

Close to Home
California Budget Cuts 10% From Foster Homes
By Lia Rowley

It's disheartening to read about the cuts Californians are going to have to make to reduce the state's \$26.3 billion shortfall. No one likes the cuts, and no one is happy about them.

The 10% cuts are affecting the most vulnerable population, the 80,000 children who live in foster care homes or group homes throughout California. They're often the kids with the most severe emotional problems, learning disabilities, and sometimes physical handicaps, resulting from abuse and neglect experienced early in life. The children at The Children's Village of Sonoma County, because of misfortunes outside of their control, have the greatest catching up to do.

Foster care parents and group homes, like The Children's Village, are facing a 10% decrease in state funding. For many of the foster care parents raising children in their homes, the timing couldn't be worse. Many wage earners in these homes are themselves facing unemployment due to business closures and belt tightening in corporations.

Group homes like ours are facing enormous challenges as well. The California Alliance of Child and Family Care anticipates that 5-10% of group homes will be forced to close, and that the ones that survive will see a reduced capacity of 40% or more and an increase in the staff to child ratio from 1-15 to 1-20. At The Children's Village, we've already taken pencil to paper to identify ways we might cut—everything from administrative expenses, to reduced budgets for food and clothing for the kids.

Since The Children's Village opened its doors three years ago, we've been able to survive by the funding we've received from the state, but also through the generosity of the hundreds of people in Sonoma County who have donated their time, talent and money to enrich the lives of our children beyond the basics. It has been through their generosity that we've been able to provide our children with tutoring, field trips, camp experiences, opportunities for sports and extracurricular activities, braces for their crooked teeth. Every day, volunteers help with the little tasks of life: like art projects, gardening haircuts, storytelling.

But most of all, we have been blessed with a staff of surrogate parents who live with our children 24/7 in our Village homes, and we've been double-blessed with four surrogate grandparents who also live at the Village and share their lives with our kids by driving them to extracurricular activities and medical appointments, teaching them to cook, ride a bicycle, care for a pet, or by just being there to talk.

With a little creativity we'll make the financial cuts we must make, and we will survive. But one thing that we—and other group homes— can't survive without is the support of the community. We need volunteers, and we need the continued generosity of our neighbors. During these times when those of us in the foster care system are being asked to cut, we're also reaching out to those who have the resources to help those who do not. We are so grateful to our donors and hope they realize that their partnership with The Children's Village, is a partnership in helping us save lives.