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Latino children in foster care need Latino foster parents

By Pablo Jaime Sáinz

When he was chief of the San Diego Police Department, David Bejarano used to notice that many of the Latino criminals he helped put behind bars had one thing in common: They had been part of the foster care system.

That's one of the reasons why today he's president of the board of directors of La Cuna, Inc., a non-profit, independent foster family agency that helps place Latino children in stable homes with loving, caring Latino families.

"The statistics are against our Latino children in foster care," said Bejarano, who, after retiring a few years ago, now owns a private security company. "If there are no Latino foster parents to take care of those children in those critical early years, those children will end up as criminals."

In the following weeks La Cuna will have information sessions in English and in Spanish for people interested in becoming foster parents for Latino babies. The dates and places are the following,

· Saturday, August 9, 10:00 a.m. in English and 11:00 a.m. in Spanish.

Encinitas Community Library; 540 Cornish Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024

· Wednesday, August 13, 5:30 p.m. in English and 6:30 p.m. in Spanish.

Otay Mesa Public Library; 3003 Coronado Ave., San Diego, CA 92154

· Saturday, August 16, 10 a.m. in English and 11 a.m. in Spanish.

Weingart Library in City Heights; 3795 Fairmount Ave., San Diego, CA 92110

In almost three years and a half since it received its licensure, La Cuna has been able to secure a stable, safe place for some 66 Latino children that are part of the County of San Diego's foster care system.

Those 66 children are equal to 66 human beings that will grow up to become good members of our society, said Rachel Humphreys, La Cuna executive director.

Humphreys 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.

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.

“Right now we’re in desperate need for Latino foster parents for Latino babies. 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.”

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.

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

“One person can make a big difference in the lives of these Latino children,” Bejarano said.

Humphreys has a message for those Latino families that have been exploring the idea of fostering Latino children:

“At the end of day, there’s no better compliment than the gift of a little child saying to you, ‘Thank you. I love you.’ Here in the county we have hundreds of Latino children who are

healthy and precious and who are willing to put their trust in you. Remember, they're waiting for you."

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



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<http://www.laprensa-sandiego.org/archieve/2008/august01-08/foster.care.080108.htm>