



Resource Parent Association Fosters Care, Hope for Children in Santa Barbara County

Foster youths suffering from neglect and abuse are in need of homes, but there are other ways people in the community can help



The Hayden family, from left, Josh, Cruz, Dominic, Jenna, Justus, Caleb and Emma. “I was a school teacher and have a deep love for children,” says Jenna Hayden, a foster parent and president of the Santa Barbara County Resource Parent Association. (Hayden family photo)

By Brooke Holland, Noozhawk Staff Writer | [@NoozhawkNews](#) | August 15, 2016 | 4:32 p.m.

In the past eight years, Jenna Hayden, president of the [Santa Barbara County Resource Parent Association](#), has fostered three children and offered a support system for adoptive families.

“I was a school teacher and have a deep love for children,” Hayden said. “My husband and I have been interested in building our local community rather than adopt internationally or a domestic private adoption. We felt moved.”

According to the [National Center on Family Homelessness](#), 2.5 million children are homeless each year in America. In Santa Barbara County, more than 425 youths are in foster care as of June, according to Hayden. She said there’s an insufficient number of foster homes and a need to focus on homeless children in the community.

“We as a county need to take a step forward and realize these are our children and find ways to support the families,” Hayden said.

A resource family opens their home to provide a temporary or permanent place for children who have been victims of neglect and/or physical, emotional, mental or sexual abuse.

“There are a lot of different aspects that make it possible to take care of kids that have different levels of trauma and therapeutic needs,” Hayden said. “It’s much more difficult than working with typical population kids.”

Because of the trauma some children have experienced, they need additional support dealing with their individual issues.

“There’s a need in providing therapists to teach social and emotional skills to kids because they didn’t get it from their birth family in healthy ways,” Hayden said.

Research suggests homeless youths may have substance abuse problems and commit criminal activities in order to survive the harsh realities of their circumstances, according to the [National Alliance to End Homelessness](#).

The longer a youth is homeless, the more likely he or she is to engage in criminal behaviors and be arrested, according to a 2010 study in four U.S. cities by the [Family and Youth Services Bureau](#), a division of the department of Health and Human Services.

“If kids are in a foster home and preparing for the life skills that are needed once they turn 18, especially in a county in Santa Barbara, it’s important there are programs in place for them to learn adult living skills so they don’t end up in homelessness or crime,” Hayden said.

Policies have been adopted to help homeless youth in the county, including the resources to support child neglect, educational needs and transitional housing.

The [McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act](#), ensures each homeless youth has equal and fair access to free public education as provided to other youth.



Jenna Hayden urges people interested in becoming a resource family or those who want to help to attend a Santa Barbara County Resource Parent Association meeting for more information. (Hayden family photo)

The county also offers programs by the Department of Social Services that offer support to foster children and resource families.

The [Independent Living Program](#) provides services to Santa Barbara County foster and probation youth ages 14 to 21. The program prepares them for the transition into independent living.

The [KIDS Network](#) was created in 1991 by the county Board of Supervisors as an advisory system on family and child issues. Members from community organizations, schools, parent groups and public agencies provide human services for foster youth and families.

In addition, the [Child Abuse Prevention Council](#) coordinates countywide efforts to prevent child abuse and offers educational resources to community groups working with families.

Hayden said housing plays a top role in the well-being of foster children.

“Even though the state is doing more to provide materials for the kids, there’s nothing that can compare to building safe, healthy and trusting relationships in a foster family,” Hayden said. “These kids need care and support from the families that are taking a courageous step forward with this service.”

The mother of three biological children said the community can show support in multiple ways.

“There are many pieces people can play in supporting foster youth,” she said. “It’s not just fostering or adopting kids, it’s providing meals, supplies and mentors.”

Creating a community that thrives educational resources for foster youth also is vital, Hayden said.

Frank Koroshec, an English instructor at [San Marcos High School](#), brainstormed with students about various ways to serve educational services — the group developed the Resource Family Association Student Support Team.

Koroshec works with 30 students who are providing child care and tutoring for resource families who attend monthly parent trainings provided by the Resource Parent Association.

“The goal of our club is to be hands-on, and to be with the children and provide relief for weary foster families,” Koroshec said. “We hope that our services will strengthen existing resource families, but what most excites me is how many of my students have told me that they plan on becoming foster or adopt parents in the future.”

RFASST secured a grant from [Kids Helping Kids](#), a San Marcos student-run nonprofit organization that raises money to provide financial support to families in poverty. The money enabled the group to broaden their services.

“We now host field trips for resources families,” Koroshec said. “And, in the new school year, my students will be trained by therapists so that the child care we provide may be therapeutic.”

Koroshec and his wife became foster parents 12 years ago.

“Becoming a foster and adoptive parent is the result of my wife's compassionate heart,” Koroshec said. “She worked with juvenile delinquents at a residential treatment facility where she encountered several foster youth who had committed major crimes.”

The adoption process originally scared Koroshec, but since then he has fostered four children.

“I remember being shocked by some of the stories my wife would share, but I was even more amazed when she said we should adopt these kids,” he said. “In this way, we would be able to remove a child from a unstable environment and thus break the cycle.”

Hayden urges people interested in becoming a resource family or those who want to help to attend the Santa Barbara County Resource Parent Association meeting held at [Santa Barbara Community Church](#), 1002 Cieneguitas Road, on the second Friday of the month from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Additional support and informational meetings are hosted in Santa Barbara, Santa Maria and Lompoc by [Our County. Our Kids](#), a program of the Santa Barbara County [Department of Social Services](#).

“I feel strongly there’s a lot more people who are capable of being foster parents,” Hayden said. “The benefit of being a foster parent has much better outcomes for kids then institutional care. I encourage people to consider it.”

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