

SPRING 2010 ■

Aspirations

Supporting Family and Children in Our Community

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ASPIRAnet

Raising Hope, Empowering Community.



Aspirations

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Our vision is to take collective action to support communities and families as they love and care for children. Our statewide network of services have touched the lives of over 10,000 families and children since our founding. This vision is realized through over 35 programs, more than 30 years of experience, and services in six areas of expertise – Family Services, Adoption, Foster Care, Education, Afterschool programs and Community collaboration.

Day after day, our dedication, commitment, efforts and renewed aspirations make a profound difference in the lives of children and families throughout California. We hope you will join us by giving your time, money, or partnering to provide hope through innovative services to children and families in need.

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New Foster Parent Website

Aspiranet will soon launch a new Foster Parent website featuring helpful resources for individuals who are interested in foster parenting, the process of becoming certified, or who are currently caring for foster children. The site will feature stories of foster parents and children, answer common questions regarding foster parenting, provide helpful links to foster resources and services, and help parents understand how the Aspiranet support team works to create the best possible environment for foster children and families.

As the website progresses through development, Aspiranet welcomes your input on information that would be helpful to current foster parents and content that may ease the process of becoming a foster parent. Please e-mail your thoughts and comments to Stacey Fehr, Aspiranet Foster Care Communications Coordinator, at sfehr@aspiranet.org. We value your input!

Foster Parent Referrals Bonus

Aspiranet continues to experience an increasing demand for foster parents, and our best source for recruitment is current foster parent referrals. If you know of someone who may be interested in becoming a foster parent, contact your social worker to make the referral. When a family you refer is certified with Aspiranet, you will receive a \$100 bonus!

We want to hear from you!

Do you have something to share that other foster parents might find useful or inspiring?

Aspirations is seeking reader submissions of cute kid quotes, recipes, kid's art, stories about inspiring moments in foster parenting, recommendations on local activities, craft ideas, tips on parenting a foster child or teen, poems and more. If you have something you'd like to share, email it to Janna Sivils, Aspirations Editor at jsivils@aspiranet.org.

**All submissions are subject to editorial approval.*

More Aspiranet News on the Web!!
go to Aspiranet.org or find us at



Become a fan, follow us, or sign up for updates!

CHILD ABUSE AWARENESS

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month Each year in the United States approximately 50,000 children die from child abuse related incidents. Of these, it is estimated that 30% are preventable. You can help stop child abuse. by Marlo Chapman, Aspiranet Family Developer

What is Child Abuse?

Prevent Child Abuse America defines child abuse as, "A non-accidental injury or pattern of injuries to a child." Child abuse is damage to a child for which there is no "reasonable" explanation. Child abuse includes non-accidental physical injury, neglect, sexual molestation, and emotional abuse.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion that adults and adolescents use against their intimate partners.

Researchers have long been aware of the link between domestic violence and child abuse. Even if a child is witness to an act of violence and not an intended target, the child may be affected in the same way as a child who is directly physically and sexually abused. Since domestic violence is a pattern of behavior and not a single incident, episodes may become more severe and more frequent over time resulting in the increased likelihood that the child will eventually become a victim.

What can we do to prevent these problems?

Today, there are resources informing the general public that everyone has a role to play in preventing child abuse and neglect. It is important for us to be aware of the long-term effects of the maltreatment of children, and learn new ways to help solve this serious problem. In an effort to heighten awareness of child abuse, www.childabuse.com has made available a Child Abuse Awareness Series which provides statistics and answers to commonly asked questions on issues related to child abuse.



How Can We Help?

- By being a foster parent, you are not only providing a safe and nurturing home for a child, but also ending the cycle of abuse for that child.
- Speak with others about the possibility of opening their hearts and homes to a child(ren) for a short period of time, or perhaps a lifetime.
- Remain aware of the reality that child abuse happens in all socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic groups.
- Know and recognize the signs and symptoms of child abuse.
- Talk with your children about ways they can protect themselves and who to tell should something happen to them.
- Call your local Child Protective Service Agency if you feel that a child is at risk or being abused. You can make a difference for that child with one phone call.
- Wear a blue ribbon during the month of April to promote awareness of child abuse.
- Praise your children for their accomplishments and successes, no matter how small. Remember that everything you say and do is absorbed by a child, making a lasting impression on them.
- Tell your children that you love them first thing in the morning and last thing before they go to sleep at night. **A**

Please visit www.childabuse.com to learn important information regarding the prevention of child abuse. We all have the power to make a difference.

Social Work Appreciation Month

Social workers and case workers perform a wide range of essential services. Such services include: determining the safety and well-being of children; supporting foster parents; helping facilitate adoption services; and guiding youth to live independently. Social workers touch the lives of thousands of vulnerable children, youth, and adults. It's a profession in which every single day brings with it the opportunity to change someone's life for the better. At Aspiranet, we are proud of our social workers who are dedicated professionals striving daily to make a positive difference in the lives of others. We thank them for their hard work and dedication.

2010

RAISE HOPE IN YOUR COMMUNITY: FOSTER A TEEN TODAY – MAKE AN IMPACT ON TOMORROW

The big dance, the class ring, the yearbook —

Please help a foster teen graduate with memories to last a lifetime!

When you foster a teen, happy high school memories suddenly become possible. Every day, Aspiranet is notified of teens that are desperately in need of supportive and loving families. Too often, teens wait longer than their younger counterparts for foster family placement, are moved around more frequently, and are separated from younger siblings - however, you and your family, together can help teens face these challenges.

We need parents who will take the time to foster a teen. Please take a moment to find out about Aspiranet's innovative programs that inspire hope, and consider fostering a teen in 2010. We invite you to visit our website at www.aspiranet.org/2010.

We invite you to visit our website at www.aspiranet.org/2010 to:

- Read inspirational stories about foster teens and parents;
- Find out what Aspiranet's goals are in placing foster teens;
- Check out some 2010 campaign resources; and
- Learn how Aspiranet can provide you with support through the process of fostering a teen.

“Open up your heart and give love and you'll have that forever.” ~ Sheila, former Aspiranet foster teen

For More Information Please Contact Aspiranet Family Recruiters:

Ada Hampton
ahampton@aspiranet.org
209.585.1460, ext. 2314

Ellyn Brannon
ebrannon@aspiranet.org
209.585.1460, ext. 2315



Nai's Story

At the age of 12, Nai was removed from her family of seven siblings and placed in a foster home. At the time, Nai (the second oldest child) and her older sister were caring for their younger brothers and sisters as her parents were usually absent.

Being placed in foster care was extremely difficult for the siblings, who were separated and sent to live in different counties. Nai had become used to serving as caretaker for her younger siblings, and spent the first couple of years in foster care worrying about her brothers and sisters. Visitation opportunities together were rare, and over time Nai became resentful of and disappointed in her parents for being unable to “put the family back together again.” She had a very difficult time dealing with the fact that what she had viewed as a temporary placement in foster care would be a permanent state of reality until her coming of age at 18 years old. This was a devastating realization for Nai.

One of the greatest challenges Nai faced as a teenager in foster care was coming to terms with her identity as a foster child. Her school peers viewed her foster child status as a negative trait which made it really hard to trust her friends who would shy away from her when she opened up to them.

“I felt really alone... I didn't feel that I could talk to anyone as I didn't know anyone else in my situation.”

In fact, Nai started to keep her foster kid identity from friends until her junior year of high school when she finally felt comfortable enough to share her story with others. Her change in attitude was largely due to her placement in a healthy foster family environment. ▶

▶ Nai lived in two foster homes until her final placement with a supportive and loving foster family. At first, it was really difficult for her foster family as they were not sure how to emotionally connect with the quiet and reserved teen. Nai explains that it was just very difficult for them to understand what she was going through. But, her foster parents supported her as much as they could, and encouraged her to become involved in school academics and sports to keep her active and busy.

The turning point for the family came one day when Nai was sent to her middle school's principal's office for wearing a sleeveless shirt. The principal called Nai's foster mom to come to the school for a meeting.

Nai recalls, "When my foster mom arrived at the principal's office, she said, 'My daughter hasn't done anything wrong.' She backed me up and supported me." It was then that Nai realized that her foster mom would, "always be there for me and support me."

In looking back at her years as a teen in foster care, Nai remembers that her foster parents showed her unconditional support and caring.

"They made me feel like an equal in their house. They treated me right."

Together, Nai and her foster sister (her family's biological daughter) would do chores as household duties were shared equally. Her parents made sure to treat her as one of their own children, doing whatever they could to make her feel a part of their family - even introducing her as their own daughter. Nai remembers their extreme willingness and availability to help her with her homework - her father with math and her mother with arts and crafts projects.

Nai points out that her foster parents' commitment and support was crucial during her formative teenage years when she found herself changing in so many ways.

"[My foster parents] showed me the positive side of going to school, and supported me in my career choices."

Nai found herself motivated by their positive encouragement both in school and on the playing field, where she developed her teamwork skills and slowly learned to trust others. Being given the opportunity to really be a kid after having had the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings opened her up to doing teenage "stuff" such as hanging out with friends and getting involved in extracurricular activities.

Having been an introverted teen, Nai's foster parents also worked to instill in her the importance of expressing herself and standing up for her opinions and beliefs.

"They always played a big role in my life, and encouraged me to be a more open person... a more outspoken person."

Nai believes that this encouragement made her stronger in comparison to her initially shy and soft spoken personality. Now, Nai stands up for what she believes in and speaks out.

At the age of 23 and out of foster care for five years, today Nai is studying to become a pharmacist at Stanislaus State University. When asked if she still has a relationship with her former foster family, Nai responds, "I'm definitely still really close to them. I visit them on holidays... I still call them mom and dad. They're always there to support me."

Nai advises potential and current foster parents to encourage teens in their care to be the best that they can be and to do things that will affect their lives positively.

"Every kid is different, so try to support them in what they want to do. [My foster parents] really tried to help me out as much as they could. I'm really thankful that I got placed in foster care as I might have otherwise been in a much worse situation with my education and in terms of becoming a successful individual." **A**

Advocating for Foster Youth

On January 8th Governor Schwarzenegger released his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2010-11. Among his budget proposals was the complete elimination of Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP-Plus) funding if the state is unable to secure an additional \$6.9 billion in federal funding. When youth emancipate from foster care, it is critical that they have secured the necessary support systems that allow them to thrive and be responsible for their own care. Aspiranet's THP-Plus brings needed services through collaborations with private businesses and community resources/agencies. These affiliations link youth to services and provide them with support related to housing, job placement and training, and educational enrollment, guiding the youth to self-sufficiency.

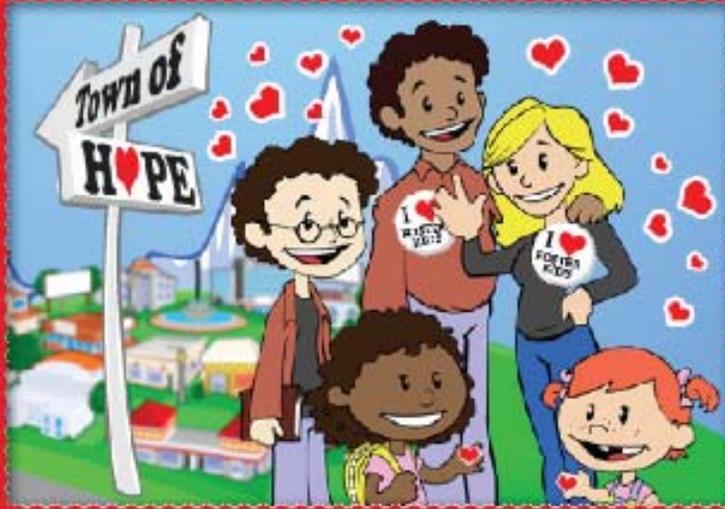
On February 1st and 2nd, Aspiranet staff and youth will be at the State Capitol rallying, visiting legislators, and participating in a hearing in support of THP-Plus state funding. Aspiranet asks you to support our efforts by calling your elected Senators and State Assembly officials to express your concern over the Governor's proposal. Phone calls, e-mails, and letters to elected officials make a difference.

For find out contact information for your representatives, visit <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/yourleg.html>.



Picture the Rewards

Happy Valentine's Day from the Fosters!



www.picturetherewards.org

HAPPY
VALENTINE'S DAY!

~ Bob, Melissa,
J.W., Melo, and Tansy

powered by
Aspiranet

We invite you to visit the Fosters in the Town of Hope, and learn how you can **give a little love** to foster families this Valentine's Day and throughout the year. Each year, Aspiranet touches the lives of over 9,300 California children and families - offering permanent family connections and reasons to hope. Our foster families are heroes in their communities. But, recent drastic California budget cuts in foster care are stretching our families' resources thin. Picture the Rewards provides opportunities to contribute toward the needs and services that foster children often go without.

Picture the Rewards introduces the community to *our* virtual community, Town of Hope, a source of support for the children in Aspiranet's foster care. In the Town

of Hope visitors will meet Aspiranet's foster families and learn more about their lives as well as the life histories of children in foster care. Through the many locations in the Town of Hope, visitors can provide children in foster care with school supplies, graduation and birthday cards, and special opportunities for swimming lessons, music or art lessons, and sports teams - items and services that many foster children are missing from their lives.

We invite you to share your experience in the Town of Hope with friends and family.

Visit our website to **send a free virtual Valentine's Day card**. At Picture the Rewards, it is easy to make a lasting impact by improving the lives of children in foster care across California.

Learn more about the Fosters! Visit www.picturetherewards.com

A Big THANK YOU to our 2009 Holiday Campaign Contributors!

Denise Bean-White • Ellyn Brannon • Steve Bringe • Arthur Chaparro • Miles Dapsauski • Jennifer Dunbar
Michael Funk • Jeannie Imelio • Alice Kan • Lynn Noble • Kevin Rinker • Lynell Scott • Nicholas Shockett
Elizabeth and Eran Vaisben • Tina Vervoorn • Gail Wittenberg • Graham Yates

COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

HOLIDAY SEASON 2009



Aspiranet Partners with Starbucks to Play Santa for Foster Children

(CENTRAL VALLEY) Aspiranet, partnered with Starbucks for its annual Holiday 2009 Toy Drive across five counties in Tulare, Kern, Fresno, Kings, and Mariposa.

Through this toy drive, Aspiranet builds a bridge between the generosity of the community and the holiday wishes of foster children. Customers took “wish ornaments” from 76 Starbucks stores and returned them with the child’s holiday “wish” for distribution to the foster children, just in time for the holidays.

“Foster families are our society’s unsung heroes,” notes Jeannie Imelio, Central Valley Regional Director of Aspiranet. “They play a key part in our community, providing homes, care, and support for children of all ages. Their successes are team efforts – partnerships in parenting and community building in which all can play a part; from corporate partners to the support and generosity of everyday citizens, it’s a success story that greatly exceeds the sum of its parts.”

In 2009, over 75 Starbucks shops participated in the drive, collecting over \$50,000 in gifts.

OLD NAVY Discovers Giving is Contagious

(BAY AREA) In December, ten Old Navy stores across California teamed up with Aspiranet for a week-long clothing drive. Donation barrels were placed at Old Navy clothing stores, including the stores in Oakridge, Fremont, Eastridge, Marina, Salinas, Gilroy, San Luis Obispo, Valley Fair and Westgate, and Santa Barbara.

It all started when the Oakridge Old Navy store donated funds to purchase enough clothing for nine foster children. “I was excited to see



From left: Foster parents, Ernie Romo and Deborah and Mark Blomenkamp help distribute donations from Old Navy stores.

the kids thrilled about their items,” said Eric Jasmine, manager of the Oakridge Old Navy store. Because of the success of the drive in Oakridge, the holiday clothes drive was expanded to multiple stores whose staff were eager to participate. The South Bay Aspiranet offices received a large box of t-shirts, socks, and underwear to distribute to Aspiranet foster children in the area.

Aspiranet appreciates the generosity of Old Navy and all those who kindly donated to foster children this past holiday season.

Naval Base Practices Small Act of Kindness in a Big Way

(SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA) Naval Base Ventura County had a special mission — make the holidays bright for children affiliated with Aspiranet. The idea was simply to ask the surrounding community to gather gift donations in shoeboxes.

Command Chaplain Lt. Deann Coleman led the shoebox gifts program. Coleman said she got the idea for shoebox gifts from a program she ran while stationed in Guam. “The reason [givers] are limited to a shoebox is so that they won’t feel burdened. They only need to fill it so much. We’re trying to be a blessing, not a burden,” she said. Coleman noted that people weren’t obligated to use a shoebox, and many gifts were in bags and boxes of varying sizes. The base collected approximately 180 gifts from November to Christmas, and all gifts went to Aspiranet children.

Aspiranet extends sincerest thanks to Naval Base Ventura County for their contributions to our community’s foster children.

Our Story

by Katherine Turkish, *Parent Partner Aspiranet Wraparound Bakersfield*

The caller informed me, “Someone’s been trying to find you.” My first thought was, “Oh my God, it’s finally happened!” My emotions froze and went into overdrive all at the same time. A weight was lifted I didn’t even know I had carried. As the caller’s voice continued, adrenaline whipped through me. My senses went numb. He said, “She’s been looking for you and she knows you’ve been searching for her too.” If she only knew.

Years before, a day had come that had not been the one of freedom I had yearned for during my adolescence. With my eighteenth birthday came the announcement of another impending birth. In my innocence, I had not prepared and was now to pay the worst price. So was she. I was sure I would fail her. I had failed at so many things. I panicked at the thought of failing as a mother. In my uncertainty of life and myself, there was one thing I was sure of — I wouldn’t do to her what had been done to me. Everyone told me, “You’re doing the right thing.” This encouragement became my mantra throughout the pregnancy, the birth, and months following. The rational mind provides such amazing defenses to assist us in hiding from the most primal of wounds. After a most profound event of coincidence connecting her world and mine, the grief surged upward through that barrier of denial. The comforting voice left me. The tears finally flowed. Shame and regret threatened to drown me. The sense of failure I had sought to avoid now haunted me.

Although the adoption was a private one arranged by my uncle, I was denied any information about her. As the years passed, I would experience unexplainable moments of panic in thinking that she was hurting. As I made calls to my uncle to see if she was OK, I was repeatedly told it wasn’t my place. When she was in high school, I ordered her yearbook hoping to finally

see happiness on her face and make my fears seem a silly imagining. Happiness did not look back at me. A bittersweet moment in seeing my daughter for the first time was swept aside as she appeared lost and unhappy. I prayed and waited helplessly for the day I might be able to reach out to her. Google and other search engines helped me keep an invisible bond with her. I knew when she moved to a city not far from me. I had an address and phone number but resisted the urge to call. My uncle’s words echoed to me, “You gave her up. Let go.” My own memories of the conflict between my adoptive parents and my birth mother further stayed my hand from reaching for the phone. Finally, when she was in her twenties, I attempted contact. By this time, Google was not helpful. She was nowhere to be found. I knew she had likely married and changed her name.

The only means of connection I’d had through the years was lost. I went back to the city she had grown up in, and eventually tracked down a relative. He agreed to contact her for me. He returned my call with her answer, “She isn’t ready yet.” Although this answer was devastating, I found comfort in knowing that she knew the door was open if she were to change her mind. I needed her to know that I was here and had not abandoned her.

When the call came a few weeks ago, I knew instantly who it was. The journey since has been filled with emotions I cannot find words to describe. I am convinced email must have been invented for a first step in reunions. Attempting to express my thoughts, I wrote to her, “I’ve dreamed of this moment since the day I let you go. I’ve rehearsed my words to you a million times, and then a million more.” In reply she said, “I don’t quite know how information about you would come to me, but over the years I would get bits and pieces about your family. My family was always very open ▶





Amanda and Katherine reunite at the Santa Monica pier.

▶ in talking about my adoption. Every birthday that I had, my mother would openly thank you for giving me to her. She made sure I always knew you loved me." In another email she wrote, "It would probably surprise you to know that I knew you had checked up on me from time to time. My parents told me in my teenage years. They used to jokingly say that if you ever tried to come get me when I was little that they had a plan in place to immediately pack the car and move to Canada. Well, half joking. They totally would have done it. LOL."

We arranged to meet at the Santa Monica Pier by the merry-go-round. This seemed an appropriate meeting place. As we walked for five around the pier that day, it became clear that they had named her well. Amanda means to be loved. As she walked me through her childhood memories it was inescapably obvious

"For the first time in twenty eight years, the words returned to me again as a certainty this time. I had done the right thing."

that her adoptive parents had indeed loved her well. Toward the end of our visit, I marvelled out loud at how relinquishment and adoption had impacted four generations of women in our family, starting with my own birth mother in 1936. She replied, "Well it's over now. It has stopped with me because I had a happy

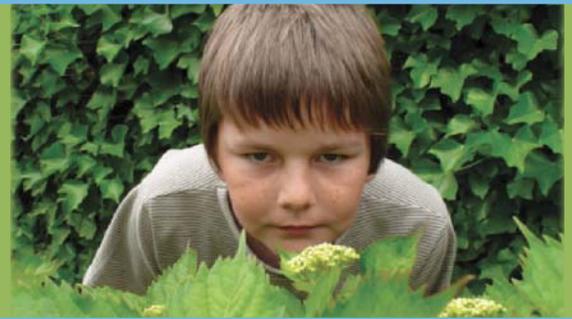
childhood. My adoption was a success." For the first time in twenty eight years, the words returned to me again as a certainty this time. I had done the right thing.

I hope that sharing our story will provide encouragement to all those who are dedicatedly

working to supporting open adoption and permanency. Amanda and I would also like to extend a huge thank you to Bob Friend, Director for California Permanency for Youth Project, for being that voice on the other end of the phone. **A**

UNDERSTANDING AUTISM

by Sheri Reynolds, MFT FFSN Program Director



Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines.

Aspiranet's Family Focused Support Network (FFSN) is designed to assist families with children who have all types of developmental disabilities like autism. FFSN is a support program that offers help for families, including foster families:

- **Services are free to families:** The local regional center pays for the services, so families must be referred by the regional center.
- **A 3-person team:** A Developmental Supervisor to assess behavior, listen to family feedback, and make recommendations accordingly; a Social Worker to address family systems issues; and an Intervention Specialist who implements the recommendations with the child. The family is also considered a valuable part of the team in its role of implementing their part of the plan and providing feedback about services.

- **Interventions implementation with the child:** The program starts at 3 hours, 3 visits per week during Phase I, then decreases to 3 hours, 2 visits per week for the last three months of service. A Social Worker meets with the family twice monthly, and the 3-person team meets with the family once monthly during Phase 1.
- **Duration:** Families usually participate in the program for 12-18 months before graduation. About 85-90% of our clientele's negative behavior improves to a manageable level.

How Foster Parents Can Help

Aspiranet also offers the Support Partners program which enables foster parents to care for and provide a home to children with disabilities. Just as in the FFSN program, Support Partners provides a team of qualified staff to work with you and your foster child with disabilities. In addition to the extra help with your foster child (anywhere from 6-15 hours per week), foster parents may qualify for a higher reimbursement rate.

If you are interested in exploring the opportunity to help a child with disabilities in your home, please let your Aspiranet Social Worker know.

10 AUTISM TIPS When living with someone with autism, it is important to ensure that you help build and maintain flexibility. Many individuals with autism have challenges with any change in routine, and these challenges often result in mild to severe tantrums-regardless of an individual's age. Building up and strengthening flexibility in all children, especially those with autism, is very important. Here are some ideas for how parents can help build and maintain flexibility:

1. Use "first this then that", i.e. "First you brush your teeth, then you can play your game."
2. Give choices, i.e. "Do you want to make your bed before you shower, or after?"
3. Remain consistent and empathetic but don't give in to tantrums.
4. Allow space to let a tantrum safely run its course.
5. Structure time but change up the schedule periodically. Have 2-3 different routines that you rotate.
6. Purposely delay fun activities to build patience. Start with a few seconds and build up to minutes.
7. Institute countdowns or use a timer to signal the end of one activity and the beginning of another.
8. Sometimes it helps to give a child a special toy to hold onto between the ending of one activity and the beginning of another. This will help maintain focus during the down time.
9. Create 3-5 "rules" for various situations, i.e. when going on outings follow these 3 rules: stay close, use walking feet, ask permission before running off.
10. Use visual materials and cues, i.e. write out the day's activities on a piece of paper.

Crafts



Balloon Plants

Making Balloon Plants is a wonderful activity! You can give them as gifts, or make at parties. Kids love creating them, and you will enjoy watching your new plant grow!

1. Hold a balloon firmly by the neck. The neck is the long part. Use a funnel, and pour 1/2 cup of dirt into the balloon. Don't turn the balloon over. (Try to find clear balloons to use.)
2. Keep holding the balloon by the neck. Add about 1/4 cup of water through the funnel. Be sure the soil in the balloon is wet. It shouldn't be soggy, though.
3. Use the funnel to drop the radish seeds into the balloon. Don't turn the balloon over. If the balloon is dirty, wipe it carefully with a washcloth.
4. Now you're ready to blow up your balloon! Keep holding it gently by the neck. Now carefully blow air into the balloon. You need to keep the balloon from tipping.
5. Tie a knot in the neck to keep the air in the balloon.
6. Tie a ribbon around the knot. Tie the balloon to a hook or other place near a window. The neck should be the top.

Your balloon plant is ready to begin growing!

Courtesy of Recipes 4 Learning
<http://www.recipes4learning.com/view.php?id=230>

Fresno Youth Wins First Prize in California Art Contest for Foster Children

Aspiranet foster teen Jamie N., 17, was recently awarded first place in the 2009 Children, Youth and Elders Art Contest. The contest, a collaboration of the Center for Families, Children and the Courts and Administrative Office of the Court, and the California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership was open to any youth or elder with experience in California's courts or child welfare system.

Navarro's beautifully crafted piece of artwork, entitled "All You Need is Love," was entered in the competition by Elizabeth Rocha-Lee, her Aspiranet social worker, and won first prize. Themed "A Lifetime of Love: The Importance of Friends, Family and Belonging," Navarro's art is featured in the 2010 calendar in the month of January. This calendar was part of the gift Aspiranet foster parents received this past December.



"We were all so moved when we saw these drawings," said Crystal Luffberry, Integration Director of the Co-Investment Partnership. "There are so many layers of meaning and their efforts were original and extraordinary."

Along with Jamie's artwork, 11 additional pieces were submitted contributed by current and former foster youth have been compiled into the calendar. More than 15,000 calendars will be distributed to policy makers and child welfare professionals to increase the understanding and communicate the importance of love and belonging in the lives of foster children and the urgent need to create and sustain permanent connections for all foster children and youth.

Jamie N., Fresno/Madera County

Jamie Navarro entered the foster care system at the age of nine, and during her eight years as a foster child, has lived in seven different placements.

Now residing in an Aspiranet foster family home, Jamie exemplifies courage, perseverance and tenacity. She is an active senior at Clovis High School where she participates in several high school clubs. When not in the classroom, she pursues her passion for art and is active in her church's youth group.

Navarro has been accepted to California State University, Fresno, and hopes to become a pediatrician. An impressive young lady, her life has not been without challenges. When Navarro's foster father recently passed away, her foster mother felt she could not continue to care for Jaime as a single parent. The extended family quickly stepped up to help and volunteered to become foster parents, allowing Navarro to reside with them while continuing school.

Today, this artistic young lady is surrounded by a permanent family connection that supports and provides her with a sense of belonging and encourages her to reach for her full potential in life.

A BIG THANK YOU to our 2009 Donors!

The following individuals and businesses helped make 2009 a little brighter for hundreds of foster children. The unstable economy and unprecedented budget cuts from the state threatened to affect the level of support provided to the children and families in our care. Last year, these donors gave generously to give foster children in California: an amazing holiday experience; support with sports; (young adults) furnishings for first homes; and so much more.

The difference made by many is amazing. Thank you for your tremendous support!

Corporate Donors

Automotive Racing Products	Events by Regina	Main Street Footers	Sam's Club
Gary Bang Harley Davidson	Giant Chevrolet, Visalia	Management Consulting Services, Bakersfield	Southern California Edison
The Press Enterprise/A.H. Belo Corp.	Gilroy Bowl	Modern Concrete Services	San Luis Obispo Vespa
Brentwood Women's Club	Robert Hall Winery	Old Navy Stores, Eric Jasmine	A.G. Spanos
Law Office of Matthew Brueckner	Heffernan Insurance	Michael Passarelli Productions	SRT Helicopters
Doc Burnstein's Ice Cream Lab	It's Your Party, San Luis Obispo	Powell's Sweet Shoppe	Starbucks Coffee Company
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Chick-Fil-A	Kiwanis Club of Greater Nipomo	Roadhouse Steak and Saloon	Sundance Tanning
Conglass Manufacturing	Kiwanis Club of Old Town Clovis, Fresno	Rontal Salon	Albertsons, Bakersfield
Consortium Media Services	Kmart	Saint Bonaventure High School	Turlock Poker Room
County Center Rotary, Visalia	La Bella Rosa Vineyards	Santa Maria Harley Davidson	Turlock Irrigation District
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