

ChildNet: Making a difference in our community

POSTED: 3:00 AM, Aug 21, 2014
TAG: [jupiter courier newsweekly](#)



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Any room in YOUR life?

EDITOR'S NOTE:

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The following is a Guest Editorial written by a member of the Jupiter area community.

You may have seen reports about the struggles facing the child welfare system in Florida.

Less known is the extreme need in our local community for individuals and families to step up to the plate and to make a difference in the lives of Florida's abused, abandoned and neglected children.

As the executive director of ChildNet Palm Beach, the nonprofit community-based care lead agency contracted by the Florida Department of Children & Families to manage the system of foster care and related services, I am fortunate to witness everyday people who become heroes by fostering or adopting children. In fact, I am proud to report that this county ranked No. 2 in the state for licensing the most new foster homes last year. Unfortunately, a recent and dramatic increase in the number of children being removed from their homes due to abuse, abandonment or neglect has outpaced our incredible growth of new foster homes.

This past year, this county had a 54 percent increase in the number of children removed over the previous year. As of July 2014, ChildNet Palm Beach is serving 1,792 children, which is 322 more children than last year and 523 more than two years ago.

In Jupiter, 31 children were removed from their homes last year. When you consider there are only 11 licensed foster homes in the community and that those homes generally operate at full capacity, the gap is scary.

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There are many ways that you can make a difference in the lives of these children.

Are you an empty nester with room in your heart for a child in need

until a biological parent is able to resume responsibility or until a "forever home" with an adoptive family is identified? Perhaps you are a parent with children still in the home, but with room for another?

Did you know there are classes that you can take where you can learn what it means to become a foster or possibly a forever family and there is no obligation required?

Learn more here: www.childnet.us/portal/process-to-become-a-foster-parent or call our Recruitment Hotline number at 561-352-2501 to learn more about how you can make a difference.

Believe me, there are individuals in your community who are making a difference. One of them is local Jupiter resident Sarah Marmion who serves as a member of ChildNet's Board; and she is the founder, along with her husband Bruce Zabriski, of Clara's Secret Shepherds Foundation.

SARAH MARMION

For many years, Sarah's family has been helping foster and adoptive families.

In 2011, Sarah's commitment to this mission deepened with the untimely passing of her 10-year-old daughter Clara. Every year, Clara loved helping her family pick out gifts for children in foster care. So in memory of her daughter, Clara's Secret Shepherds Foundation was formed.

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"Our daughter loved to help people," Sarah says, "and we wanted the foundation to reflect that. The foundation's vision is to inspire people to make a difference in the lives of abused, abandoned or neglected foster children in South Florida through financial generosity and volunteer commitment."

The foundation uses its funds to purchase Christmas gifts, senior high school yearbooks and other items to enrich the quality of life for

children in foster care.

SATURDAY, AUG. 23

The foundation raises funds through the annual Clara's Kids family event, which will be conducted this year from 5 to 8 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 23, at Abacoa Golf Club in Jupiter. Tickets to the event, which will feature an extensive silent auction, a raffle, a variety of children's crafts hosted by Resource Depot, dinner and drinks, are \$20 for adults, \$10 for children age 15 and under.

Visit <http://claraskids.eventbrite.com> to purchase tickets to the event.

Larry Rein,

Executive Director

ChildNet Palm Beach

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