



Homes With Heart initiative

by Karen Helen Szatkowski

The overwhelming need for foster homes in Ventura County is an everyday concern for those that work with the children that lack temporary or permanent safe homes through no fault of their own.

Foster VC Kids is a program of The County of Ventura Human Services Agency, Children and Family Services (CFS). Foster VC Kids is the foster parent and kinship caregiver information, resource and support arm of the county, working with community partners to ensure that our fostering and kinship families have the support they need to offer quality care. The Foster VC Kids

"Homes with Heart" campaign/initiative seeks to recruit more committed Ventura County families to support and nurture the children, youth and teens who are anxious to be a part of a safe and supportive home.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the agency is the perception in the community that qualifying as a foster parent and providing a caring home is difficult and expensive--therefore, the "initiative". The requirements to step up are met by many of us; over 18 years of age; single working or couple working; background of responsibility; planning and providing for the child's care; financially stable; able to provide the space for each child to call her own (sharing rooms of same gender is fine.) Additionally, Foster VC Kids seeks families who are unconditionally committed to the child in their care and who support

<http://www.venturabreeze.com/6.10.15.pdf> (pg 18)

the child as social workers work with families towards reunification.

At this time approximately 1,000 children are in the foster care system. Reunification to their biological family is always the number one goal when it is in the child's best interest and safety, therefore many children will be in foster care for short periods, and reunify with families within their first 12 months. For some children, this process may take longer or reunification may not be possible. Whatever the circumstance, long term permanency for every child is our goal.

Without enough foster families in Ventura County, 60 percent of siblings are separated from one another and children are removed from their schools and support networks, which add heart-break and trauma for growing children. Foster VC Kids wants to let it be known that it provides a significant amount of help to the foster families they recruit. Most people are aware of the monthly cash stipend but the services to support the families are more numerous than that and very helpful. The list includes but is not limited to:

- *A mentor through the first two years as a fostering parent(s).

- *Twelve hours of free respite care per month.

- *Ongoing education and networking opportunities.

- *Additional funds to support a child's educational, enrichment and medical needs.

- *Participation in family and team decision making meetings to address needs.

There is an informational meeting on June 30th at the Human Services Agency on 855 Partridge Drive, 6-8 P.M. If you can't make that meeting you can find out more information by calling 654-3220, the web site at fostervckids.org or liking their Facebook at facebook.com/fostervc.

An amazing array of dedicated people provide the inspiration and perspiration in the pursuit of loving family care for these Ventura County children. It is serious labor and it should be applauded. We expect soon to present a second in the series highlighting some of the equally amazing foster parents that have Stepped Up.