

Transcription of Podcast Episode 394: Coachella Valley Foster Kids

SPEAKERS

Robi Frederick, Bob Firing, Chris Schultz

Note: This transcription was computer-generated and may contain typographical errors.

Bob Firing 00:00

Good afternoon Shadow Hills. Well, we are coming to the end of a pretty successful year for most of us. The markets have been up most of even cash, which last a year ago this time was paying zero, paying about five and a half percent. And so I have been giving you some ideas in case you would like to share with some less fortunate people. I had Ricardo Loretta talk about the doctor carry on foundation. And today we have a relatively new charity in the valley, but one is doing so much work. It is Coachella Valley foster kids. And here to talk about it is Robi Frederick. Robi, welcome to the podcast.

Robi Frederick 00:53

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Bob Firing 00:55

So a couple of our residents did a pretty successful fundraiser in, was it last month or the month before?

Robi Frederick 01:05

Yes. beginning of November, I believe

Bob Firing 01:08

Beginning in November. So it's a little over a month ago. And we got it was good participation they raised \$13,000. In that was a great start. And so that we're here to ask for more. And so why don't you start off by talking about what the Foster Kids is all about?

Robi Frederick 01:30

Coachella Valley Foster Kids, like you said is a fairly new nonprofit came together in 2019. Several attorneys that work in the juvenile court system saw that there were a variety of gaps that needed to be filled within this system for these youth that had experienced great trauma that were being placed into new and unfamiliar situations and just needed opportunities that they had not received. And so these attorneys were originally focused on a couple of things, making sure that as many children as possible could have access to attend camps, so that they could see that there were greater opportunities for them out there. A lot of these children had never left the Coachella Valley, often, sometimes even the city that they resided in. And once they get out and go to camp, or sometimes even experienced at a college, they see that there is a big beautiful world out there and amazing opportunities and it can change the trajectory of their life.

Bob Firing 02:45

So could you give the audience a couple of examples about how a child would get into the foster care system?

Robi Frederick 02:52

Yes, so the child welfare system is there to check in on children when child abuse or neglect calls come in to a hotline. And then if they rise to a certain level of severity or concern, then a social worker will go out and do complete an investigation. And if they determine that a child has suffered abuse, that that abuse is likely to occur again, or that they have been neglected and that cannot be made better in that moment.

Bob Firing 03:34

So those kids are not safe living in their own home?

Robi Frederick 03:38

Correct. That's the way that's how it's determined that they need to be removed and placed into a different situation until their home environment is safer, or until a different permanent plan can be made for these children. And some of these situations are things that nobody wants to imagine could have occurred to a child.

Bob Firing 04:02

Yeah, what? Tell us a story.

Robi Frederick 04:05

Um, so a lot of the time one of the biggest issue that is going on worldwide is substance abuse and definitely takes a hold of individuals and can result in a variety of neglect. And often abuse these children are born or exposed in utero to substances often are born positive alongside their parents. And, again, you know, when substance abuse grabs a hold of somebody, and you know, just take a toll on them. So, you know, parents end up sometimes forgetting to feed their children, get them to school, clothe them properly, provide safe and safe environments for them to reside and a lot of times they get exposed to individual Those that do the abuse as well. So, you know, the it's a system that needs to be their children need to be watched over. However, it can't do everything for these children. And that's what CVFK is trying to come in and do is just make sure that these children have opportunities that they're taken good care of, and that if they want to pursue something in their lives, that they have the option to do those things.

Bob Firing 05:32

And I know that you've cycled several of these kids through your own home, and, in fact, have just adopted a baby to the extent you're comfortable, could you talk about that?

Robi Frederick 05:45

Sure, we have, I have also been alongside my husband and our family, we've been fostering children for several years now. And I've had over 20 children in our home, we are in the process of adopting currently, and but we have always enjoyed the experience of getting to know their parents and trying to

support them and reunification because it's the ultimate goal of the foster care system. And but they do come in from very rough situations, often very traumatized. And then very often, they come into our home with nothing, nothing more than what they're wearing.

Bob Firing 06:25

So they come in with the clothes they're wearing, and maybe some stuff in a pillowcase, that's what these kids have.

Robi Frederick 06:34

Yes, we're lucky if they come with something in a pillow case, we've had babies arrive straight from the hospital, just wearing the outfit that they have on and coming with maybe a couple of diapers and the single bottle formula, and, you know, children in the clothing that they're wearing, and nothing more than that, you know, and a lot of times you can't retrieve any more than that from their families. And so you're kind of starting from scratch. And, you know, it's, it's hard to imagine a child coming in with nothing and feeling like they have nothing. So one of the things that our organization does is tries to ensure that these children can come with at least a bag of items that will get them through the first 24 hours that they're in care with us or with a foster family or a relative, that way they walk into that door, having some possessions of their own, which turned out to be very special items to these kids, things that we would never think are special items. But you know, they're there's they're, they're things, they're clean. And it really helps their caretakers as well to get through those first 24 hours and not have to rush out to grab a bunch of stuff. And it allows them time to just comfort that child and then figure it out from there.

Bob Firing 07:53

Okay. And to show, we have another guest here, who is a local businessman named Chris Schultz. And Chris had experience working with these kids, and just in finally seeing the circumstances they live in. And so Chris, would you talk to tell him your story?

Chris Schultz 08:13

Absolutely, Bob, thank you for having me. My name is Chris Schultz. I'm with the Rotary Club of Indio, Past President. And with our rotary club, we've been able to have the opportunity to provide several scholarships for these students. We've worked directly with the foster care and was probably for the past four years was able to really bless them with some scholarships. I had the privilege of picking up the students a few different times to take them to the bus at for to board the to go to camp, the opportunity plug in the GPS, I jump in my car, and have my Starbucks coffee, and I pull up to the address. And at first I thought, Hey, maybe I have the wrong address. I was looking at a house which had gates everywhere, a boarded up window, taped up window on the car and all of a sudden I pull up and I get out of the car. And I was like wow, these several people all the way from the age of probably four years old, could child and a diaper no shirt to several of the kids walking out. It really broke my heart to see that the two students that were joining the camp had mixed matched socks they were stretched out. One of the students shoes smelled really bad. It was like to a point where I'll get into the story a little bit later about what we did. But um, and then everything that they were going to camp with was in either a pillowcase or a trash bag. We get in the car I introduced myself and my heart just dropped. I was holding back not tearing up. And what I did was I stopped by the business was able to

get them to say All these long sleeve shirts and coats and I had a pair of work boots there was able to bless this student with the work boots, pen, paper, backpacks, water jugs, for this camping experience. They said, rarely can we have this? Absolutely, this is yours, enjoy this drip, make the best of it, this will be life changing and having the opportunity to really encourage them. So we get to the actual bus station. And then we went into a Chevron because it met a Chevron off of Indian there. And we walked in, I said, guys, grab whatever you want. And they're like, really? Are you serious? I said, grab whatever, and beef Turkey and Gatorade and you're gonna have a trip. And then one kid asked, hey, is it okay that I get to ice cream. I was like, man get two ice creams. And he said, I have an ice cream for like a couple of months. And I've been really craving this type. And so that's not even it. It was when picking the students up after this intense weekend of just leadership and other friends not being judged being a part of something greater. And the smiles and joy that came from these students, their life was changed. And to see that it was taking somebody isolated in a corner and giving them the opportunity to thrive and have that environment and meet other friends, not with judgment, but acceptance. And then all of a sudden, they're just like it perked him up and still to this day there. Their life has changed. They are progressing their education. And they exchanged numbers with several students throughout the Coachella Valley, who attended this camp and stays in contact with them.

Bob Firing 11:48

That's great. And I saw I heard Robi make a presentation earlier this week and talk about some of the levels that are needed and what can be done.

Robi Frederick 11:59

So our organization has evolved into doing quite a few things. So whereas we started with just trying to meet some needs here and there and send as many children to camp as we could, which started out to be more like 25 or more. We've now found there a variety of needs. And we're just trying to meet as many as we can with our organization and with the support of our community.

Robi Frederick 12:24

One of the things that I had mentioned is we tried to prepare these emergency kits. And we would like to ensure that every child that enters the foster care system locally is able to have one of these kits. So number wise, here in Riverside County, there are approximately 4500 children that are in the foster care system. here locally, there are over 400 children that enter foster care on an annual basis. So we would really like to ensure that those children that are entering on an annual basis that each one of them has a kit of things that they can call theirs, that helps them to get through those first day or two in foster care.

Robi Frederick 13:05

Another program that we have involves ensuring that we have beds and sometimes dressers and items available to set up a room so that a child if a relative is available for them to be placed with that they can go immediately into that home with that relative, even if it was just a matter of them not having a bed that keeps them from going there. And that just means one of those kids does not have to go into foster care into a home that they're unfamiliar with but gets to go to with a relative or a close family friend, because we're able to provide a bed just something simple as that. We also are some of these kids end up attending court hearings that are not a very friendly place to be for a child, very intimidating,

very uncomfortable, sometimes almost traumatic in their own sense. And we try to also ensure that in the courtroom, that there are stuffed animals and comfort items available for these children so that as they're going through that experience, that we can comfort them with an item and to see their eyes light up when they see these things in the courtroom. It's you know, a simple little item like a stuffed animal makes huge difference. And we often see those stuffed animals pop up in lots of different places along their journey. We will see them come back with them to visit with their parents, move with them if they go to a different placement, return with them back to another court hearing or to visit with a social worker. You know, they become an item that's very personal to that child.

Robi Frederick 14:56

So that we're doing that but then again, like I touched on before are trying to send as many children to camp as possible that to see to see the impact like Chris was talking about on these children. I remember one little girl who was approached, she was about 10 years old and she, the first day of camp, she was clinging to her relative that was bringing her there. I knew that was going to be a great experience for her. But she was just devastated by having to go to camp, and very scared, very fearful, the change eyes to the ground, and her relative was able to coax her onto the bus and the counselor talked about how for the first number of days Her eyes were at the ground, she didn't talk, she didn't engage, she stayed right by her counselor side. But slowly, as the week went on, she started noticing that there were friends around, you know, smile started to come to her face, she started engaging more, and by the time she jumped off that bus at the end of the week, it was full smiles excitement, when can I go back. And she her relatives said she had never left the Coachella Valley before. And so to be able to go up to the mountains for a week and spend time with these extremely encouraging camp counselors, counselors and a new group of friends, she's never going to likely forget that experience is going to greatly impact your life.

Bob Furring 16:20

Well, that's great. Thank you for telling us those stories. And I want to do something I've never done before. And that is I'm going to take the lead here. And I know that it the cost of these camps is about \$500 a week and so I'm going to give you a check for \$1,000 to pay for two scholarships. And to the audience, we've got the brochure will be accompanying this podcast. And if you would like to help some really needy kids, the opportunity is there. And so thank you both for coming in. Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to everyone. Until next time, bye-bye.