

SPECIAL EDITION GRADUATION QUARTERLY



"Hats Off" to the graduation class of 2017, made up of our youth, employees and biological children of our foster families!

May your commitment, hard work and success continue to inspire those around you!



A Foster Family's Success at its Finest



Amelia and Hannah

From the start, my mother (Leia Blue), was constantly encouraging us to be better, to be nicer, to reach for the stars and follow our dreams, and was always praising us. She was always celebrating our achievements, no matter how big or small and that made us want to be more successful. In my teenage years, my mother joined Children First Foster Family Agency and would accept children into our home that were abandoned or neglected. Many children entered and left our household, some stayed permanently by adoption. Each having left an impression on us. Although welcoming these children in our home was difficult at first, it provided us with another perspective. It's easy to complain about your own life, but when you see someone less fortunate than you, it tends to have a greater impact on how you think and act, and it provides motivation to be a better person. My mom gave and continues to give each and every child the same amount of love, praise and encouragement as she has done for me all my life. It is truly remarkable to be a part of that process and watch the children blossom into amazing human beings.

I have always been passionate about the medical field. I moved to Los Angeles and attended West Coast University and in April of 2014, I completed my BSN and passed my state boards and officially became a registered nurse (RN). I worked full time as a waitress while in nursing school. Many academic advisers including professors told me there was no way I would make it through the program while working full time, but I did. There was no other option for me, I had to work. I would be lying if I said it was easy. There were many days that I cried and wondered if it was all worth it. My mother was always in my corner. She believed in me when no one else did, and gave me the strength and motivation to succeed. Now, I have since obtained a job at the most prestigious hospital in the nation, and completed my Master's Degree and I am a licensed and board certified Nurse Practitioner. My sister Hannah has also completed her BSN degree and works for LAC + USC Medical Center in Los Angeles. We both can sincerely say that we attribute all our success to our mother. If it was not for her, I don't know where we would be, or what we would be doing. Now I get the opportunity to provide the best quality of care that I am capable of to the most vulnerable population, the sick and injured.

In brief, when times get tough remember what you're fighting for. Think of those around you who support and believe in you and most importantly believe in yourself. Don't quit or give up. Keep pursuing your passion and dream big. Educating yourself is the best and most important investment you will ever make.

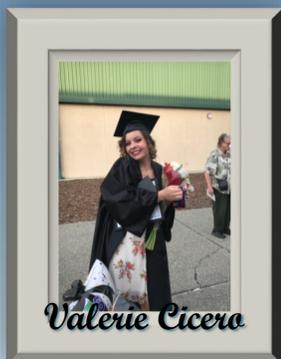
Amelia Kolenc, NPC



2017



Transition Age Foster Youth High School Graduates



Valerie Cicero



Valencia Deal



Taylor Cameron



Hayley Bailey



Alex McCollum

Do or Do Not, There is No Try-Yoda



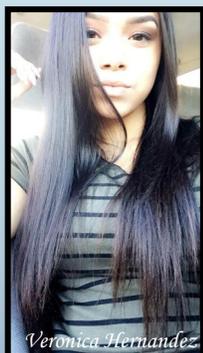
Bella Gasteazoro



Jazzmin Hartman



Autumn Amber



Veronica Hernandez



Tyler Learitt



Brittney Merwin



Anthony Linstroth-Burtlow



Roy Bishop

- At Least 38% of foster youth in California Experience 5 or more placements while in foster care.
- Foster youth who experience more placements are nearly 15% less likely to complete high school when compared to their peers.
- 24% of foster youth struggle with disabilities while in school.

Foster Care Facts

- Each year in California, over 4000 young adults exit the foster care system when they turn 21. These "emancipated foster youth" commonly leave the system without a place to live, a job, a high school diploma.
- Children First Foster Family Agency values, supports and promotes education.
- Our THP-Plus Social workers teach youth skills in budgeting, job attainment & resume building, career search and training, bill paying, cooking, cleaning, problem solving, healthy relationships and more!
- Our youth attend quarterly outings to colleges and businesses, have assistance in finding mentors, support with weekly home visits, and

weekly in-home support.

- The agency has created First Cleaning Service to extend employment opportunities for young adults while training and preparing them for successful lives and careers.
- Children First is proud to work with and mentor each of our 13 high school graduates!

My 8th grade graduation was a special evening, as I took a step into the future. For me, a foster child, it was tough being told by my acquaintances and bullies, that I was fat, ugly, annoying and stupid. This may have brought me down quite a ways, but without the support from Children First Foster Family Agency, my teachers, Sequoia school staff, and especially Granny Kay (Foster Parent Kaye Escobedo), I would not have made it.

Like William Durant spoke; "Forget past mistakes. Forget failures. Forget everything except what you're going to do now, and do it."

On my first day of 8th grade, I was extremely scared, but I was welcomed with open arms. It was all a bit much, feeling like a worthless child, and while among some, having a bad reputation. Even with my three to four suspensions and several referrals, I was still welcomed with open arms.

There's two things that I learned this year in 8th grade; the first thing is that nobody, not even the teeny, tiniest, grain in the universe is, was, or will ever be worthless. The second thing that I learned is, "You see, even with struggles or a hard life, if you try hard enough, you will succeed!"

Foster Child & 8th Grade Graduate



Children First Employee Earns Master's Degree

Engaged at 17 and married at 21, I helped support my husband through college until he received his "Doctorate Degree". I was a stay at home mother for twenty years and eventually found myself divorced with a high school diploma. I needed to be able to support myself so I decided to go to junior college and during the time I attended college, I was also trained as a school bus driver, while raising my three children.

I transferred to Simpson University and received my BA in Psychology and within the same week that I finished, I started the Master's Program at the

University of San Francisco in clinical psychology with an emphasis in marriage family therapy and professional clinical counseling.

It was important to me to be a positive role model and set an example for my three children, as well as all of the children I work with at the agency.

Reach for the stars and never give up on your dreams, your education, or your goals!

LeRae Ariagno, ITFC Support Counselor





Layton's Preschool Graduation

Fun Facts about Layton

What he wants to be when he grows up:

- Captain America

Favorite Toys:

- Hot Wheels cars

Favorite Food:

- Corn dogs
- All fruits and vegetables
- Especially broccoli
- Layton loves to travel and go on trips,. He also loves staying in hotels and going to Six Flags Discovery Kingdom.



Layton was placed on January of 2015 when he was 2 1/2 years old. The adoption was final 11 months later in November of 2015. My dream has always been to be a mom so he was my dream come true.

Layton is extremely smart, energetic and happy and loves to talk. One of Layton's many achievements in school is getting stickers almost every day for being the "big clean up guy". Layton is also very caring and is often times concerned about his classmates when they aren't feeling well. He will go out of his way to make their day brighter.

This graduation was a great celebration of all the work he had put in and the dedication of the staff at his preschool. I am extremely proud of Layton and all that he has accomplished.

Mary-Ann
Children First Foster Parent

Contact Us

Please call us for more information about our programs and services.

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If you would like to make a donation,
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