

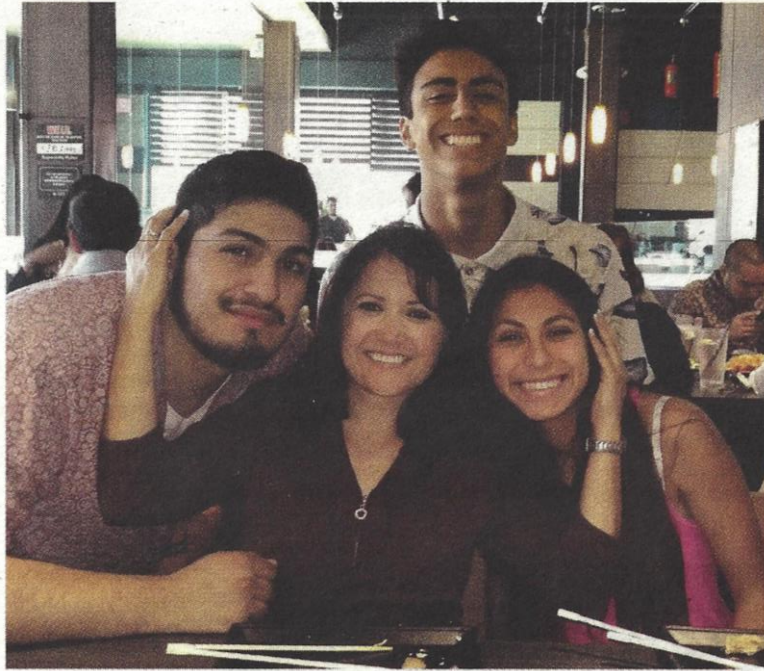


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# SUMMER MOVIE PREVIEW





Chris Torres, Fernando Torres Jr. and Nyssa Torres celebrate Mother's Day with their adoptive mom, Natalie Torres.

# Filling a void

Former Oxnard officer opens home to orphaned youth

by **Chris O'Neal**  
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**N**atalie Cardenas Torres dedicated her life to service, achieving a lifelong dream of becoming a police officer in 2002 after spending 13 years as an educator. After five years with the Oxnard Police Department as a patrol officer, however, life took an unexpected turn.

Torres suffered a minor spinal injury and was forced to medically retire, though she would have preferred to continue on, she says. It was then that Torres began helping the community in another way — by fostering Ventura County youth through Foster VC Kids, a division of Ventura County Children and Family Services, which she had previously done for near to a decade prior to becoming an officer. She will be part of a panel on the state of foster care in Ventura County on Saturday, May 21.

Twenty years after adopting and raising two sons and a daughter, Torres and her husband are now reopening their home to fostering after being encouraged to do so by their youngest son.

"Once you're an officer and you leave that profession, for me, personally, you have this void. I thought I was going to help the community; I'm a bilingual Hispanic female. I thought I was going to do really good in Oxnard," said Torres. Her youngest adopted son, who she says noticed her penchant for giving guidance to kids, suggested a way for her to perhaps fill the void. "My son said to me, 'Mom, you helped us. We should help

other children too.'"

Since 2014, Torres and her husband have fostered over 14 Ventura County infants and teens, all of whom reunited with their biological families after leaving the Torres home, but their relationship doesn't end there.

Torres' family fostered a two-month-old baby whose young mother couldn't care for him after birth. Over a two-year period, Torres and the biological mother became friends, developing a mother-daughter friendship, visiting with the family regularly.

"When you become a foster parent, you're afraid of hurting the parents; you don't want them to think that these people are wanting to take these kids away," said Torres, adding that eventually the mother realized that she was there to help, and even after returning the child to his mother, Torres was invited to the boy's birthday party.

Torres says that she hopes attendees at this Saturday's event will leave with a different perspective on what it means to have to give a child into foster care.

"No matter where we come from, we're all human and everybody makes mistakes; nobody is perfect," said Torres. "If a foster parent can come in that way, thinking, 'I have a pretty good life and I can help somebody else,' even if it's just a little bit, th

The Ventura County Foster Parent Informational Meeting, hosted by Ventura County Children and Family Services' Foster VC Kids, will take place on Saturday, May 21, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at the All Saints Episcopal Church, 144 S. C St. in Oxnard. For more information, visit [www.fostervckids.org](http://www.fostervckids.org). ♦