

Tom and Martha's Story

The decision to become a resource parent varies with each family. For Martha and Tom Hynes, it was a newspaper article that inspired their desire to learn more about becoming resource parents with Children's Bureau. The couple had raised four children of their own and thought fostering offered a great way to help other children and families in the community.

Children's Bureau Social Worker Brenda Leon says that Tom and Martha go above and beyond to ensure that the needs of children in their care are being met. They work to strengthen each child's academic skills, actively participate in mental health therapy sessions, and support birth family relationships. Tom and Martha have huge hearts and truly care about the children in their care. We asked Martha and Tom to describe their journey as resource parents and how it has enhanced their own lives.

CB: How did you find Children's Bureau and why did you choose to foster or foster-adopt through this agency?

My husband, Tom, and I chose to foster through Children's Bureau on the recommendation of an acquaintance who was a resource parent with Children's Bureau.

CB: What was the process of becoming a resource parent and how long did it take?

When we became approved as resource parents, we took the PRIDE training over two months because of our own scheduling conflicts. The training was followed by a family assessment. The entire process took about six months for us.

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The Hynes Family

Meet the Bubian Family

Manuel, Sandra and their two daughters made the decision to grow their family through adoption and decided that the foster/adopt route was their best option. They began the journey to become Resource Parents with Children's Bureau in 2009. Just two-months from being certified, the Bubian's received their first call to foster a baby girl, Mia, who they adopted in 2011. Over the years, Manuel and Sandra have provided over 40 foster children with a happy, safe, nurturing home where the children immediately feel comfortable and part of their family. Recently, the couple decided to adopt another little girl in need of a forever home. The family is currently in the matching process and hopes to get a call from their matching coordinator soon.

"It is such a pleasure working with the Bubian family. I get to see firsthand the commitment, dedication and love that Sandra and Manuel have as resource parents. They fully embrace all of the qualities that Children's Bureau looks for in resource parents. They have had their challenges throughout the years, but their dedication to each child is truly remarkable," remarks Children's Bureau social worker Evelyn Ruiz. Here's more about the Bubian's journey with Children's Bureau.



The Bubian Family

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CB: How has Children's Bureau helped you on this journey?

Children's Bureau has been invaluable guiding us through our journey as resource parents. The Children's Bureau social worker has been our source of information, support and our advocate.

CB: What inspired you to become resource parents and how has it changed your life?

Tom read a newspaper article written by a woman who, with her husband, was fostering to adopt. She wrote of their heartbreak after the first child they had fostered reunited with family. She cited statistics showing that the goal of the vast majority of resource parents is to adopt. However the goal of Los Angeles County is to reunite families. Tom shared the article with me. We concluded that supporting a biological family in the reunification process with a child while desperately wanting to adopt that child yourself seemed an extraordinary challenge. He pointed out to me that people like us would make the perfect resource parents: him being retired and me being semi-retired, having raised our own children, having no interest in adoption but being at a stage in our lives when we could dedicate our time and energy to children for the period of time necessary, being able to mentor and support a birth family in healthy parenting practices. Our four biological children at that time ranging in age from 21 years to 31 years gave us their unequivocal support.

Being resource parents has been all consuming. Both Tom and I have had to cut back on some of the volunteer activities in which we were engaged in the years since he retired and since I cut back on my work schedule. We do not have the freedom to travel as previously. It has been years since we had to think about hiring a babysitter just to go out to dinner. Since both of us are committed to this journey, those sacrifices are part of the deal. Overall we find being resource parents hugely rewarding. We have witnessed transformation in each child for whom we have cared. Our lives have been enriched by knowing all of our foster children and their families.

CB: How have you helped the children transition back to their families? What was that like for you?

From the beginning, we have volunteered to monitor family time with approved relatives as often as scheduling permits. We feel that the children and relatives both benefit from maximizing family time in a safe, supervised setting. We know that the foster children and their birth parents absolutely love each other. We feel that we can demonstrate good parenting techniques from which the parents can learn during the visits. We invite the birth family to join us at school events, church programs, sports or other activities in which the children are engaged. From the beginning of our relationship with the birth parents, we are clear that we are not competing with them for their children's love. We know that their children are not ours to keep. Our role is to keep the children safe, healthy, learning and, we hope, happy until they can reunify. In fact,

we are not open to adoption at all. We believe that sharing our perspective with the birth families can be very reassuring for them and helps them trust us. As reunification approaches, we try to ease the transition by increasing time including unsupervised time with the birth family as approved by the court. We make it clear to the children and their birth families that, even after reunification, we are always available to them. They have our cell phone numbers and emails. We hope to remain part of the children's lives.

CB: What activities/therapies have the children joining your family through foster care experienced?

We treat our foster children just as we treated our biological children. After we get to know one another a little bit, we figure out what kind of activities might enrich each child. We have had children in church choir, basketball leagues, AYSO soccer, YMCA summer day camp, piano lessons, tumbling classes, cub scouts, boy scouts and girl scouts. We encourage play dates with classmates or friends from the community. We have enrolled all of the 2-4 year olds in private pre-school. We have taught all of the children to enjoy the pool and ocean. At reunification all of the children over the age of 2 years have been competent, safe swimmers.

Foster children may have additional needs requiring interventions. After initial assessments, we have supported and followed through with individual and family therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, interventional preschools, wrap around services. In many cases, we have initiated tutoring to catch up to grade level. We have advocated for IEP (Individualized Education Program) assessments as indicated.

CB: What surprised you about the birth parents/families?

The birth parents and families are just people doing the best they can. They may have made mistakes but it is not our role to judge them. Our role is to support them. We have been surprised at how much the birth parents really do love their children and how much the children really do love them despite whatever went on prior to coming into foster care.

CB: How did you manage your and other family member's feelings when a child goes to live with another family?

Since the goal from the outset is reunification, when reunification happens there is a happy sense of a job well done. We miss the individual children and the routines we created with them. They will always have a part of our hearts. We hope to stay in touch and see them. We feel that the emotions may be somewhat similar to a teacher at the end of the year when students get promoted, he/she cherished the time they had together in that grade but at the end of the year, if the students do well, the teacher sends the students on, hopes the best for them in their lives and that they will come back and visit.

We did have one situation where the foster children did not reunite but were separated and moved to two homes that might offer permanence. Tom and I had more difficulty dealing with our emotions then because of the way it was handled

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CB: How did you find Children's Bureau and why did you choose to foster or foster-adopt through this agency?

My husband and I were driving down the freeway and saw a Children's Bureau billboard so we went to one of the information meetings. We learned that there were a lot of kids in need of a home and love so we decided to be a part of Children's Bureau.

CB: What was the process of becoming a resource parent and how long did it take?

The process took us around two months and everything moved along relatively smoothly.

CB: How has Children's Bureau helped you on this journey?

For us, the support we receive from the social workers is nice. They are really there for you and the kids when you need them...seven days a week at any time.

CB: What inspired you to become resource parents and how has it changed your life?

It was always our dream to have a big family and it has changed our life for the better because we have learned different cultures and helped many families.

CB: How have you helped the children transition back to their families? What was that like for you?

We help them understand that they are in our home to protect them and give them love. About a week before they leave, we talk to them and explain that they are getting their room fixed back at their parents/grandparents home and they always get excited. We get happy too because we think family reunification is always good.

CB: What activities/therapies have the children joining your family through foster care experienced?

We have gone to places they've never been to like Disneyland, Universal Studios, the movies, and we often attend Children's Bureau activities.

CB: What surprised you about the birth parents/families?

Sometimes the birth parent/families are upset with us and sometimes they are happy to meet us. Eventually, when they see how happy their children are with us, they are grateful.

CB: How did you manage your and other family member's feelings when a child goes to live with another family?

It is always really hard and sad but we know our mission is to take care of kids that need love.

CB: What do you do to prepare yourselves for the child leaving?

Positive thoughts and pray for the children to have good lives.

CB: What advice would you give others who are considering being resource parents?

It's a learning experience because every child has different needs but most importantly they need lots of love.

CB: What is the greatest thing you have learned from fostering?

That no matter how old, race, religion that child/ child's background is, their happiness and the love they show you is the same.

CB: Anything else you would like to say?

We are blessed to be a part of Children's Bureau. We also hope to keep working together to bring more joy to our family. And thank you to Children's Bureau, we are happy to have our biggest blessing with us, our daughter.

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without proper preparation for the children or us. We leaned on the support of Children's Bureau, our family and friends. As hard as it was on us, we know that it was infinitely harder on the children, the innocent ones we try to protect.

When we are back in our empty nest, Tom and I throw our extra energy into cleaning the house up, organizing, sorting, storing. We usually take a break for a couple of months then jump back in again with a new set of siblings.

CB: What do you do to prepare yourselves for the child leaving?

In preparation for reunification, we spend time with the children reviewing their favorite memories of their time with us. We put the final touches on the Life Books that go with the children as a document of their life with us. We gather our family and friends for a farewell party to celebrate them.

CB: What advice would you give others who are considering being resource parents?

Talking to someone who has been a resource parent about his/her experience is probably the best advice I would have

for someone who is considering becoming a resource parent. The information session at Children's Bureau is a good place to start.

Tom and I have a young friend who is finishing the process of resource family approval with Children's Bureau. I have enjoyed having her reach out to me with some of her questions and concerns as well as keeping me posted with her progress.

CB: What is the greatest thing you have learned from fostering?

Through fostering, I have discovered and been encouraged by the overwhelming support for what Tom and I are doing within our community: from our families and friends to our church family to our schools and school district to our medical community.

Meet Children's Bureau's Foster Care & Adoption Family Support Social Workers

We are delighted to introduce you to our new Children's Bureau Family Support Social Workers, Samantha Padilla, MSW and Meghan McGill, MSW. Both Samantha and Meghan are joining our team with child welfare experience to serve our resource parents. Samantha and Meghan will be providing support to our resource parents post children joining their families when they are faced with challenges such as the pending reunification of a child or when a child has reunified. Foster P.R.I.D.E./Adopt P.R.I.D.E. pre-service trainings will be facilitated by these new social workers under the guidance of Cindy Stogel, long-time P.R.I.D.E. Facilitator and Foster Care/Adoption Coordinator. Samantha and Meghan will be conducting pre-assessments with applicant families, facilitating support groups, developing a resource parent advisory group, and creating regional networks of families connecting with each other. Samantha's service area includes Antelope Valley, San Fernando Valley, and the Santa Clarita Valley. Meghan's service area includes Los Angeles, the Westside, South Bay, Orange County, San Gabriel Valley, Riverside, and San Bernardino. Samantha and Meghan will be reaching out to current resource parents to gather feedback on their needs and how to increase Children's Bureau's services.



Meghan, Samantha and Cindy

Independent Domestic Family Assessments Now Available

Children's Bureau now offers the service of completing independent domestic family assessments (adoption home studies) for families adopting outside of Children's Bureau. For more information or to refer a family, please contact Cindy Stogel at (213) 342-0117.

May is National Foster Parent Appreciation Month!

Foster Parent Appreciation Month in May provides a wonderful opportunity for Children's Bureau staff to acknowledge, honor and recognize the ongoing work of our Resource Parents who make a difference every day in the lives of children in foster care. We greatly appreciate and applaud all of the hard work and patience it takes for you to stabilize and nurture a traumatized child. Your dedication, patience and willingness to help a vulnerable child to thrive is truly admirable.

Foster children join Children's Bureau families on a daily basis. Many times they arrive in crisis, with no pajamas or tooth brushes and crying for their birth families. Children's Bureau Resource Parents step up to the challenge of helping traumatized children feel safe and nurtured, while promoting positive memories of their birth families, whatever their circumstance. Our Resource Parents understand that by promoting a positive view of the child's family, the child may thereby view him/herself as a positive extension of that family.

On a 24-hour, day and night basis, our Resource Parents make a difference in the lives of children. In the short term, a child's immediate daily needs are met. In the long term, a child's life has been impacted for the better during a critical time in their life. Resource parents tell us of the many heartfelt rewards they gain when helping a child. The best one, however, is knowing they played a vital role in helping that child to become a caring, productive adult.

Find More Families Like Your Family for \$500 Per Referral!

Children's Bureau is proud of our excellent resource (foster and foster-adopt) families. And we want more families like you, who are caring, compassionate, committed, child-focused, concerned, and comforting. Join us in developing and supporting more resource families to help children of all ages and their families in our communities by referring them to foster or foster-adopt with Children's Bureau. When your friends, neighbors, and families apply, tell them to write Your Name for the Referral Source. When the family becomes approved you will receive \$250.00. And when the first child joins their family, you will receive an additional \$250.00! Referrals are our best resource for finding quality families, so please tell all about the value of fostering and foster-adopting with Children's Bureau. For more information, please contact your Children's Bureau worker.

Parent Socials/Support Groups Offered

Children's Bureau provides parent socials for our resource families. These groups provide a great opportunity for you to meet, learn and share your experiences with other resource families. The ultimate goal is for families to build lasting friendships that flourish outside of the group. All Approved resource parents receive two training hours for attending a meeting. We are currently offering support groups/parent socials in Palmdale and Los Angeles.

Interested in learning more about becoming a Children's Bureau resource parent in our family foster care and foster-adopt program? Please give us a call at (800) 730-3933 or (661) 272-9996 or visit us at <https://www.all4kids.org/program/foster-care/>