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Social Worker Christina Delight works with Kidsave to connect young people in foster care with potential adoptive families and supportive adults.

November is National Adoption Month. During this time of the year, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) shines a light on a frequently overlooked population: children in foster care who are waiting patiently to be connected to a loving, permanent family.

Social Worker Christina Delight knows better than most that the needs of these young people do not begin and end in a single month, however. Through her work with the Kidsave program, Christina links youth with adoptive families and other supportive adults who can serve as mentors and guides.

“Working as the department’s liaison to Kidsave allows me to have a positive impact on the lives of even more children and youth than I did as an adoption worker,” said Christina, who has spent her DCFS career working to facilitate

adoptions since she joined the department 25 years ago.

The partnership between Kidsave and DCFS began in 2005 amid renewed efforts to find permanent homes and stable support systems for older youth in foster care. The program brings together young people between the ages of nine and 17 and adult hosts in their community who may be interested in adoption or simply want to support individual children as allies and advocates.

Young people interact with prospective hosts at regular Kidsave events, allowing them to play an active role in deciding if an adult is a good match. Fun activities like pumpkin carving or bowling provide a low-key environment for youth, prospective adoptive parents and hosts to spend time together and build relationships at their own pace.

“This can be a positive and empowering experience, especially for teens,” Christina said. “Sometimes kids come into the program dejected and without a lot of hope, and to see them at events — interacting with people, having fun and expanding their circle of support — is really uplifting.”

While infants and young children often experience a smoother road to adoption, it can be challenging for older youth in foster care to make permanent connections, a reality that Kidsave seeks to improve.

Kidsave Senior Vice President Lauren Gordon notes that events are designed specifically to engage older youth who may be ambivalent toward adoption or reluctant to open themselves up to new people. In these safe and relaxing environments, youth tend to lower their defensive walls, making personal connections more likely.

“All of these young people have a spark within them,” Lauren said. “This program really brings these kids to life by allowing that light to shine through. Families get to know them as people rather than simply a case file.”

While there are many heartwarming examples, Lauren recalls a particularly memorable instance during which a host expected to connect with a young girl. Instead, the host unexpectedly bonded with an older boy at one of the events, forging a close relationship that has lasted nearly 20 years.

According to Lauren, there are many foster youth who attend Kidsave events never truly believing they will find a connection.



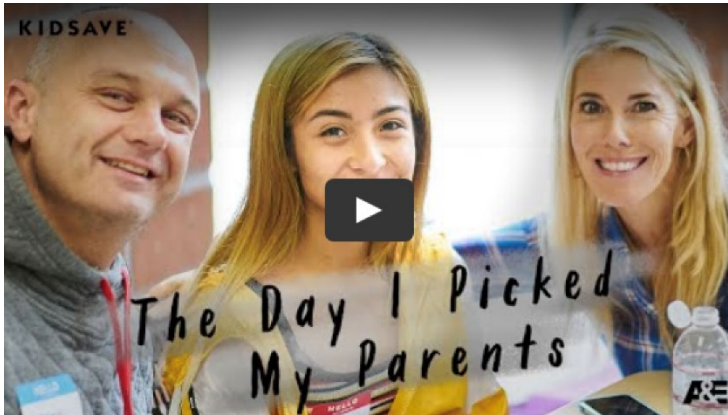
A passionate advocate for child well-being, Kidsave Senior Vice President Lauren Gordon views the partnership with DCFS as key to creating meaningful and lasting relationships for youth in foster care in Los Angeles County.

"But then it happens," she said. "They connect with someone who becomes their forever family. That's why we do this." The initial pilot project in 2005 was only able to serve approximately 20 young people at a time, according to Lauren. Proving successful, the program has since expanded to working with an average of approximately 100 youth in foster care in Los Angeles County each year, matching them with adoptive families and caring adults.

"We couldn't do this without our DCFS partners, who have been collaborative since the beginning," Lauren said. "Over the years, we have continued to learn from each other, and I'm so proud of how the program has expanded to become an integral part of the department's permanency efforts."

For Christina, who has devoted much of her career to helping children and young people find permanent, loving homes, the program's greatest benefit lies in creating meaningful connections for young people in foster care, even when adoption is not an option.

"All young people have a place within this program," she said. "Whether they are open to adoption or not, for whatever reason, we strive to pair youth with an adult who they can count on for life."



Want to learn more about KidSave Weekend Hosting Program?

[Click Here](#)

to watch the Emmy Award Winning A&E Series, "The Day I Picked My Parents," which features youth and families in the program.

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