

Spring 2019

NEW HEIGHTS

Stories about life-changing journeys made possible by you!

Junior Blind
has a new name!



Meet Our Newest **Wayfinder**

Welcome Isaias, the newest student in Wayfinder's Special Education School! His happiness and good nature draw everyone to him.

Isaias has multiple disabilities, including vision impairment, and uses a wheelchair. His parents, Hector and Marian, chose Wayfinder's school because it could meet their son's different needs. "The school has more therapists in-house who can help him," says Marian. "The student-to-adult ratio is low. And he has a small class size."

With four teachers and 20 instructional aids for about 40 pupils, students at our Special Education School receive the individual attention they need.

On the first day, Hector and Marian told the school staff that Isaias would need music to stay calm during the day. "He cried a little the first day," Marian remembers. Hector adds, "But his adjustment was really fast. Within a matter of days he felt comfortable."

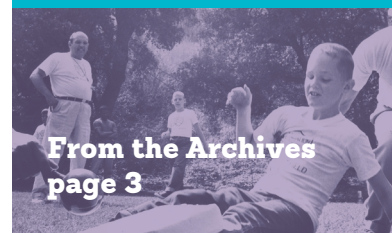
On Isaias' third day, he did not need his music anymore. He was ready to join every activity! "He loves cooking activities, art activities, anything messy," says his teacher, Sheila Thomas. "He is very curious, and he gets along with his peers."

When asked about their goals for Isaias, his parents answer simultaneously, "We want him to be more independent, to be able to do more things for himself."

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NEW HEIGHTS

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Q&A with Miki Jordan

Wayfinder Family Services President & CEO



Miki Jordan joined Wayfinder Family Services in 2006. Below, we continue our series of questions and Miki's answers about the organization's new name and the organization's unchanging commitment to children and families.

Do you still serve children who are blind?

Yes! We are as deeply committed as ever to the blindness community. In fact, we serve more children with vision loss across California than any other organization. We are one of the few organizations that has the expertise to work with children with vision impairment and multiple disabilities. We are so proud that our services reach visually impaired people of all ages, from early intervention for infants and toddlers, through recreation programs for children, to residential programming and workforce development for teens and young adults. These programs and more will continue to meet the needs of children and adults who are blind, today and into the future.

Who else do you serve?

We have three service pillars: visual impairment, developmental disabilities, and children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. Our clients are children, youth, adults and families that are in one or more of these areas.

What does "success" look like at Wayfinder Family Services?

As an organization, we lead with integrity and operate our programs and services with the highest standards. As employees, we are most successful when we work together. For each client, success means reaching their personal best. ● *To read the full interview with Miki Jordan, please visit www.WayfinderFamily.org/MikiQandA*

Anthem Fitness CHALLENGE

Wayfinder received a grant from the Anthem Blue Cross Foundation to empower its members to participate in the National Fitness Challenge, an initiative founded by the United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA). Check out these Wayfinder Moments from the past few months of the #AnthemFitnessChallenge!



From the **Archives**

The Year: 1958

The People: Founder, Norm Kaplan, camp staff and campers gather for fun.

The Moment: Children play beep baseball during the first camp held at Camp Bloomfield.



CAMP Bloomfield 2019

Evelyn can't wait to go back to camp this summer!

Wayfinder's Camp Bloomfield transforms the lives of children and teens with vision loss. Camp builds friendship, confidence and independence. That's what Camp Bloomfield did for Evelyn last year.

Evelyn lost her sight when she was a year-and-a-half old due to cancer in both eyes. Maggie, Evelyn's mother, admits to being protective of Evelyn that after that experience.

Last year, 14-year-old Evelyn arrived at Camp Bloomfield not knowing anyone. She wasn't sure how to connect with the other teens. "Wayfinder helped because everyone is very open, very welcoming," Evelyn says. "I made a lot of friends my first day at Camp Bloomfield."

At Camp Bloomfield, Evelyn learned how to connect better with people. She made friends and gained confidence. At home, Evelyn is now more independent. Evelyn's wonderful experience at camp eased Maggie's concerns. "I love that program!" Maggie says.

As you know, the physical location of Camp Bloomfield burned in November 2018. But the spirit of Camp Bloomfield is strong! Camp will go on this summer at another campground.

"I made a lot of friends my first day at Camp Bloomfield."

But we need your help. Camp Bloomfield is funded 100% from private sources—friends like you! Please consider a gift to Camp Bloomfield today! Make a gift online at: www.WayfinderFamily.org/camp ●



Evelyn can't wait to return to camp this summer, but we need your help! Please consider a gift to Camp Bloomfield today:

www.WayfinderFamily.org/camp





“**T**hat’s not for me,” Virginia remembers thinking when she heard a radio ad encouraging people to become foster parents. “Then I felt guilty.” She asked God to give her a sign if he wanted her to be a foster parent. “The next day, I saw a great big sign saying ‘become a foster parent’ as I got on the highway,” she laughs.

That did it. Virginia became a foster parent in 2005 and has fostered more than 100 children, most of them teenagers.

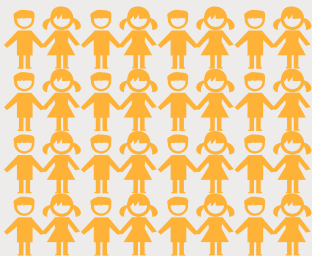
Virginia has a special talent for guiding teenage foster kids. “When you are in meetings, foster parents say ‘I don’t want teenagers,’” Virginia says. “But when teenagers trust you, they are yours. You still can change their whole life.”

Araceli Sanchez, a Wayfinder social worker who assists Virginia, credits her success with teenagers to the structure Virginia provides: required wake-up times, chores, meal times and homework time. “She does not easily give up on the kids,” Araceli says. “She has a big heart. She’s very warm and nurturing.”

Virginia is a **Life-Changer**

Meet a Wayfinder Foster Mother with a special talent for guiding teenagers...

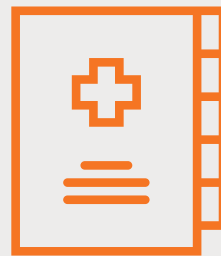
Wayfinder Addresses **Critical Shortage of Foster Parents**



...roughly **21,000** children in L.A. County are in foster care.



...the number of **foster families in L.A. County** dropped from 6,000 in 2008 to 4,000 in 2018.



...up to **80%** of foster children have **chronic medical conditions or physical, developmental, learning or mental health disabilities.**



Virginia goes to bat for her foster kids. She pushes the school to provide extra support if a child needs it. When a teen makes a mistake, Araceli says, “She talks to the kid about making a better choice next time.”

Virginia’s belief in the teens she fosters pays off in their affection and accomplishments. Today, four of the children she fostered recently are in college. One of them, David, whom Virginia fostered from age 13, has a full scholarship to Chapman University.

David paid a loving tribute to Virginia as he received scholarship funds when graduating from high school.

A teacher asked him if he wanted to thank anyone. He said, “Thank you to my mom because she has been there for me.”

Virginia thought David was referring to his deceased biological mother. “But he said he meant me,” says Virginia. “That made me cry.”

Through all the ups and downs, Virginia finds being a foster mom extraordinarily rewarding. “You can touch a life,” she explains. “It’s unbelievable!” ●

“..When teenagers trust you, they are yours. You still can change their whole life.”

In order to protect Virginia and her family’s privacy, this story uses Stock photography and David’s real name has been changed.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT? Contact us today!

To learn more, please contact **Leslie Oropeza at (909) 305-1948 x207 or loropeza@wayfinderfamily.org**. Wayfinder provides guidance and support to foster families so they can succeed in providing a safe, loving home for children. We offer monthly reimbursements, 24-hour emergency assistance from a social worker, respite care, weekly visits from social workers and more.

A new grant from W. M. Keck Foundation will help Wayfinder address this critical shortage. Over two years, Wayfinder will use grant funds to enhance our recruitment of foster families and to expand our training of foster families, with a focus on children with health or mental health challenges.

Often, prospective foster families are hesitant to foster a child with a disability because they feel unprepared. A new training program developed by Wayfinder will fill this gap by supplying families with knowledge, resources and support.

In addition, the grant will bolster Wayfinder’s recruiting of foster parents—for all children, as well as for those with disabilities. Wayfinder has the knowledge and experience to undertake this important work. We have decades of experience assisting children with disabilities. Plus, in recent years Wayfinder has expanded its child welfare services, including programs that serve foster youth with medical and mental health challenges and foster care and adoption services.

Through this grant, Wayfinder will increase the number of foster families, particularly those who are trained to foster children with health challenges. As a result, more foster children will find stable, caring homes. ●



A DAY WITH ISAIAS

Small Class Size

An adult-to-student ratio of 2:1 or 1:1 means that Isaias gets all the individual support and attention he needs throughout the day.

Learning is Fun

Isaias is curious and friendly and loves being in the classroom with other children. He also loves “messy” activities like art and cooking!

Meaningful Activities

Isaias’ parents want him to become more independent, so his teachers are working with him to build everyday skills, like feeding himself with a spoon.

Meet Our Newest Wayfinder (continued from page 1)

At school, he practices feeding himself. He can put finger food in his mouth, which is an important step toward independence. “But he misses his mouth with the spoon, so food goes all over,” says his teacher. “So cute! He’s working on it.”



Isaias’ family dotes on him and loves seeing him thrive at Wayfinder!

Hector and Marian can tell Isaias loves his new school because they see a difference in their little boy. “He is excited to go to school,” says Marian. “He is happier overall.”

“He united us all. He taught us that love comes in many different ways.”

“Yesterday morning, he surprised us because he cried,” Marian says. “But not because he didn’t want to go to school. He wanted to leave right away to go to school, but it was too early!”

Hector is very grateful to have found Wayfinder’s Special Education School for Isaias. “He is receiving love and being treated well,” he says. “He receives so much attention here. It’s like we are taking care of him at home.”

Marian is very impressed by Isaias’ teacher, instructional aide and therapists. “I can’t even describe how I feel about them. I am beyond grateful,” she says. “They communicate daily with us, and the information is so detailed that we feel we are part of his day.”

When asked to describe their youngest son in three words, Marian and Hector choose “happiness, union and love.” Why union? “He brought the family closer together,” says Marian. “He united us all. He taught us that love comes in many different ways.” ●



Shane is a Wayfinder Star



Stevie Wonder Star Student Shane Aguilera, Stevie Wonder, and Wayfinder's Chief Operating Officer Jay Allen.

Shane Aguilera got an early start on his achievements. At age 2, he began playing the piano. He started competing in the Wayfinder Paralympics (previously named the Junior Blind Olympics) when he was just 6 years old. He added guitar-playing to his talents, as well as composing his own music. And he released a solo country album, *Shane Rider*, at age 18 in February. You can find his album on Amazon Music, Apple Music, Spotify and more.

For his excellence in and out of the classroom, Shane received the Sixth Annual Stevie Wonder Star Student Award, presented by Stevie Wonder himself at Wayfinder's Children's Holiday Carnival in December 2018. Shane was surprised and very pleased to receive the award.

After the on-stage presentation, Shane spent time with Stevie. "I thought he was pretty cool," Shane recalls. "I enjoyed talking to him. We did duets on 'Walking the Floor Over You' and 'The Christmas Song.'"

Stevie gave Shane a lesson on Stevie's harpejji, an electric

stringed instrument played by tapping keys. "I was able to play some music on it and to figure out musical chords and melodies," Shane says.

Dawn, Shane's mother, was delighted by Shane's interaction with Stevie. "I didn't want to have big expectations about a celebrity," Dawn says. "But the experience was awesome. Shane and Stevie were talking, playing music, sharing their phones. I felt like they were two friends hanging out."

Shane was born with bilateral retinoblastoma, cancer in the retinas of both eyes, and has no vision. He competed in the Wayfinder Paralympic Games from ages 6 to 13—the 50-yard dash was his favorite event.

As a teenager, he attended Camp Bloomfield. "It was good for him to be around other kids who were completely blind," says Dawn. "Most of the kids at his school were visually impaired, and he was the only completely blind kid. At Camp Bloomfield, it was good for him to see counselors who were blind. It built his confidence."

Shane agrees that he gained confidence at camp, and he made new friends. "I learned to do things with a group," Shane says. "I learned teamwork. Being disconnected from the Internet meant I could socialize more."

Shane hopes to pursue a career in music and applied to colleges with music programs. With the gift of perfect pitch, Shane can hear a note and determine what it is. "Perfect pitch enables me to understand music in a way that other people don't," he explains.

The last two years, Shane has led fundraising projects that raised money for Camp Bloomfield. "He is into giving and making a difference where he can," says his proud mother.

Wayfinder is very grateful to Shane for helping children and teenagers with vision loss enjoy a transformative camp experience, as he did. Good luck with college and your music, Shane. Your fans at Wayfinder are rooting for you! ●

FOUR REASONS to Consider Including Wayfinder in Your Estate Plans

Since 1953, Wayfinder Family Services has worked tirelessly to create a world in which every child and family can overcome the obstacles they face—a world in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Here are our top four reasons to consider including Wayfinder Family Services in your estate plans.

1 Your Gift Will Have Significant Impact

Planned gifts offer Wayfinder sustained, long-term financial support, so that we can continue our critical programs for decades to come. Through your planning, you can make a significant difference in the lives of the children we serve.

2 You Define Your Personal Legacy

You can define your legacy and ensure your support of Wayfinder Family Services even after your lifetime. Planned gifts are an important and deeply meaningful way to ensure the future of Wayfinder Family Services and provide a lasting personal legacy.

3 You Will Shape Our Future and the Next Generation of Children Who Need Your Help

Your legacy gift will profoundly influence the future of those we serve—children with vision loss, children with multiple disabilities and children who have suffered abuse and neglect.

4 You Will Inspire Others

Your generosity and foresight provide support to future generations and serves as an inspiration for others to do the same.

Make a Gift for the Future

To make a gift or to learn more about planned giving, contact Randy Sprabary at: (323) 295-4555 Ext 220 or rsprabary@wayfinderfamily.org



2019 BEEPER EGG HUNTS

Wayfinder's Blind Babies Foundation families, staff, volunteers and sponsors made this year's Beeper Egg Hunts in the Bay Area and Central Valley an unforgettable experience!

#WayfinderMoments

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Junior Blind
has a new name!


Wayfinder
FAMILY SERVICES

Give with trust.



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