

Open for business: Lilliput Children's Services

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It was in the early 1980s, while attending Napa Community College and Pacific Union College, that Karen Alvord's parents became the full-time caregivers of her sister's three daughters.

Like the majority of such "kinships," it was a family arrangement — the child welfare system wasn't involved. But the kin care didn't end there.

Several years later, following the death of her parents, Alvord and her husband, Scott, took in, raised, and later adopted, her three nieces as well as a nephew.

Together, with the children the couple had together, the Alvord's have raised seven children, currently ages 12 to 31.

Today, Alvord lives in Roseville, but her work has brought her full circle back to Napa, as she brings Lilliput Children's Services to her hometown.

Lilliput, based in Sacramento, provides a range of social services.

The nonprofit recruits and prepares foster/adoptive families interested in adopting a child from the foster system. They also offer post-adoption services to support adoptive families who are living in Napa County.

As an agency, Lilliput has facilitated 550 foster care adoptions a year, two-thirds of which within extended families, Alvord said. Yet 54,000 California foster children are currently waiting for a permanent adoptive family.

Approximately 600,000 children in California are living with a grandparent or relative. Lilliput also administers the Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) in partnership with Napa County Department of Health and Human Services and five local family resource centers to support

relative caregivers.

Lilliput's KSSP program works with families like Alvord's, facing unforeseen challenges when a family member is unable to care for their own children, often due to drug addiction or mental health problems.

Traumatized by early life experiences, these children have needs that their new caregivers are usually unprepared to deal with. Working with the school systems, getting needed medical or mental health care, finding child care or respite, and accessing health insurance or money to help support the children are all challenges that can seem overwhelming without guidance.

Lilliput provides emotional support to such families through in-home visitation and referrals, support groups, family counseling, and recreational opportunities and activities for children.

Many times, clients are surprised to discover the services that Lilliput can offer them, said Joy Metoyer, Napa's Regional Program Manager. She commonly hears the same comment about Lilliput's kinship services. "I didn't know I could get help just because I'm taking care of my grandchild,"

Lilliput's Kinship Support Services Program is a collaboration with the Napa County Department of Health and Human Services, the American Canyon Family Resource Center, Calistoga Family Center, Cope Family Center, ParentsCAN and St. Helena Family Resource Center.

For more information about Lilliput, visit www.lilliput.org.

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