



## Local Resource Family Writes New Definition of Family

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Today, the meaning of “family” has become increasingly inclusive and diverse. Perhaps no one better exemplifies this trend than Matt and Michael Pennon, a Santa Maria couple who are writing their own definition of family while positively affecting the lives of foster children and youth in Santa Barbara County. Resource parents like the Pennons are the new face of foster care, as new rules call for elevated levels of expertise and dedication and provide more help for new foster parents.

Matt and Michael began their foster care journey in December 2014 by becoming resource parents through Our County, Our Kids, a program of the Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services. Their hope was to find a child who was available for adoption, but they never anticipated the journey this process would take them on.

In 2015, the Pennons had five placements, 2 of whom reunified with biological parents, 2 of whom have been on track for adoption by Matt and Michael, and a third child who originally reunified with her biological family but recently re-entered care and has been recommended for adoption. While it wasn’t easy to see the children come and go, the Pennons embraced the opportunity to make an impact.

“You make a difference in their lives whether they’re in your family for two days or two years,” they said. In early 2016, Matt and Michael welcomed a now four-year-old boy into their home, followed a few months later by an infant boy who just recently turned six months. Both boys will become permanent members of the Pennon family when their adoptions are finalized in early April.

“It’s an amazing thing to come full circle in this process,” said Matt. “Walking alongside of a child from foster placement to adoption is not an experience you get to have as a traditional parent.”

The Pennons have been so inspired by the process of fostering, mentoring, and adopting that Matt has joined the Our County Our Kids team as a Resource Family Recruiter and Trainer. Matt has been instrumental in increasing visibility of the Our County Our Kids program in Santa Barbara County, and helping to recruit and prepare additional resource families to welcome foster children and youth into their homes.

Effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, new California legislation AB403 requires all group homes for foster children and youth to obtain national accreditation and provide more specialized services to their residents, or shut their doors. As a result, the need for supportive and well-trained resource families like the Pennons is more crucial than ever in Santa

Barbara County. The north county areas of Santa Maria, Lompoc, and Santa Ynez are currently experiencing the greatest need for resource families for the more than 425 Santa Barbara County foster children and youth who need a place to call home.

Through the foster care and adoption process the Pennons have been able to expand their increasingly diverse family, but their marriage has also grown and changed.

“The diversity of our family is the best part about it,” says Matt. “But we have also become a much stronger, more patient couple. We communicate better and have set more goals for each other and for our family.” One of those goals includes Matt finishing his BS degree in Sociology and obtaining his Masters in Social Work.

The Pennons believe that resource families have the power to positively change the hand a child is dealt and they tell their powerful story to encourage others to take the life-changing step of opening their home to a foster child or youth.

“There’s always enough space in your heart to love a child,” they say.

For more information on how you can get involved and help support Santa Barbara County foster children and youth, visit <http://ourcountyourkids.org/>.

#### **About Our County. Our Kids**

Our County. Our Kids is a program of the Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services (SBC DSS). It is the SBC DSS resource family recruitment, retention, and support program. Visit [www.ourcountyourkids.org/](http://www.ourcountyourkids.org/) for more information.

[http://ktla.com/community-calendar/#/event/6327130-local-resource-family-writes-new-definition-of-family?radius\\_miles=25&location=93457-santa-maria&sections=all&date=2017-05-01](http://ktla.com/community-calendar/#/event/6327130-local-resource-family-writes-new-definition-of-family?radius_miles=25&location=93457-santa-maria&sections=all&date=2017-05-01)