



Local Nurses' Hearts Beat for Foster Kids

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L to R: Avery Maxson, 2 yrs., Amanda Maxson, Shaun Maxson, Elijah Maxson 4 yrs.

Life-long healthcare professionals inspire with touching stories of foster parenting and adoption

VENTURA COUNTY, Calif. — Ventura County resident and foster parent Sandra Chronis has always had a special place in her heart for babies. The labor and delivery nurse made a career out of welcoming newborns into the world and caring for them and their mothers in their first moments of life. It was in the hospital nursery that Chronis' heart was first opened to the idea of foster care.

"I would see foster parents come in to care for the children who couldn't go home with their biological families," recalls Chronis, "and I knew I wanted to help." Chronis began her foster parenting journey with Foster VC Kids in May 2011 and since that time has opened her home to over 15 foster children, many of whom have been medically sensitive in a variety of ways. Sandra's training and experience as a nurse have allowed her to feel more comfortable caring for children in unique medical situations, but she doesn't believe such expertise is necessary to be a good foster parent.

"If you have room in your heart you are needed," says Chronis. "All these kids need is to be accepted and loved. If you can give them that, you can be a foster parent." The vast majority of Sandra's foster children have been adopted or placed in relative care, but she has adopted one four year old boy and is awaiting the finalization of her second adoption, another four year old boy whose chronic kidney disease has required several surgeries and almost daily dialysis treatments.

"For everything he's gone through," Chronis says of her soon-to-be son, "he's such an amazing, happy little boy."

Currently, Ventura County has over 1,000 children and youth in need of support, guidance, and hope to help them

thrive while separated from their families of origin. Foster VC Kids is asking members of the community to open their hearts to these children by attending their inspirational Open Hearts Town Hall Meeting on Saturday February 25th beginning at 10am at the Ventura County Health Care Agency. A moving panel of foster parents, former foster youth, health care professionals, and foster care advocates will speak about the state of foster care in Ventura County and the many ways to open your heart and support local foster children and youth in need.

The Open Heart Town Hall panel will include foster parent Amanda Maxson, another local nurse who says foster care is something that has always been on her heart. Now going on their fourth year as a resource family, Amanda and her husband Shaun have fostered five children. The couple adopted their very first placement, a son now four years old, who battled a congenital heart defect as an infant.

"Being a nurse gave me the confidence to accept a medically fragile child," recalled Amanda, who also believes her professional role helped prepare her to advocate for her foster children.

"As a nurse, part of my job is to advocate for my patients," she said. "So much of the role of a foster parent is to advocate for the children while they're in your care; to identify their needs and help them get the services to meet those needs." While the Maxsons have cared for several children with medical needs, Amanda stresses that not all of those needs are intimidating health conditions.

"In many cases they're just behind on immunizations or dental appointments," she said.

Amanda and Shaun have a saying: "Love grows children." They have seen first-hand the impact their support has on the children they care for.

"I see so much change in these kids in just the short amounts of time that we have them," says Amanda. "I know a lot of people say it would be too hard to let them go, but these kids still deserve to feel valued and loved and to know what family looks like. Just because it's hard doesn't mean it's not worth it." Anyone interested in learning more about how to help Ventura County's foster youth is encouraged to attend the Foster VC Kids Open Hearts Town Hall Meeting or visit www.fostervckids.org.

The Ventura County Health Care Agency is located at 2240 E. Gonzales Road, in Oxnard.

About Ventura County Human Services Agency, Foster VC Kids Ventura County Human Services Agency (VCHSA) strengthens families, supports self-sufficiency and promotes safety, health, and well-being. All of their service areas operate and perform at the highest level to meet the needs of individuals, families, and the community by providing assistance, aid, and protection for foster youth and beyond. VCHSA demonstrates the ability to work in multicultural environments and ensures that policies, programs, and actions communicate respect for the dignity of all people. Visit www.fostervckids.org for more information.

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