

REAL HOPE | Transitional housing provides a bridge to stabilizing youth in the county

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Kathleen Mosqueda, client at Hopegivers, and Tiffany Windsor, Kathleen's main advisor and the Hopegivers program ambassador.

"I first went into foster care when I was 10 years old," said Kathleen Mosqueda, 24, of Oxnard, adding that she and her siblings were placed by a case worker with her grandmother. As Mosqueda transitioned out of foster care in mid-2016, she found out about the Hopegivers transitional housing program in east Ventura County through Rosalinda P. Vint of Newbury Park-based Women of Substance and Men of Honor. And there she found stability.



Tony Hershman and Tiffany Windsor of Hopegivers.

“Through my work placement [through Hopegivers], I have learned how to accept corrective criticism and explore new possibilities,” Mosqueda said, noting that she was able to find full time work at Raidex Pest and Termite through the Hope2Work program. She said that for foster children in a similar position, “Anything is possible if they step out of their comfort zone and take a chance when programs like this are offered.”

Hopegivers International Inc. in Ventura County came to be two years ago, when Tony Hershman and his wife were considering adopting children. They went to an informational fair sponsored by Foster VC Kids, a Ventura County program operated by its Children and Family Services (CFS) department.

“We felt that (adoption) wasn’t for us,” because of age, said Hershman, 57, a Thousand Oaks real estate investor, “but I felt that if you’re not going to adopt kids, you’ve still got to do something.”

Although California legislators had passed a bill 10 years earlier providing funding for transitional housing for former foster youth, Hershman noted that there still wasn’t a program that helped them get the skills they needed to be functional adults.

That prompted Hershman to take another approach to helping foster youth, who have a high rate of unemployment and homelessness after turning 18. Less than half of foster youth even

graduate from high school, according to the children’s advocacy group Alliance for Children’s Rights.



Rosalinda P. Vint of Newbury Park-based Women of Substance and Men of Honor

“Seventy percent of these youth, when they age out, end up in prison or homeless,” said Hershman. “I just felt we had to get involved and see how we can fix it.”

Using his business contacts, Hershman launched a local operation of Hopegivers International Inc., a collaborative effort of business and social services aiming to put a dent in the number of former foster youth who end up in dire straits for lack of parents or other support.

Recognizing their need for secure housing, Hershman contacted Strategic Acquisitions Inc., a single-family residence management company that agreed to lend the program two condominiums in Westlake Village for five years. James Storehouse, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, outfitted the apartments with household materials.

Clients are given not only housing but jobs through the program, working at internships arranged with local businesses for nine months to a year. The local Hopegivers’ affiliate businesses and nonprofits jointly fund the program.

“My initial thought was to put one kid in each apartment, bring them on to staff and give them job training,” paying \$13 per hour and charging \$750 a month rent, explained Hershman, “and that at the end of the internship, gift that all back to them.

“Our goal was that they’d leave with money and experience,” as well as skills like grocery shopping and driving, said Hershman.

Students are put in key positions in companies, getting training on office computers in Microsoft Word and Excel, said Hershman.

The program started about a year ago with three clients before its official launch in December. One client fell out after a month but two others have successfully completed it.

Mosqueda recently began searching for an apartment after deciding on her own to free up the condominium for someone else, “which is a healthy thing,” noted Hershman.

Because each client has a different background and needs, counselors work with them on a case-by-case basis.

“We find that they’re a little overwhelmed,” said Hershman. “It’s hard to put yourself in that situation when you may never have eaten at a dining room table.”

Because they have been moved around a lot from place to place, “I think their major difficulty is self-confidence,” said Rosalinda Vint of Women of Substance and Men of Honor.

“We meet with them weekly for two hours,” Vint said, “and work on leadership skills, trust, how to properly interview and communicate in workplaces.”

Clients are also required to spend some time doing community service.

“It helps them to focus on what they don’t have and what they have,” said Vint, “and to be grateful for it.”

For more information on Hopegivers and the local affiliates, go to <http://jamesstorehouse.org>, <https://www.wosmoh.org/> (Women of Substance and Men of Honor) and <http://fostervckids.org>.

<https://www.vcreporter.com/2017/07/12/real-hope-transitional-housing-provides-a-bridge-to-stabilizing-youth-in-the-county/>