

# Better Living

## Family Care Network provides help for troubled families

By Melissa Chavez  
Paso Robles Gazette

What motivates people to open their homes—and their lives—to care for other people's children?

Six years ago, Templeton residents Jon and Laura Marsh made a commitment to offer themselves as foster parents. "We are really compelled, out of compassion, to take kids who are hurting, rejected and thrown away by society. They are told they will never change," Jon Marsh said.

The Marshes turned to Family Care Network (FCN). The nonprofit organization seeks to "create a 'family centered' treatment program as an alternative to group home or institutionalized care." FCN collaborates with other agencies, such as Department of Social Services, Probation, and Mental Health, to help families in crisis through short- and long-term foster care, family intervention programs, education and training.

Some children placed with FCN have been abused or neglected, while others behave out of control or are troubled, despite their parents' efforts to help them. Often, children have had some contact through the juvenile probation system before they are placed through the Network.

Some families care for younger children, while some prefer to accept teenagers or pregnant teens who want to keep their babies and need housing. Foster parents may or may not have children at home of their own, while some are single parents.

Today Marsh and his wife are caregivers to three boys, ages seven, 12, and a 13-year-old who arrived two months ago; two have been diagnosed with attention deficit (and hyperactivity) disorders.

The Marshes are willing to make significant changes to qualify for what is a "sub-acute" home, which provides shelter for up to six children. They plan to receive children experiencing intense problems, including run-aways and those with mental disorders or sui-



Photo courtesy the Jones family

Susan and Larry Jones with their kids.

cidal tendencies, and devote the time necessary to do it. Like Laura, Jon plans to quit his full-time job in order to work together at home tending foster children.

"Reunification with the parents" is what the Marshes would like to see, but until then, they offer "a hand extended to them," said Jon, adding it is not uncommon to keep in touch with previous children they have fostered. "They need love, someone who will talk with them and spend time with them," said Laura.

Atascadero residents Susan and Larry Jones foster four boys. Three are 16-year-olds, and the fourth, who will graduate high school in June, is 17. Susan, who initially began fostering children ten years ago, married husband

Larry (three years ago) after being widowed.

Susan said she made it clear to Larry how important fostering continued to be to her, and was thrilled to learn that her husband-to-be was more than like-minded. In fact, Larry now concentrates life on full-time fathering while Susan goes to her outside job during the day. She is quick to give her fostered sons credit for their share of contributing to the family.

"The kids we have are just wonderful. Everyone has chores to do...their own laundry, ride their own bikes to school. We teach independent life skills, like shopping and balancing a checkbook. We wouldn't do this if it was awful! (Fostering) gives us an outlet for love, attention and encouragement."

Jones offers hope to others who would consider foster parenting, saying, "Once (children) find parents and begin to feel secure, they start relaxing. They'll respond...and they show consideration toward each other. They blossom."

As to why children, who will "act out" in their own homes, often do well in foster care, Jones says kids often just tend to "behave better at other people's houses," and that "foster parents don't have the emotional push-buttons and issues that parents do. Sometimes they just need a break from the stress of what is going on at home."

Family Care Network is appreciated for its education and support to foster families.

Says Laura Marsh, "I've heard stories about some agencies where you have to wait for someone to call you. (FCN) goes the extra mile. When you need a break, they're there...for problem-solving or home visits."

FCN provides monetary reimbursements for assistance, as well as clothing allowances and supplemental funds for activities, such as summer camp.

Patricia Taylor, manager of clerical services, has worked with FCN for nine years. "We strive to uphold a high, moral standard of integrity," she said, "using the principals and character of Christ (as a model)." Taylor said that while there are resources available, such as grants and other agencies, Family Care Network relies on donations to meet the needs of troubled families.

FCN offers a myriad of services in addition to basic and intensive therapeutic foster care, such as The Family Intervention Project, Wraparound Intensive Services, Therapeutic Behavioral Studies (24-hour in-home counseling), Delinquency Prevention and Treatment Services, with new programs on the horizon.

Department heads from various county agencies, including law enforcement and county government, serve as advisory board members to FCN.

More foster families are needed to meet the demand of children. Susan Jones explained that any qualified person who loves children can parent, whether they are two-income families, single parents or those who "stay at home."

"We're not saints. We're not exceptional people. It's been a blessing," said Jones. Without hesitation, this is the most rewarding thing we've ever done in our lives."



### Creative

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### Art Association to