

READY FOR LIFE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



WWW.READYFORLIFE.NET

READY FOR LIFE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY

Ready for Life Foster Family Agency is located in Redding, CA. We are committed to helping provide safe, loving homes for foster children in Northern California.

Better Choices, Inc./Ready for Life, a private non-profit Foster Family Agency, has been committed to helping provide safe, loving homes to hundreds of foster children in Northern California since September 2000.

It is evident that Rick and Nena Panza, founders of Ready for Life, have a profound desire to see the children of our communities succeed. Ready for Life was established to provide children with vocational, social, and life skills while providing a safe haven for personal growth and physical care. Ready for Life Foster Family Agency is a faith-based organization, and as such, strives to support our families, children, and staff with daily prayer, guidance, and encouragement, as we endeavor to raise these precious children together.

As a private foster family agency, Ready for Life receives calls to place children from counties all over Northern California. This includes, but is not limited to Shasta, Tehama, Trinity, and Siskiyou County. We have families in Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity County.



LETTER FROM CO-FOUNDER & CEO NENA PANZA



As I reflect on 2020 I remember thinking to myself, "What an exciting year this will be!" Little did I know things were going to become extremely challenging, overwhelming at times, and for some, life changing. If you can relate, just imagine how the children and families that we serve felt. In just one small moment in time, our resource families were being told they had to somehow stay home with all of their children and the foster kids that they serve. They were to figure out how to help with and maintain all of the schoolwork while worrying about their own lives. Jobs were being lost, schools were being closed and no one saw any hope - just fear. At *Ready for Life* we worked remotely for a time, but maintained constant contact with and supported all of our families and children. I was thankful for the hard work and flexibility of our employees during this time. Even through the chaos, loss of life, layoffs from work, closure of schools . . . toilet paper not found, even through all of that, I had a peace that passes all understanding. I knew that for my family and I, my God was in control and taking care of us even in the darkest moments. In 2021 I still cling to that promise and I will continue to pray for our families, children and employees as we maneuver this year's ongoing changes. Last but not least, I am so thankful for all of the donors and volunteers who continued to support us in any way that they could and I am forever grateful for our Board of Directors who consistently hold to the truth, mission and values that Rick and I first started this agency on so many years ago.

LETTER FROM BOARD PRESIDENT LONNIE JULIUS

In 2020, *Ready for Life* was faced with its fair share of challenges as was the rest of the world due to Covid-19. The entire team adapted and overcame any and all obstacles presented in order to best serve our children and families. As the world changed, the board changed too. We proudly welcomed new board members and with grief and heavy hearts said goodbye to others. We rejoiced with staff as they welcomed new babies into their lives. Vision and execution in the face of opposition was one of the greatest strengths witnessed this past year. Expanding not only the services, but ministry of *Ready for Life* was a key accomplishment. I am proud of the ever thriving community connections we have established and the respect of fellow child advocates. Our children are flourishing in home environments with supportive families that are given the tools needed to navigate even the most challenging of situations. As we saw increase in placements and adoption, we also witnessed increased hope in the eyes of our kids. The longevity of intentional leadership is the cornerstone of *Ready for Life*.



HISTORY

Better Choices, Inc./Ready for Life is a private, non-profit agency, founded in September of 2000. The idea was conceived after the founder, Nena Panza, along with her husband, Rick, had been foster parents for approximately ten years in addition to being group home parents to teen boys. After the realization that traditional foster care seemed to have a few flaws, Ready for Life was made a reality. In an effort to proceed with our mission, Ready for Life went under the umbrella of a larger non-profit to start its foster family agency. In July of 2003, Ready for Life Foster Family Agency decided to venture out on its own. With the help of many community members, our own Board members, and Tehama County (our support county), we began the journey.

On September 11, 2003, Better Choices, Inc./Ready for Life was licensed by the State of California Department of Social

Services, Community Care Licensing unit. In 2017, we contracted with Tehama County Child Protective Services and Probation departments to completed RFA assessments. We also were approved as a Resource Family Approval program in early 2017. Additionally, we received accreditation from Council on Accreditation in 2017 and were renewed in December 2021.

GOALS

The primary goal is to meet the needs of children when out of home placement is necessary. We rely on our resource families to provide clear examples of a healthy, productive lifestyle. They teach children boundaries, choices, consequences, and social skills. In addition, Ready for Life requests that our families work intensively with our youth ages 15-21 years of age to give them the opportunity to be as fully prepared to live on their own as is possible.



VISION

To ensure every child has the opportunity for stable, life-long relationships and hope-filled expectations.



MISSION

Fostering hope and transforming lives, one child at a time

VALUES

God's Unconditional Love
Hope | Honesty | Integrity
Family Relationships
Safety | Community

PHILOSOPHY

Our logo is a symbol of transformation that a child in need can experience with the help and encouragement of the right resource family. The circle is broken, symbolizing the "breaking of a dysfunctional life cycle." The butterfly shows the spiritual transformation from within that they can experience. When combined, these symbols create a logo that represents our philosophy.

At Ready for Life, we believe treatment should be administered cooperatively between the Administrator, social workers, family workers, therapists, resource family, the foster child, and their county social worker. If possible, the child's biological family should be incorporated into the treatment plan as well. In addition to our therapeutic social work, counseling services will be made available to foster children when deemed necessary. Ready for Life resource families will be encouraged to participate in the child's treatment. The social worker will be responsible for adequately informing both the foster child and resource parents of confidentiality issues.



Foster Family Agency

Resource parents will be requested to document behaviors that are of concern after the child has met with their counselor. The resource parents will then be asked to provide this documentation if the social worker deems it is necessary.

In those cases where the biological family is involved in the child's treatment or a reunification plan is in effect, resource parents will be required to both support and encourage this process. It is our philosophy at Ready for Life that whenever possible, it is in the child's best interest to maintain contact with their biological family.



HIGHLIGHTS

NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF COVID

2020 proved to be a year of great challenge, however it also presented us an opportunity for growth as we navigated how to best serve our children and families during a difficult season. We learned to overcome the technical challenges of working remotely and came up with creative solutions to foster connection in a world of virtual interactions. Our families showed great love and dedication to serving our most vulnerable children while managing school closures and distance learning, facilitating family visitation and sudden lack of known schedules and routines.

READY FOR LIFE HOST HOMES

In January of 2020, our agency was approached about starting a Host Homes program in Shasta County. After creating and presenting a proposal to the NorCal Continuum of Care, our program idea was included in a collaborative grant application to the state. In August, we received confirmation that our program was chosen to receive an allocation from the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program. We officially launched our program in January of 2021, and housed our first four young adults that same month!

INCREASED DONATIONS

As an agency, we experienced an increase in generosity from our community and donors! Over \$10,000 was raised on Giving Tuesday, our children's Christmas wishes were fulfilled in excess and the agency's Amazon Charity List has been consistently shared and contributed towards. We've added new monthly donors and are excited to see what next year holds.

“Ready for Life lives up to its name. All along the process each person I met and worked with helped me to feel ready for life as a foster/ adoptive parent.”

– RFL RESOURCE PARENT

For more highlights, check out our website:

WWW.READYFORLIFE.NET



WELCOME: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We welcomed two new board members who deeply care about the mission, vision and values of *Ready for Life*.



Susie Baugh is an Anderson native, an Anderson High School graduate, and currently serves as the Mayor for the City of Anderson. She is a small business owner, has been very active in assorted school committees, was the vice-chair while on the Anderson Planning Commission, and a member of the Anderson Chamber of Commerce. Susie is co-founder of the Anderson Community Garden which supplies tens of thousands of pounds of fresh produce to food banks, seniors and those in need throughout the South County at no cost. She currently serves as the Director of Women's Ministries at Anderson Community Church, and is a mentor for junior and senior high school girls. Susie joined the Ready for Life Foster Family Agency Board in 2020. She and her husband, Les, were licensed foster parents for many years and adopted their youngest daughter from foster care.



Ray Holden recently started an employment opportunity with Interstate oil. Ray graduated Shasta College in 2019 with a certificate in Ag. Equipment operations and maintenance. Ray grew up in the foster care system and has had to overcome hurdles in his life to become successful. He is the father of 2 girls and 2 boys." As a child that grew up in many foster homes. I hope to bring new insight to the table from someone who has been there before. I am so grateful to be a part of Ready for Life Foster Family Agency board, spreading hope to children and families in the surrounding areas."

A YEAR IN REVIEW



2020 was a crazy year for everyone. We're all still trying to figure out what happened. Here's the numbers.



NEW RFL RESOURCE FAMILIES APPROVED FOR FOSTER CARE



CHILDREN ADOPTED INTO LOVING FAMILIES



213 CALLS FOR CHILDREN NEEDING HOMES

49% OF THOSE CALLS WERE FOR TEENS

35 CHILDREN PLACED WITH RESOURCE/FOSTER FAMILIES AT READY FOR LIFE FFA

ADOPTIONS



We are the Van Dyke's, Brock, Ashley, Candice (15), Makenzie (5), Brandt (4), and Levi (11 months). We began the foster process in 2016 and we're certified in 2017. We originally were wanting to be the bridge, a helping hand, for parents to get on the right track and reunite with their kiddos. Then we got the call. We were told she was sassy, argued a lot and that she was disruptive in her current home. Brock went to meet to her and expected to walk in and see a preteen with a grumpy look on her face - arms crossed, eyes rolling. What he saw couldn't have been more opposite. He saw a frail, sad, scared little girl that needed love.

Candice moved in with us on September 12th, 2017. Now don't get me wrong - we had moments we were not proud of over the following three years. But, from day one, it was abundantly clear that God put her in her "forever home" with us. We realized that adoption was the only road we were willing to let our story go towards with Candice.

It was later that year when we first presented the idea to Candice about formerly adopting her. We told her that our intentions were to provide permanency and give her a forever loving family. Her response was underwhelming. She was evasive in answering questions about adoption and seemed to act out even more when it was brought up. We at first were a little offended by all of the hesitation. But we kept coming back to the following thought. "Adopting a teen, isn't like adopting a baby. We can't just say, 'Okay, this is what we are doing, you are stuck with us!' It's more like a marriage proposal. We want you to be our daughter and she has to say, I DO."

We went through a lot over the next several months, including counseling and many sleepless nights. Then, out of the blue, on May 16th, 2020, Candice came into the front room before bed and told Ashley and I that she had a present for us for my birthday. She said, "I am ready to be adopted." All the tears, all the pain, all of the fear was washed away. We immediately called our social workers and we were able to finalize the adoption of Candice Grace Van Dyke on August 12th of 2020.

God is good. God is kind. God is in control. We are not special people, just willing. We just made our lives available to a child who needed love, and now our family is more complete than we ever knew it would be.

ADOPTIONS



Patrick was adopted and became a big brother in June 2020.



Nova was adopted in September 2020. He loves swimming, reading, arts & crafts, science and adventures with his Dad.



The Kirk Family adopted Cali & Nate in August 2020 & Cheyenne in December 2020.

ADOPTIONS

Zachary (upper right) was adopted in June 2020. Congratulations Irwin Family!

Trendon (bottom left) was adopted in July 2020!

Brayden (bottom right) was adopted in September 2020. He loves dinosaurs, fishing, and riding his dirt bike!



BIO FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The Tuckerman Family

It always starts off with "The Call" (humorously, I have yet to get a call for what I expect). We were leaning towards a girl younger than my son, but we said yes to a boy two years older than him instead. Turns out, he is a great fit for our family! Now comes the cool part!

This kiddo came with an "About Me" page he and the Intake SW had filled out together! It included important information about things he likes, who the important people in his life are, what he's scared of and how to comfort him, favorite foods, etc! WOW, this was a game changer for us! It was SO helpful to learn important things about this guy from the start and it gave us something to talk about, right off the bat.

We were provided contacts for his family (that were already approved to connect with him) and also his teacher - what a goldmine she was! She let me know where he was in his education and gave me helpful advice on how to get him help. She met up with us and gave him a blanket that he still uses and reminds him of her. She had the class write him cards and mailed them to our house! For his birthday - which was only a month after placement - he received handmade cards from all his classmates/friends from school! We were approved to plan a party to include his family, which his SW agreed to supervise, and 30 friends and family showed up to celebrate his birthday at the park! I was able to meet his extended family and get to know his mom more. He had such a special time with all his family and friends around him and it was beautiful to watch! He has a group photo from that day hanging on his wall. As a resource parent, it is really helpful when we talk about his family to know who is who and how they are connected.

Our kiddo's oldest brother is 25 and has been very involved with him since he came into our home.

He started connecting with phone calls and those went so well that we set up a play date after he was approved for visits. Our first visit he did nothing but focus on his little brother and play whatever he wanted. It was wonderful to see them engage in a healthy and playful way!



At this point in this unpredictable journey, it looks like parents may not be able to get their son back. His brother is eager to take care of him and is starting the process to be approved for placement. We are eager to support him as he makes the decision and starts the process of becoming his caregiver. About a year ago, a friend of ours asked if we would consider fostering one of her grand babies. Of course we said, "Yes!" however the baby went to be with their other siblings. We were so excited about the opportunity to foster a little with established family connections because it meant that that child would still have a part of their family involved in their life while with us! It got us thinking of just how sweet this situation would be and how it might have made things better for some of our previous kiddos - and their parents.

When we received a list of people he valued it was an opportunity and choice to see if we could connect with them. It helped that some were his teachers and others were family that his social worker had already approved contact with. Others were not so healthy and it was so helpful to have the support of his social worker to supervise contact when appropriate. Over the past several months, we've been able to help facilitate phone calls with his parents and adult siblings. We have even had his brother and family over for dinner to start to get to know each other better and help our kiddo feel more comfortable with all of us getting along and being on the same page. It is *so exciting* to have other family members desire to invest in this little guy's life! We love it!

"WE WERE SO EXCITED ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY TO FOSTER A LITTLE WITH ESTABLISHED FAMILY CONNECTIONS, BECAUSE IT MEANT THAT THAT CHILD WOULD STILL HAVE A PART OF THEIR FAMILY INVOLVED IN THEIR LIFE WHILE WITH US"

"C" was known for her attitude and goofiness: she was witty and smart and above all, *had a really good heart*

She loved Pink Floyd, Billie Eilish, gingersnap cookies, all things tie-dye, art & popsicles.



"C" was placed with the Burch family in August 2019 and shortly thereafter diagnosed with significant health challenges. Ruth and her family never faltered in their commitment to seeing "C" through her treatment and recovery. Through it all, with the support of the Burch family, "C" planned for a future beyond the hospital and foster care.

The world truly is a better place because she was in it.

YOU ARE DEARLY LOVED & MISSED



Susan Guiton was a member of our Board of Directors since July of 2017.

Her happy positive spirit, a heart for the children of *Ready for Life*, and fervent prayer for the children and families we serve will be remembered. At times she wouldn't be feeling well but still attended the meetings because she wanted to stay involved and hear about the kids. We will forever be grateful for her knowledge, positivity, smile, concern for our families and children, and her friendship on our board. She will be greatly missed!

A NEW PROGRAM

The Host Homes Program is an innovative, grassroots approach to addressing our community's homelessness crisis. By pairing transition-aged youth (ages 18-24) with community members who have underutilized spaces in their homes, youth not only obtain access to short-term shelter, but are also able to build meaningful connections to caring adults in their community. While staying in host homes, youth guests are able to engage in the long-term housing search safely and more successfully and save any income earned while being hosted toward their future.



READY FOR LIFE
HOST HOMES



Short-term Host Homes are an intervention for youth who are currently experiencing homelessness for any variety of reasons, including but not limited to family conflict, poverty, gender identity and sexual orientation. The goal of short-term host homes is to provide a safe, temporary, welcoming space for up to six months where the young person has time to repair their relationships with self-identified family or make decisions about other housing options with the support of a caring housing case manager.

GIVING TUESDAY

During this year's North State Giving Tuesday event, generous people like you declared that philanthropy is resilient and that nothing can touch our region's giving spirit.



Amid a global pandemic that has caused so much hardship, thousands of kindhearted community members rallied behind the nonprofits that make the northstate healthier, stronger, and more vibrant.

Thank you for your part in supporting *Ready for Life Foster Family Agency* and *Ready for Life Host Homes* this past Giving Tuesday!

GRANTS RECEIVED

Due to COVID-19, several grant proposals were unable to be processed for their intended purpose. We look forward to pursuing these funding opportunities in the future!



DONORS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

T & S DVBE INC - Peery Family Chiropractic - Pacific, Gas & Electric - APEX Technology - The Harvest Company - The Pizza Factory, Shasta Lake - In-N-Out - Dr. Lensink - Shasta School of Cosmetology - Shasta County Office of Education - Clothing Revival - Monthly, Annual & In-Kind Donors

GIVING TREE

Thank you to the patients of Peery Family Chiropractic and the customers of The Pizza Factory, Shasta Lake for sponsoring Christmas for all of our foster children. Your donations provided many children the JOY of Christmas this holiday season!



SHASTA
COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION



Nathaniel C. Peery
DOCTOR OF CHIROPRACTIC



THANK YOU,

IT'S AN HONOR TO DO THIS WITH YOU.

Every year we are blown away by the stories of each child that comes into care and their journey. We meet incredible families that wouldn't say they are special in any way other than their willingness to say yes. They say yes to hard things, yes to the mess, all for the benefit of one child to feel loved and safe. We feel grateful to get to partner with families and counties in Northern California and we just want to wanted to extended a big thank you. Thank you to all of the volunteers who who whatever is needed that day to support the staff and families.

A big thank you to our monthly donors. In a world that is constantly changing and fluctuating, you guys are the constant we need the most.

Every person plays such a key role in seeing our community flourish. Thanks for playing your part.

Find us on



@readyforliferedding



@readyforlifefosterfamilyagency

to get regular updates about what's
happening at RFL!

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