



## Foster families get a day of fun, relaxation

*County social services organizes appreciation day in Buellton*



In celebration of May as National Foster Care Month, nearly 100 families gathered on a gray Sunday afternoon, May 19, to enjoy a day of wellness, relaxation and fun at River View Park in Buellton. The event was hosted and organized through “Our County. Our Kids,” a program of the Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services. The program is in charge of resource (foster) family recruitment, retention, and support.

Each May, program staff host an event “to show appreciation for all the resource families who work tirelessly to protect, love, and support Santa Barbara’s most vulnerable youth,” said Social Media Associate Shanna MacLagan.

In California, the word “foster family” has been changed to “resource family” in order “to encompass all the different people (aunty, uncles, grandparents) who are resources,” said Marianne Reagan, the program manager with Child Welfare Services.

This year, the focus of the event was wellness. Massages, work-out sessions, face painting, and bounce houses were a few of the activities offered. Parents were encouraged to take a break and relax while the kids had fun.

Gustavo Prado, the staff member in charge of coordinating the event, emphasized the importance of the wellness of these resource families, who do what he calls “parenting plus.” Not only do these parents have the hard job of raising children who may have experienced trauma, but they also have to work closely with the county and social services.

“If we take care of our families, then they take better care of our kids,” Prado said.

The fitness sessions, split into age groups, by Santa Maria Custom Workouts were especially popular at the event.

Marc Gatson, owner of Custom Workouts, was proud to team up with “Our County. Our Kids” and help give back to the community.

As a previously troubled kid growing up in South Central Los Angeles, Gatson said, fitness “kept me off the streets and . . . showed me a healthy way of life.” This led to his personal motivation to start a gym with a focus on helping troubled kids.

“Fitness keeps the kids busy. It keeps them out of trouble and gives them mentorship and motivation,” said Gatson. . . . “The event gives me happiness. They motivate me. Them being determined to receive a healthy and positive lifestyle . . . a lot of these kids come from nothing.”

Children loved having unicorns and dinosaurs painted onto their cheeks and jumped exuberantly in the bouncy houses, but for many the best part of the event was the sense of community it built up among resource families.

Garret, 6 years old, said his favorite part was “getting together with my family.”

As Prado said, “It takes a village” to raise a child, and community and support are some of the most important ingredients.

“Resource parents can’t do it alone . . . it requires a jigsaw puzzle of support. The children belong to the community . . . to all of us,” he said.

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