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## La Cuna a place of safety and comfort for Latino babies

By Pablo Jaime Sáinz

“Joey” is a two-year old Latino boy who lived in four foster homes in less than a month.

His biological parents abandoned him, so he is in desperate need of a permanent, stable home and family where he will be able to develop into a healthy, matured adult.

Being in foster care, “Joey” might have all odds against him.

But thanks to the help of a local foster family agency, “Joey” was recently placed with a loving, responsible foster Latino family.

“Joey” is the 50th baby that the non-profit, independent foster family agency La Cuna has placed since April 2005, date when it received its licensure.



In almost two years and a half, La Cuna has been able to secure a stable, safe place for 50 Latino children that are part of the County of San Diego’s foster care system.

Fifty children are equal to fifty human beings that will grow up to become good members of our society, said Rachel Humphreys, La Cuna executive director.

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*“Juan Carlos,” here with his foster mother, Deanna, was the 49th. baby La Cuna placed in a stable home.*

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“It’s a milestone for us,” said Humphreys, who founded La Cuna in 2003 and, together with a group of concerned individuals, began working on the licensing requirement to become a foster family agency. “Some people used to say we wouldn’t even place 12 children in one year, and now, less than three years later, we have placed 50.”

La Cuna, which means “the cradle,” in Spanish, was established to address the shortage of quality foster homes serving Latino babies and toddlers. Its mission is “to develop programs that allow foster infants to grow up healthy and happy, and to evaluate the results and create best practices that will improve the lives of Hispanic foster infants throughout California.”

Humphreys said that Latino children face critical conditions in San Diego County’s foster care system.

“Latino babies are the silent crisis in foster care,” she said. “The biggest need for foster care is coming out of homes with Latino, monolingual families. We see a lot of domestic violence, poverty, abuse, homelessness.”

According to La Cuna information, the most current statistics for San Diego County, the breakdown of local children in foster care show that 2,423 are Latino children, 1,723 are White children, and 1,423 are black children.

Latino children face special language and cultural barriers when placed in non-Latino foster care families, Humphreys said.

“Some children only speak Spanish or their diets might be different, like including tortillas and beans,” she said. “About 75 percent of our children are placed in Latino homes.”

Foster care children have a difficult time adjusting to their situations.

Some 30 percent of all San Diego foster children ages five and under have been placed in five or more homes, according to La Cuna information.

And 80 percent of those who are incarcerated have been in foster care. Nationwide, 50 percent of former foster youth become homeless during their first two years of exiting the system.

“By ensuring youngsters are matched with loving families that provide a stable and culturally-relevant home experience, La Cuna is addressing the most critical factors affecting many of our community’s un-parented children: The need for a strong sense of self and exposure to essential family values during their formative years,” said David Bejarano, chair of La Cuna’s board of directors.

La Cuna is not an adoption agency. Each child placed with a La Cuna family has a reunification plan with his or her biological parents. Unless it puts the child at risk, agency staff strongly support that plan. The social workers coach each foster parent on ways to support the potential reunification process.

La Cuna is always recruiting Latinos for foster parents to provide safe, stable, and loving homes to Latino foster infants and toddlers. The requirements are not as tough as many people think, Humphreys said.

“We need to find quality families, of one, couples, grandparents, they don’t have to be wealthy, they just need a lot of ganas to take care of a child. We need parents that are committed.”

La Cuna has developed a foster parent training program to address the cultural and linguistic needs of Latino babies, like “Joey,” who’s now living with loving foster parents.

Humphreys said that La Cuna’s success rate, which stands for placing children in stable homes, is at 96 percent.

On Sept. 27, La Cuna will have an information session in Spanish for people interested in becoming foster parents for Latino babies. The session is from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the La Cuna offices.

For more information on La Cuna and its programs, call (619) 521-9900 or visit [www.lacuna.org](http://www.lacuna.org). La Cuna is located at 3180 University Ave., Suite 260, in San Diego.