



PRESS RELEASE

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MIRAMAR MOM FOSTERS HOPE AND CHANGE FOR TROUBLED TEENS

PLANTATION, FL – Most people look forward to the day that their children are past their teen years. So why would a single mother with two teen sons in the home choose to bring two more teen boys into her home? Valerie Etkins, a resident of Miramar, has wanted to foster or adopt children for as long as she can remember. She recalls being a child herself when she was touched by movies about children in foster care and became determined to one day help children in tough situations. In November of 2007 Valerie decided it was time to realize her dream of helping youth in foster care and called ChildNet's Foster Home Recruitment Hotline which linked her with the enhanced foster care agency, National Youth Advocate Program (NYAP).

NYAP trains, licenses and manages foster homes for youth that are medically fragile, youth that have difficult behaviors, youth that have a recent history of or current problem with substance abuse, and youth that are gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, or questioning. Valerie became an enhanced foster parent in March of 2007 and has since taken five teens with substance abuse and/or behavior issues into her home. She says that although it's not always easy, it is always very rewarding. "The best part of fostering these boys is seeing the positive change in them that comes from being in a loving, understanding home," says Valerie. They learn to trust, to love and to succeed in school and relationships. The most challenging part is when the boys first come into her home and she needs to make a connection with them and break through their walls. But she always does and she sees the complete transformation, making everything worthwhile. One of the boys in her home was failing his classes when he came to her house, already two grades behind in school from his past experiences, and now he is on the honor roll and football team.

Valerie states that even though she is a parent to two teen boys and an adult daughter, she would not have been prepared to be a foster parent without the wonderful training and support she receives from NYAP. "Everything they teach you in training really happens," recalls Valerie, "and NYAP is always there to answer questions or offer support." For anyone thinking about fostering, Valerie says "Definitely become a foster parent because it is very rewarding." Prior to fostering she advises that the foster parents make sure everyone living in the home understands the children's history so they can be understanding and compassionate towards them.

Although there are many wonderful foster parents in Broward County, there is always a need for more people like Valerie who are willing and able to take teens with "behavior issues." "These children, and they are still children, have been through a lot in their short lives and need a loving, understanding home to help them turn their lives around," says Valerie. What could be more rewarding than truly changing a person's life for the better? If you are interested in helping a teen or another child in foster care, please call ChildNet's Recruitment Hotline at 954-414-6001.

ChildNet is the private, not for profit organization selected by the state through a competitive process to serve as the local Community Based Care lead agency. As the lead agency, ChildNet manages the local system of services and supports for Broward's abused, abandoned and neglected children and their caregivers. This system of care was developed with extensive input from local stakeholders and its effective implementation depends upon their continued support. For more information on ChildNet, visit the web site at www.ChildNet.us or call (954) 414-6000.