

Making a difference

One child at a time

By **ANDREW CLARK** Valley Press Staff Writer

In a small office along Palmdale Boulevard, a group of social workers spend their days making families.

The Children's Bureau office in Palmdale, an agency that places youngsters into foster and adoptive homes as well as reuniting families, offers a chance to welcome foster kids into their home at an informational meeting once a month.

Bernadette Boylan, foster care and adoptions supervisor at the Palmdale office, explained why the monthly meetings at the Palmdale office are generally the most crowded in the area.

"There's a lot more people staying home," Boylan said. "We have a lot of stay-at-home parents who have the ability and flexibility."

In addition to Palmdale, the Children's Bureau has two offices in Lancaster.

Nationally, adoption and foster rates are on a downward trend. A survey of 2012 data released last year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found nearly 400,000 children to be in the foster and adoption care system, but in 2003, there were approximately 520,000 in the system, resulting in a 23 percent decrease.

According to Children's Bureau, more than 56,000 youngsters in California are in the foster care system. Since July 2012, the bureau's Palmdale office has finalized 27 adoptions, 14 of which were in the Antelope Valley, and certified 31 foster families, 17 of which were from the Valley.

In order for a family to become certified as a foster family, Boylan explained the process requires an application filed after an informational meeting, an additional class taught over three Saturdays, CPR and first aid certification, three to four visits and interviews by bureau officials, and a Live Scan background check and fingerprinting.

Boylan said the first meeting usually remedies attendees' pre-conceived notions of what foster care involves.

"That informational meeting is the chance to bring reality to it," Boylan said. "It's not the meeting that slices people away, it's the paper work. Nine times out of ten, people take an application."

One such person that completed the process and has been nurturing infants and toddlers for the past seven-and-a-half years



Jeanne Crittenden, a foster parent, left, and Bernadette Boylan, Foster care and Adoption Supervisor, both smile for a portrait at the Children's Bureau in Palmdale.

CHRISTINA RAMOS/Valley Press

is Jeanne Crittenden, who explained how she was drawn to the agency.

"I myself was adopted," Crittenden said. "I've always worked with infants and my education was early childhood education. Since my husband travels, I wanted to do something out of my home again."

Crittenden and her husband, a pilot, tried unsuccessfully for years to be a foster family, but they were hindered by frequently moving as a result of her husband being in the Air Force. Once he left the military, they tried again.

The couple has had 38 babies in their home since their certification for being foster parents and often mentor younger families. Currently, they have a 4 month old boy and two infant sisters, one 9 months old and the other 19 months old.

Crittenden noted that she keeps in contact with some of the children she has cared for.

"One family that we see once a month calls us aunt and uncle," she said.

While the infants tend to not stay in her home for years, Crittenden said she sees her role in a specific way.

"I'm moving them on to where they're supposed to be," she said.

Crittenden said her history with adoption has left an overall positive impression.

"I see adoption as a blessing for the children and the entire family," she said.

Crittenden added that the biggest pleasure of being a foster parent to infants is their infectious happiness.

"The joy is so fulfilling, they're such a blessing and the love that they give back is rewarding," she said.

The Children's Bureau will have an informational meeting from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 8, at its office, 1529 East Palmdale Blvd., Suite 210. For details, call (661) 208-4212, (661) 272-9996 or visit www.all4kids.org.