida.

Consequently, there is an increased need for available resource families for these youth, who need love and support just as much as younger children.

"There are always more children than families."

Diane Partida
Recruiter, Uplift Family Services

Uplift Family Services caters to the needs of these children and their families in the Sacramento area and surrounding counties. Its social workers conduct home and school visits, and its other agency programs provide wraparound services and behavioral interventions for youngsters and teens who have been traumatized.

"We make referrals to bring on mental health services and in-home support services as needed," says social worker Francisco Meza, a 16-year veteran with Uplift Family Services. "If a child is exhibiting behaviors in the home, we may suggest a family specialist to work one-on-one in the home, community or school setting. We provide the help where it's most needed."

Meza says, however, that people should never assume that a child is in foster care because the child has done something wrong.

"No matter what has happened and reasons they were removed from their biological home, most children wish to be reunited with their family," Meza says.



Staff at Uplift Family Services make it their job to find successful placements for high-needs foster youth.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

UPLIFT FAMILY SERVICES: OVER A CENTURY OF HELPING YOUTH

With a history dating back to 1867, Uplift Family Services stands out with a range of services to help ease the journey of foster care and adoption:



Intensive therapeutic services:

Uplift Family Services is one of the few foster care agencies in the area to offer these services to struggling children and teens.



24/7 family support:

Uplift's social workers and family specialists are there to help whenever it's needed with a 24/7 helpline and weekly in-home visits.



Adoption licensing:

Beyond being a foster care agency, Uplift Family Services has a licensed adoption program, which gives it the qualifications and expertise to help families complete the adoption process.

Loving Them — No Matter What

Single mom Vicki has helped dozens of children in foster care when they needed it most

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

Vicki Hartman knew she wanted to be a resource parent to children in need. “I always wanted to adopt,” says the Citrus Heights resident who has two biological children and one stepson. “That was the goal. There are a lot of kids out there.”

She didn’t let anything keep her from reaching that goal, not even becoming a single parent.

Hartman has hosted dozens of foster children and teens. She has also taken in dozens more for weekends and short stints whenever a youngster needs emergency housing.

Her first foster child, a 6-year-old boy, came along in 2004.

“He didn’t eat green beans,” laughs Hartman.

As a novice resource parent, Hartman says she welcomed the guidance and support that her Uplift Family Services social workers provided.

“They were very helpful in explaining some of the behaviors,” says Hartman. “He was an only child, so having to share stuff was very hard for him.”

Later on, Hartman reached out to social workers while caring for 2-year-old twin girls and a third girl who was also 2 years old.

“The one little girl was very aggressive,” says Hartman. “She used to [slam] into the twins and they would go flying two or three feet. She also used to pull their hair, but Uplift hooked me up with good counseling.”

The girl underwent therapy, and Hartman says she herself learned several coping strategies that she used to help calm the child.

“Within three months, she stopped pulling hair and [slamming] into people,” says Hartman. “She even began to cry, which was good because she used to not cry. She just raged.”

Today, Hartman’s first foster child, the boy who wouldn’t eat green beans, is 20 years old and attending medical school. Although he returned to his mother nine months after Hartman took him in, she says he still texts her just to see how she is doing.

Hartman also adopted the twin girls, who are now 10 years old. She says she has even developed a friendship with their birth mother and grandmother, whom they often visit.

She says being a resource parent has taught her how to love unconditionally. “I love who I’ve become because I’ve been able to be in their lives,” she says. “It has also given me an appreciation of their resiliency.”

“I love who
I’ve become
because I’ve been
able to be in their
lives.”

Vicki Hartman
Resource parent



Vicki Hartman adopted her twin daughters, Lily and Amy, after taking them in as foster youth. Hartman has befriended the girls’ birth mother and grandmother, whom they often visit.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

CHILDREN WHO NEED YOUR HELP

For children from abusive or neglectful homes, foster care may be the only option to ensure their safety.

But **older children and teens** often have a tougher time getting a foster care placement because some resource parents prefer babies and younger children, says Uplift Family Services foster care and adoption recruiter Diane Partida.

Other hard-to-place children are those with **“high needs”** who may require additional social services, she says. These children can include the medically fragile and children who are oppositional defiant, have developmental delays and sexualized behaviors.

“Other kids have had drug exposure,” she says. “Some have witnessed horrific events.”

As a result, some youngsters and teens act out with challenging behaviors.

To help, Uplift Family Services offers programs with intensive outpatient and family therapeutic services to give parents the tools and resources necessary to help children recover and thrive.

Children who are the hardest to find placements for include:

- older children and teens
- siblings
- pregnant and parenting teens
- LGBTQ youth

Giving Back

As a resource father, Charles helps youth in foster care find their footing en route to adulthood

BY ANNE STOKES



Charles Kidd, a longtime resource parent with Uplift Family Services, says he feels blessed to be a positive male role model to the many teens he's cared for.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Charles Kidd was 15 when his mother passed away. He went to live with his grandmother, who raised 10 children, including his brother, both sisters and two cousins.

"We didn't have a lot, but what we had, money could never buy," he says. "There was so much love around that place that we survived."

For nearly three decades, he has been sharing that love with the many young adults he's taken into his home. Even pushing 60 years old, he still continues to take in high-needs foster youth. He admits it's hard work, but it's work he feels called to do.

"Helping a child grow up to be successful, or helping a child grow up and achieve some of the things he or she wants to achieve, it's a blessing to me," he says.

It all started in 1989, when Kidd was coaching basketball at Sacramento High School and one of his players reached out for help. Since then, he has kept his home open for more youth to build foundations for their future.

"They're not foster kids to me. They're kids that I've brought into my home, that develop into my family," Kidd says.

Kidd focuses mainly on older youth, which are typically the hardest youth to find homes for. He enjoys

working with this age group and teaching them life skills like laundry, cooking and money management. He says that children in foster care — just like anyone else — are looking for one thing: to know they're loved.

"Kids are human ... If you go to four or five houses in a year, how are you going to act?" he says. "When you bring that kid into your house and you say, 'I'm going to do whatever I can do to make it work for that child,' at some point, that child is going to do whatever he or she can to make it work for you."

Kidd says that he has been "blessed" to have Uplift Family Services as a source of support. He's benefited from convenient and ongoing resource parent education and has found staff very responsive to him and his children's needs. One of the tiers of support Uplift provides is ensuring his home is a right fit for any youth placed with him. Kidd has a busy schedule — he owns a gym and works for the city — so he likes to work with kids who are a little more independent.

"If for any reason you have love in your heart, patience in your mind, if you have the will to give back, then you want to be a [resource] parent," he says.

"Helping a child grow up to be successful ... it's a blessing to me."

Charles Kidd
Resource parent

HELPING KIDS THRIVE

In order to meet the varied needs of youth, Uplift Family Services offers comprehensive and team-based mental health services and support, including:

Flexible integrated treatment

- Clinicians create a plan to meet the youth's cognitive, emotional and behavioral health needs.

Therapeutic behavioral services

- Short-term, intensive services work on targeted behaviors by utilizing coping skills and alternate strategies.
- Support available at home or school.
- Efforts are a collaboration between youth, families and clinical behavioral analysts and specialists.

Outpatient mental health services

- Helps children and adolescents recover from trauma and maintain a healthy function within the family and community.
- Includes clinic- and community-based services including individual, family and group therapy.

Psychiatric services

- A "whole-person" treatment approach includes individualized assessments and participation of youth and families.
- Treatments for serious emotional disorders can include medications, if necessary.

For more information on any specific service or program, visit upliftfs.org/our-services.



Family Specialist Sydney Nickolas does whatever it takes to support resource families and foster kids, whether it's transportation, teaching coping skills or just being there to acknowledge their hard work.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Supporting the Heroes

Q&A with Family Specialist Sydney Nickolas

BY ANNE STOKES

"I think that it's really important that we're a team."

Sydney Nickolas
Family specialist, Uplift
Family Services

Sydney Nickolas has always loved working with children. Before becoming a family specialist with Uplift Family Services, she was a teacher, worked with Big Brothers Big Sisters and volunteered with her church's children's ministry. Now with Uplift Family Services, she's able to help those children who need her help the most through one-on-one support, weekly home visits, school support and giving youth tools such as self-regulation, coping and life skills. "It was ideal for me to switch, not lanes, but gears as far as how I serve children," she says.

How would you describe your job as a family specialist?

I would say I'm the right hand to the social worker. They do the overall case management part, and I do behavior intervention.

What are some of the more common issues that resource parents and youth face?

Sometimes they can miss each other as far as expectations, like "I expect this kid to follow this set of rules or this system," but it's never been required of them. So I remind [parents] to keep it practical.

How do you support resource parents to make placements more successful?

Foster families, I believe they're heroes. Sometimes they say, "I just need someone to *listen* and *hear* me and *understand* the weight of what I'm going through." Acknowledgments are huge for them [and I] remind them that they're doing a service for these kids. I think that it's really important that we're a team. We're like a family because we're all in communication with each other so that we can provide the best service for our kids.

What are some cases where your kids have had really good outcomes?

[Many come to mind. One in particular is a 9-year-old] kiddo was just not able to really find comfort in the foster family she was with. There were a lot of tantrums, a lot of frustration, aggression, and I want to say it was because she didn't really know what to call what she was feeling. It's been about a year since I stared working with her and now she's thriving. She can say, 'I'm upset,' where last year it was more like, 'I don't know what I need, but I'd rather break something.' Now she has words to express herself.

IT TAKES A TEAM

With Uplift Family Services, resource parents are never alone in their foster care journey. A community of social workers, family specialists and other staff offer the following guidance and support:

Resource parent training and education

Families receive extensive preparation to meet youths' needs with pre-placement training and ongoing education to increase parenting skills.

Weekly support visits

Social workers and family specialists make weekly in-home visits to help families and foster youth meet their goals, work through any issues and remind parents they're doing a good job.

Wraparound services

Foster care staff, educators, parents, mental health professionals and community members work together to help youth with their complex behavioral, educational and social needs.

Opening Her Heart

How one family's love
changed former foster youth
Steffanie forever

BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

By age 18, Steffanie Kramer (now 25) had been in multiple foster homes and stopped expecting adults to care about her. Then, when she was placed in the home of Bob and Ellen Kramer, her heart softened and she accepted their love.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Steffanie Kramer says she still remembers the day when CPS arrived to take her and her siblings to live with resource parents. At the time, her mother struggled with addiction and could no longer care for them.

Kramer was only 9 years old when she and her older brother moved in with a resource parent. Meanwhile, her three younger siblings, ages 3, 2 and 9 months, went to live with other resource families.

While in foster care, Kramer moved to several other foster homes. Over time, she stopped expecting adults to care about her.

But when Kramer turned 18, a new social worker placed her in the home of Bob and Ellen Kramer.

The Kramers welcomed her and were kind, she says, but for several weeks she remained aloof. She usually headed straight to her room after school instead of interacting with the couple and their children.

But, in response, the couple insisted that she join them during “family time.” They also reassured her that she could talk to them about what made her angry rather than isolating herself.

“Their parenting style was communicate, communicate, communicate all the time,” she says. “I hated it, but I needed it, and they included me in everything they did.”

They took her with them to church, to the grocery store, and on family outings and vacations.

“When we went to church, they always introduced me as their daughter and not their foster daughter or foster kid: [They never] ignored me or acted like I didn’t exist,” Kramer says. “They were like, ‘This is our daughter.’ That was huge for me.”

Over time, she says the Kramers’ love for her softened her heart. She now lives out her own Christian faith.

After she enrolled at California State University, Sacramento, she asked them if she could live with them while finishing her final year in school. Braced for rejection, she says that instead, the couple asked if they could adopt her and give her their last name.

“I cried,” she says.

After getting her biological mother’s blessing, she agreed and the Kramers adopted her at age 22.

Kramer graduated from California State University, Sacramento, in 2016 with a degree in social work. Today, the 25-year-old is a Family Support Advocate at a counseling center.

“I can use my personal experience to motivate the youth to just keep going,” she says. And she knows from her own experience how a compassionate resource parent can set a child on the road to healing.

“It changed the trajectory of my life,” she says.

**“It
changed the
trajectory of my
life.”**

Steffanie Kramer
Formerly in foster care

STABLE HOMES, BETTER OUTCOMES

The 2018 California Children's Report Card finds that nearly 28 percent of children who are in the foster care system for 12 months or longer experience three or more placement moves. Moving from foster home to foster home, however, can have a devastating impact on a child's well-being and their future success in life.

According to research, multiple foster care placements can:

- Hinder a child's brain development
- Harm their mental health
- Impede their ability to form healthy relationships

Successful home placements result in better outcomes for foster children, including:

- Fewer behavioral and mental health problems
- Less stress and anxiety
- Fewer school transfers
- Increased academic achievement

Steps to Becoming a Resource Parent

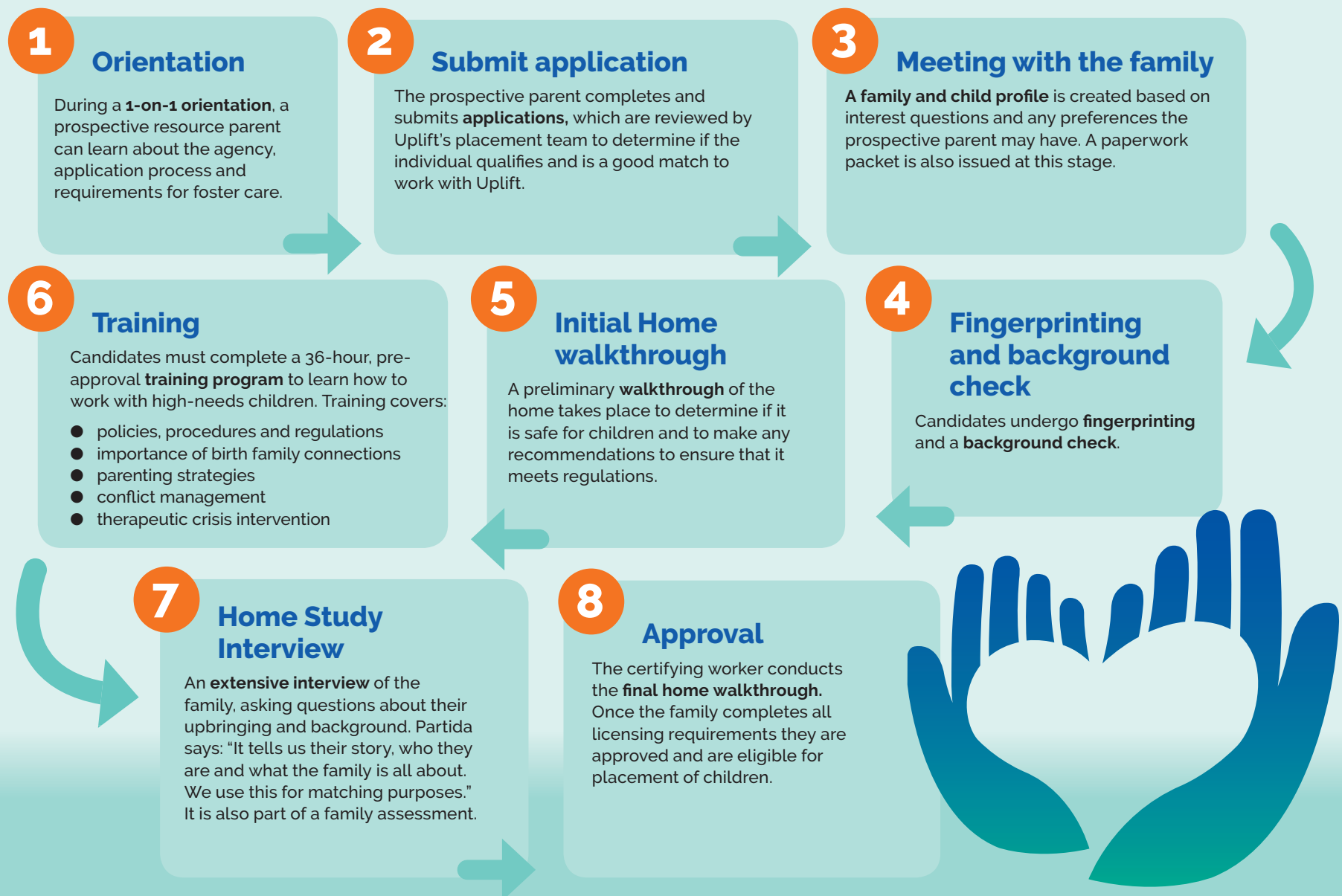
BY GAIL ALLYN SHORT

When it comes to becoming a resource parent for foster children, you have to meet the basic requirements, says Diane Partida, a resource family recruiter for Uplift Family Services.

"Being a resource parent takes someone with a high degree of responsibility, commitment [and a lot of patience]," says Partida. "Someone who can provide consistency, structure and treat the child as they would their own."

To be a resource parent you must:

- Have a home or apartment (with enough living space for a child)
- Be at least 21 years old
- Pass a background check
- Complete 36 hours of training
- Be financially stable
- Have a valid driver's license
- Vehicle with registration and insurance
- Pass a physical examination
- Complete a home evaluation and walkthrough
- Take a first aid and CPR course
- Home study interviews



Could You Foster a Child?



To be a resource parent, you can have any marital status, any gender or sexual orientation. You can be retired or working. You can own your own home or you can be a renter. What is important is that you have a desire and determination to provide a loving, nurturing and stable home life for a child.

There are many children with unique needs who need your help. Uplift Family Services will be there to help you with your commitment with a comprehensive range of services for foster children and resource parents, including: therapeutic behavioral services, outpatient mental health services, crisis care, weekly home visits, developmental disabilities services and more.

Contact Uplift Family Services today to see about becoming a resource parent and making a difference in a child's life!

SCHEDULE A 1-ON-1 ORIENTATION SESSION

Contact Diane Partida to set up a private orientation session to have all of your questions answered:
916-779-2431, dpartida@upliftfs.org.



Uplift Family Services

www.upliftfs.org

**9343 Tech Center Drive #200
Sacramento, CA 95826**