



# THE LINK

SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY / SPRING 2019 / VOL 11 ISSUE 2

National

**Foster Care**  
Awareness Month

May 2019





# PARTY OF 9

By Roylyn Burton, Community Program Specialist  
Resource Family Recruitment & Training

**BEN AND RYLEE APPLEBEE** witnessed many children living on the streets during their travels to Africa and South America. Moved by the children's needs, they thought about international adoption. "In the end, we realized that a child that needed a home was a child that needed a home – regardless of locale," said Rylee. In 2014, the couple received their foster care license through the County of Orange Social Services Agency (SSA) and are now the proud parents of seven – three adopted and four biological children.

Ben and Rylee's desire to pursue adoption was born out of a pure yearning to help. They decided to partner with SSA once they learned about a friend's positive experience with the Agency. The minimal costs that may be associated with adopting through the County also helped solidify their decision. Because of their willingness to care for any child – no matter their ethnicity, gender, age, or level of need – they were

contacted about a newborn that needed an emergency placement.

Jodi Luther, the placing social worker at the time, did not have many details about the case and there were a lot of unknowns. There were also potential relatives that needed to be assessed. Knowing all of this and despite the risks, without hesitation, Ben and Rylee agreed to care for the baby. Accepting the placement meant immediate action was needed. They wrangled their three biological children and headed off to pick-up their future daughter, Selah.

Ben, Rylee and their children arrived at the respite home prepared to take action. They spoke with the respite parents to get as much information about the baby as possible. With Ben carrying one of his biological children on his back in a carrier and holding their new foster baby in his arms, Rylee signed the placement paperwork with Jodi. When it was Ben's turn to



sign, they switched children like a carefully choreographed dance all the while being mindful of their other two biological children. “They were so attentive to their children and at the same time they were very engaged with the respite family,” Jodi recalls. “They were so calm the whole time and made a hectic situation a very positive one. Ben and Rylee have a selfless approach to foster care and adoption.” In 2016, Selah’s adoption was finalized. A few years later, Selah’s little sister, Weslee, would join the family.

In 2017, Crusade was welcomed into the Applebee Family. Erin Hartigan, Ben and Rylee’s Resource Family Approval Application and Assessment social worker at the time, noticed how easy-going, flexible, compassionate and positive both appeared. Erin expressed deep gratitude over Ben and Rylee’s responsiveness to the agency’s placement needs. In addition to flexibility, the couple’s profound concern for the children impressed Erin greatly. That concern led to another addition to the Applebee Family. Weslee was placed in January 2018 and the next month, Ben and Rylee welcomed their fourth biological child.

In December 2018, Ben and Rylee received one of the best Christmas presents ever – the adoption finalizations for both Crusade and Weslee. “This was truly an exceptional day in court,” Ben recalled. The lawyers, social workers and judge hosted the family in one room to finalize both adoptions. During an emotional speech from Ben, he paused to acknowledge the courtroom staff, social workers and lawyers for doing their part to help ensure vulnerable children have a chance at a bright future. Ben wanted staff to understand he and Rylee recognize their work in child welfare is sometimes incredibly grueling and gut-wrenching.

Rylee describes their adoption journey as a transcendental one. “It is an incredible experience to potentially affect the future course of a person’s life – it will fill your heart with every emotion.” Like many adoptive parents, Ben and Rylee didn’t travel this adoption road alone. They surrounded themselves with people who have been touched by adoption and fostering as well as others new to these experiences. Ben and Rylee created a network of encouragement and love. “Having kids is a truly fulfilling and awe-inspiring experience. However, anyone thinking about fostering must check their expectations by evaluating their motives and get



counsel from other wise people they trust to reflect back their reasons for doing this,” Rylee said.

A big part of Ben and Rylee’s journey centers on maintaining relationships with the biological parents whenever possible. Ben and Rylee continue to nurture a relationship with Crusade’s birth parents. A very significant connection with the birth parents developed during scheduled monthly visits. “They often express gratitude to us for taking in their baby,” Rylee said. Ben and Rylee consider these moments appropriate times to share with their adopted children the efforts made to maintain relationships with their biological parents. Ben and Rylee also strive to be a positive influence in the birth parents’ lives. In speaking about Ben and Rylee, Erin emphasized, “They don’t resist anything. They are not afraid of working with the birth family because they know those connections are so important to the children.”

One of the greatest gifts a child in care can receive is maintaining connections with his or her birth family. For one little guy, Crusade, he not only got to celebrate his second birthday with his birth parents, he also celebrated with his new family – and what a family it is.

# Equipping Caregivers to Raise the Next Generation



By Roylyn Burton, Community Program Specialist  
Resource Family Recruitment & Training

**PARENTING** is one of the most challenging and complex jobs you'll face in your lifetime – and also the most rewarding. Some days are harder than others, that's for sure. Just when you think you have it all together – you don't. That's okay. The good news is there's no such thing as a perfect parent or caregiver. The best news is you can develop the skills needed to raise the next generation of healthy, mature and productive adults.

Although children do not come with a parenting manual, Saddleback College's Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) Program offers tools to help you grow. FKCE provides free educational and support opportunities in an effort to equip you as you help meet the emotional, behavioral, educational and developmental needs of children in your care. This also provides an opportunity to meet other adults experiencing similar challenges. Over 50 classes are offered in both English and Spanish, taught by skilled and experienced trainers, on topics such as child development, discipline, how to understand and access resources, navigating social media, teenage sexuality, anger management, caregiver self-care and Trust-Based Relational Intervention.

"I hear caregivers say how much they needed the information and how helpful it was to talk to other caregivers dealing with the same issues," said Martine

Wehr, FKCE director. Open and honest sharing and connecting with others traveling the same journey are just a few of the many benefits you will experience at a FKCE class.

With the generous support of community partners and faith-based organizations, classes are hosted at various locations throughout the county, at different times during the week and on Saturdays. Check out the class catalogue and you will find there are classes to fit most schedules. Some host sites even offer free child care and meals for all who attend. "Caregivers are welcome to take classes at any site at the time that best suits their schedules," Martine emphasized. "I want to make it easy for caregivers to attend a training and we are removing the barriers for them to get there." In addition, Martine welcomes feedback and encourages caregivers to contact her with topic ideas for future classes in an effort to meet educational needs.

Classes are open to anyone in the community and all caregivers are encouraged to attend. For a full list of classes, dates, times, and locations, explore the current class catalogue at [https://www.saddleback.edu/uploads/hs/fkce\\_2019-jan-june\\_web.pdf](https://www.saddleback.edu/uploads/hs/fkce_2019-jan-june_web.pdf). For more information, contact Martine Wehr at (949) 582-4217 or visit <https://www.saddleback.edu/hs/fkce>.





## Martine Wehr: A Voice for Education and Parenting the Next Generation

**MARTINE WEHR** knows quality parenting may be the best intervention for children. Her niece was a dependent of the juvenile court and Martine took an active role in advocating for her many needs. This experience continues to inspire and inform Martine’s passion to educate and support caregivers.

For many years, Martine was an elementary school teacher and a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). While attending law school, Martine externed in the juvenile court system and worked with at-risk youth. In her work, Martine noticed many youth did not receive early interventions or support. These experiences are the foundation of Martine’s commitment to deliver quality, relevant training opportunities to all caregivers as the director for Saddleback College’s Foster and Kinship Care Education Program.

“When we support caregivers from a heartfelt place, they are going to become stronger, more encouraged and feel like what they are doing is so very valuable,” Martine said. Parents and caregivers have a special place in her heart because she knows the issues they deal with day by day, hour by hour. “It’s not easy being a parent and I’m so very moved by the work caregivers do,” she declared, “I take my hat off to people –parents and caregivers – who are willing to step in and be the hero [the parent] the child needs.”



The Foster Care Auxiliary of Orange County (FCAOC) offers products and services and hosts events for resource families. Currently, FCAOC offers the following from their resource and distribution center:

- Lending Library
- Baby Gear Lending program
- Computers for students
- Fun family events
- Educational scholarships
- Birthday Corner program
- Luggage program
- Academic mentor tutoring for qualified youth
- Monthly distribution days of new items
- Free tickets to plays, sporting events, ballets, concerts, comedy clubs, etc.
- Thrift store with deeply discounted donations
- A network of resource families for assistance and support

For more information, call (714) 778-3383, e-mail [FosterCareAux@yahoo.com](mailto:FosterCareAux@yahoo.com) or visit [www.FosterCareAux.com](http://www.FosterCareAux.com).

Connect with Us



Resource Family Liaison  
(714) 704-8255

[ResourceFamilySupport@ssa.ocgov.com](mailto:ResourceFamilySupport@ssa.ocgov.com)

Do you have questions or concerns about services or resources? Let us help. Call (714) 704-8255 or send an e-mail to [ResourceFamilySupport@ssa.ocgov.com](mailto:ResourceFamilySupport@ssa.ocgov.com).

*Dear Caregiver,  
From all of us social workers – newbies  
to veterans – thank you for your lessons  
in goodwill, compassion and teamwork.*

Dear Caregiver,

In time, experience would diminish my doubt and uncertainty, but my future self couldn't comfort me in that moment on your doorstep or during my reluctant confession to you: I was a brand new social worker on my first home visit.

Unfazed, you patiently equipped me with knowledge and understanding. I marveled at your delicate confidence in tending to the tiny preemie. Your living room was my classroom; school bell replaced by intermittent beeps from the infant's apnea monitor.

Nearly 20 years and hundreds of cases later, I remember you with vividness and gratitude. Your kind mentoring sculpted my appreciation for a caregiver's indispensable and lasting impact on a child, a family and in my case, a social worker. Whatever I may have learned across two decades, I know it cannot replace the insight and expertise of a devoted caregiver.

Club Mom & Dad Presents  
**Caregiver Appreciation Night**  
Friday, May 31, 2019  
6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.  
Children & Family Services  
744 N. Eckhoff St.  
Orange 92868

Enjoy an evening of bingo, prizes and dinner. Be sure to visit with community partners as they share about the many available resources. Complete and submit the resource fair questionnaire to receive one hour of training credit. This fun night out is for all resource parents.

Registration is limited. Register with RFA Training at (888) 871-5437 or [RFATraining@ssa.ocgov.com](mailto:RFATraining@ssa.ocgov.com) by May 27th. Adults only please, no one under 18 will be admitted.



## SPOTLIGHT ON **Support Services**



### **In-Home Coaching Services**

This program provides in-home parenting coaching for all caregivers of children who are at risk or have a history of abuse or neglect, including domestic abuse. Coaching topics may include:

- Positive child behavior
- Stages of development
- Parenting styles
- Difference between discipline and punishment
- Age-appropriate expectations and discipline
- Difference between rewards and bribes
- Creating a reward system
- Housekeeping
- Parental self-control
- Budgeting
- Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Education about child abuse or neglect
- Domestic abuse

Other services may include:

- Connecting families to community resources
- Provide transportation and accompany the family to initial medical appointments
- Attend visits in order to provide hands-on coaching to parents
- Guidance on the use of public transportation

All qualifying families residing in Orange County are eligible. Out-of-county referrals will be processed on an individual basis. For more information, contact Lenka Vecerova at (714) 704-8087.



### **Bridge Program**

The Bridge Program aims to increase the number of children successfully placed in family care settings by increasing access to child care. The program provides funding support to resource parents working full-time to cover the cost of daycare for up to six months. In partnership with Children's Home Society, a child care navigator will be assigned to assist caregivers with locating long-term child care and processing voucher payments. Eligible caregivers include Orange County resource parents, caregivers who have a child, newborn to age 12, placed with them in an emergency, licensed foster family parents, parents under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, and non-minor dependents. For more information, contact Karen Pinkerton at (714) 704-6145.



### **Academic Tutoring**

Academic tutoring services are available for children in care and non-minor dependents (NMDs) in grades kindergarten through 12 who reside in Orange County or the following neighboring counties: Los Angeles, San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino.

Tutoring services are provided for a minimum of two hours per week, twice a month, for a period of three to five months for each child/NMD.

Tutoring may take place in a location recommended by the child's/NMD's assigned social worker which may include the child's/NMD's home, school or local library. For more information, contact Karen Pinkerton at (714) 704-6145.



# CONNECT WITH

*orangewood foundation*



## ORANGEWOOD RESOURCE CENTER

ORANGEWOOD FOUNDATION'S on-site resource center, called the Orangewood Resource Center (ORC), has expanded both in size and services. Last February, the center moved across the parking lot at the Foundation's offices on 17th Street in Santa Ana to a space that is 50 percent larger.

The ORC now offers more on-site resources to current and former foster youth through the addition of a housing coordinator and office space for community partners providing mental health support, housing resources and legal services. The new space also enables the

Foundation to host workshops, activities and groups such as the Man Up weekly men's group that gives youth an opportunity to engage in positive social interactions in a safe and caring environment. Available services include employment assistance, college and housing as well as providing meals, personal hygiene products and clothing.

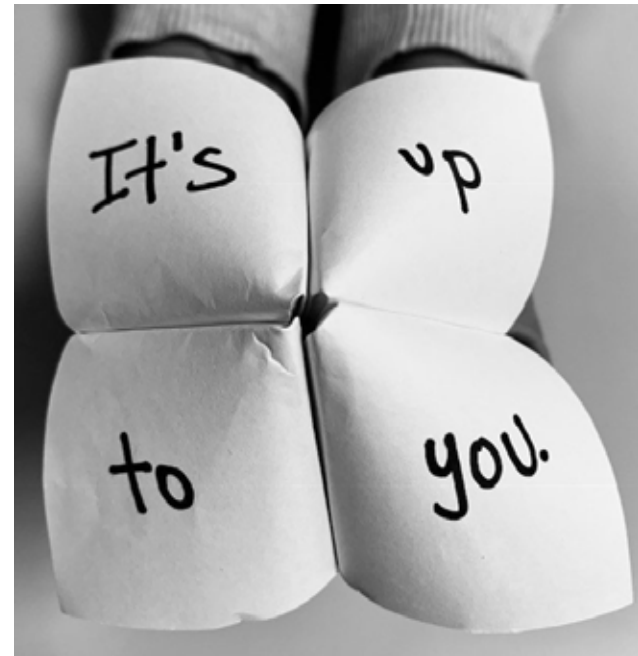
The expanded ORC is located at 1615 E. 17th Street in Santa Ana and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. Youth may drop in or call for an appointment. For more information on the Orangewood Resource Center and all Orangewood Foundation programs for current and former foster youth, please visit [www.orangewood4you.org](http://www.orangewood4you.org).

## Project CHOICE

**INTRODUCING PROJECT CHOICE** (Creating Healthy Opportunities and Inspiring Change through Empowerment), a new program for youth at risk of or involved in sex trafficking within Orange County. Funded by the County of Orange Social Services Agency, and managed by Orangewood Foundation, Project CHOICE provides specialized services and support to Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) as well as education and resources for service providers, caregivers and community groups.

The goal of Project CHOICE is to encourage CSEC youth to reclaim their power of choice through a survivor-centered and strengths-based approach; prioritizing the safety, health and stability of each youth. Youth ages 11 to 21 are eligible for the program. For service providers, caregivers and the community, Project CHOICE provides CSEC awareness and prevention trainings; trainings on identifying and engaging youth at risk; support group and linkages to community resources for caregivers of youth engaged in or at risk of sex trafficking; and consultation.

For more information on Project CHOICE, including referrals for CSEC youth or arranging a training, please contact the Foundation's Youth Support Specialists, Melodie Lacy, at (714) 619-8410 or [mlacy@orangewoodfoundation.org](mailto:mlacy@orangewoodfoundation.org) or Lourdes Dominguez at (714) 619-8413 or [ldominguez@orangewoodfoundation.org](mailto:ldominguez@orangewoodfoundation.org).







# DIRECTORY

**FOSTER CARE INFORMATION LINE**  
(888) 871-KIDS (5437)

**CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION RECEPTION**  
(714) 704-8000  
(714) 935-7171 (emergencies & after hours)

## ADMINISTRATION

Debra Baetz  
Social Services Agency Director

Carol Wiseman  
Social Services Agency Chief Deputy Director

Anne Bloxom  
Children & Family Services Division Director

Scott Burdick  
Children & Family Services Division Deputy Director

Denise Churchill  
Children & Family Services Division Deputy Director

Kim Ragen  
Children & Family Services Division Deputy Director

Ken Santini  
Children & Family Services Division Deputy Director

## RFA & SERVICES PROGRAM

\*Norean Lubchenko, Administrative Manager II

\*Victor Chavez, Administrative Manager I

\*Susan Collins-Rogers, Administrative Manager I

Marlene Telegadas, Administrative Manager I

## RECRUITMENT & TRAINING

Marlene Telegadas, Administrative Manager I  
(714) 704-8853

\*Francisco Perez, Senior Social Services Supervisor  
(714) 704-8952

Roylyn Burton, Community Program Specialist  
(714) 746-2778

\*Veronica Flores De Leon, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 270-4636

\*Elizabeth Hutchinson Cervantes, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 704-8911

Geeta Karir, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 697-6098

Helen Lindsey, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 704-8997

\*Maria Major, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 697-6059

\*\*Diemmy Tran, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 380-8361

\*\*Lianne Vu, Social Services Supervisor I  
(714) 704-8658

Jennifer Balbuena, Information Processing Technician  
(714) 704-8895

\*Yazmin Leal, Staff Specialist  
(714) 704-8828

\*Lorena Rodriguez, Information Processing Technician  
1-888-871-5437 (RFA Training Hotline)

## RESOURCE FAMILY LIAISON

(714) 704-8255 (TALK)

\*Sayra Arreguin, Resource Family Liaison Senior Social Worker  
(714) 746-0345

## LICENSING

Brent Payne, Supervisor  
(714) 704-8887

Stephanie Aspgren, Analyst  
(714) 746-6038

\*Paul Sanchez, Analyst  
(714) 697-2895

## FOSTER CARE ELIGIBILITY

Prashant Kamboya  
(714) 704-8441

## BIRTHDAY GIFTS FOR FOSTER CHILDREN

(714) 679-2438  
Call for an appointment

## TRANSITIONAL PLANNING SERVICES

\*Jaime Muñoz, Administrative Manager II

\*Lourdes Chavez, Supervisor (714) 704-8058

Leslie Gould, Supervisor (714) 940-3936

\*Guadalupe Juarez-Castillo, Supervisor (714) 940-5609

Julie Percer, Supervisor (714) 940-5704

## RESOURCE FAMILY AVAILABILITY

(714) 270-8174

All resource families are encouraged to call this number to notify of their current openings.

## TREATMENT FOSTER CARE OREGON OC

Dr. Mary Eason, Program Supervisor  
(714) 704-8238

Terry Maher, Program Supervisor  
(714) 704-4122

Michelle Medina, Recruiter/Trainer  
(714) 746-1774

## SPECIAL MEDICAL PROGRAM

Berenice Armas Lopez, Placement Coordinator  
(714) 704-8533

Mary Ewart, Medical Intake Coordinator  
(714) 704-8531

Cindy Hutchison, Medical Intake Coordinator  
(714) 704-8531

## TIME OUT FOR PARENTS (TOPS)

Dianna Madrigal-Munoz, Program Coordinator  
New Alternatives, Inc. (714) 245-0045

## WORKING CAREGIVER CHILDCARE

\*Karen Pinkerton (714) 704-6145

## FOSTER & KINSHIP CARE EDUCATION

Saddleback College  
Martine Wehr, Program Director  
(949) 582-4217

Gail Janisch, Program Assistant  
(949) 582-4884

## RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS

Open Arms Adoption Resource Group  
Darren & Guiselle Scott (714) 599-4473

Spanish-Speaking Resource Parent Support  
Meets at OCSSA Eckhoff Office in Orange  
(714) 704-8255

## ORGANIZATIONS

California Children's Services (CCS)  
(714) 347-0300

## CalOPTIMA

Cydney Weber, Liaison  
(714) 796-6132  
Member Services (714) 246-8500  
Claims Department (714) 246-8885

Child Health & Disability Program (CHDP)  
(800) 564-8448

Denti-Cal (800) 322-6384

## Foster Care Auxiliary of Orange County

Kathy Harvey  
(714) 778-3383  
www.fostercareaux.com

Kinship Center  
(714) 957-1004

Olive Crest Kinship Support Program  
(657) 622-4191  
kinship@olivecrest.org

Orange County Mental Health  
(714) 834-5015

Orangewood Foundation  
Linda Levshin, Director Youth Transition Services  
(714) 619-0239

Vision Services Plan  
(800) 877-7195

\*Spanish Speaking  
\*\*Vietnamese Speaking

## THE LINK

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### Editor

Roylyn Burton

### Copy Editors

Roylyn Burton  
Elizabeth Hutchinson Cervantes  
Helen Lindsey

### Contributing Writers

Sara Bazant  
Roylyn Burton  
Ericka Danczak  
Kathy Harvey  
Mario Murillo



OCLetsFosterTogether



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