

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

DEPARTMENT'S FOREVER FRIENDS PROGRAM AIMS TO CREATE LONG-TERM FRIENDSHIPS

The Los Angeles County Probation Department's "Forever Friends" program is helping to create new meaningful long-term friendships. Forever Friends launched in January of 2020, under the leadership of Director Lisa Campbell-Motton. It was conceptualized by community members who expressed their desire to connect with youths that are currently under the guardianship of the probation foster care system. Not yet ready to commit to becoming a resource family, community members would often express their desire to impact youth positively. Director Campbell-Motton and her team heard their request and committed to developing a program to answer the call.

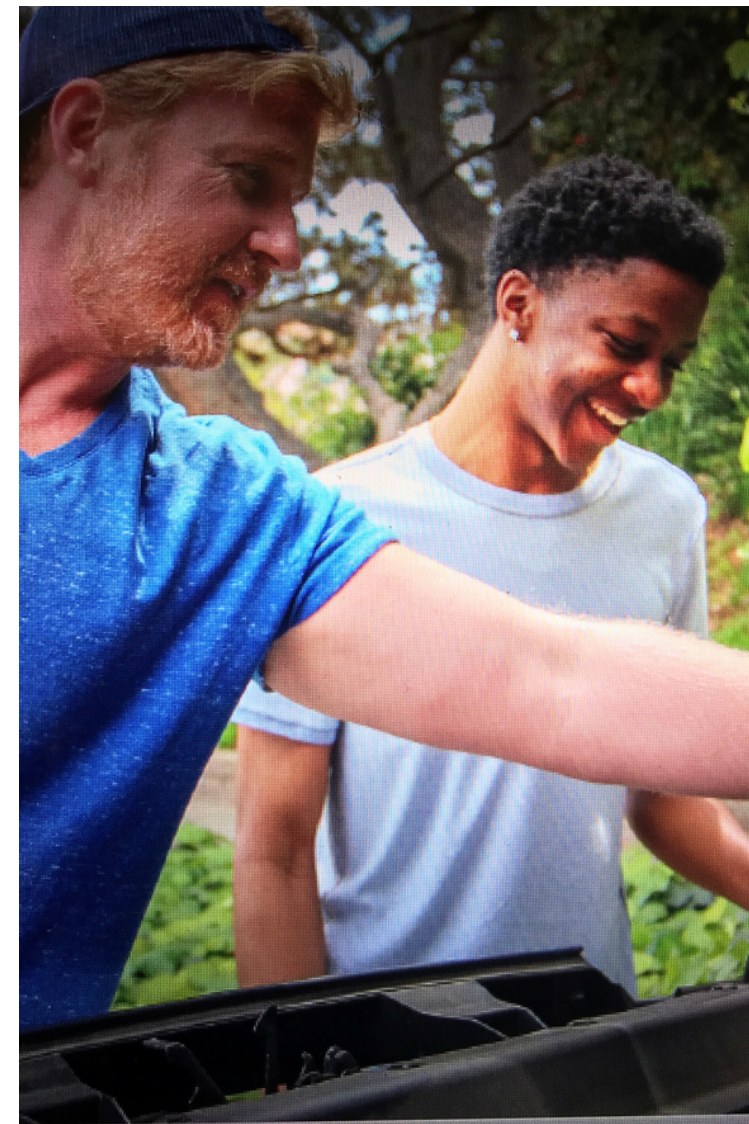


Weaving Art from a youth and Forever Friend

Forever Friends assists teens in building friendships with individuals, couples, or families that can provide a lifelong connection. Forever Friends isn't a mentorship program, group therapy, or big brother/sister program. Forever Friend's focus is all about nurturing long-lasting, genuine friendships. "This program provides us the opportunity to impact the life of a kid forever. We can change the trajectory of the youth simply from our Department, allowing us to be able to do a program that is so out of the box," explained Ms. Campbell-Motton.

On any given evening, weekend, or holiday, you may find a Forever Friend at a Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) engaging with young people. Some cook meals together, play games, try their hand at crafting, watch movies, host workshops, or sit and chat, laughing about the adventures of the past week. Friendships are not forced. All relationships grow organically from the youth and Forever Friends interacting with each other. Once a genuine rapport is established between the friend and youth, they are then officially assigned.

The Forever Friends team consists of Supervisor Wilbert James and two Child Welfare Liaisons, Deputy Probation Officers Sheryl Thompson and Ruben Romero. Deputies Thompson and Romero work very closely with Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program staff to identify young people that don't get visitors or have family support. They then invite the forever friends to that home for a meet and greet. A meet and greet can be elaborate as a planned backyard cookout with all the fixings to a casual and straightforward game night in the living room. The DPO's serve as liaisons between the Probation Department, the STRTP, and the Forever Friend. They maintain regular contact with all parties regarding the youth's participation in the program.



CHANGING LIVES THROUGH FRIENDSHIP (CONT)

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The Los Angeles County Probation Department invites you to consider positively impacting a young person's life and becoming a Forever Friend. The process is simple. For information, visit ForeverFriendsLA.org



Forever Friends come from all walks of life. The program currently consists of 108 approved Visto Volunteers who have a heart for giving back to children whose lives lack stability. With the understanding that most of the program's youth have been in foster care since the age of 3, the Forever Friends pledge to nurture these unique relationships and continuously support their young friends throughout their transition and life. Forever Friends are Educators, Actors, Entrepreneurs, Attorneys, Retirees, etc. Whether it is one hour during the week or a few hours on the weekend, they are committed to spending consistent quality time with the youth. They not only share life skills, but they forge bonds through sharing their life experiences.

The Forever Friend often finds a common interest with a young person, and then the two of them set out to explore that interest together. One connection grew from a love for exotic food. Every week, that Forever Friend brings the youth food from a different country. They explore expanding their palates together and gaining an appreciation for other cultures. Other Friends facilitate weekly weaving and financial workshops, while another is a professional dog trainer and invites the youth to assist her with K-9 training exercises. "The Friends are very invested in the youth and the program. The youth know when someone is genuine, and they naturally gravitate to that person. It's good to see that we have people that care," DPO Thompson shared.

While permanent placement is not the program's purpose, some Forever Friends have developed such a bond with the youth that they have become Resource Parents. Through the Forever Friends program, Probation is also committed to working with families that desired to adopt or become legal guardians. On occasions, staff has searched for families to try and provide the youth permanency through adoption or legal guardianship. "The things we've been able to do with this program are beyond my wildest dreams. Never did I ever think I would be doing adoptions within Probation. It's amazing!" shared Director Campbell-Motton.

DPO Romero expressed, "It's great to see how the Probation Department has progressed. We are doing a great job and making sure that the youth have more advocates. It's a wonderful feeling to see how eager the volunteers are to engage in activities with the youth. They jump right in and start working. It's very rewarding to see that."

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