

# 3 QUESTIONS FOR A FIVE ACRES SPECIAL FRIEND



**Suzanne was first introduced to the Five Acres in 2003 when she volunteered for a special outing for foster children at the Santa Monica Pier. Once she saw how much the children relished getting some extra attention, she decided to help a foster child in an ongoing way. Now more than thirteen years later, Suzanne remains close with her special friend, who is now 20 years old. Read below her heart-warming story and the importance and value of mentoring children in foster care.**

## **5A: How did you become a special friend? Was there an “a-ha” moment when you knew you wanted to mentor a Five Acres child?**

**Suzanne:** I first realized that there was a huge need to support kids in foster care when I participated in a one-day event many years ago called Day of the Child. It was a special outing at the Santa Monica pier for hundreds of LA foster kids and I volunteered as an adult chaperone for two boys. It was startling to see firsthand how many kids are in the system and I enjoyed my time with those boys. I could see that they relished getting some extra attention. Afterwards, I decided I'd like to help a child in an ongoing way that would allow me to really bond with them. The Day of the Child organization referred me to Five Acres for the Special Friends program.

## **5A: How long have you been a mentor for your special friend? I understand it's continued beyond the duties of Five Acres. Can you share a little bit about your experience with your special friend?**

**Suzanne:** I was matched with my Special Friend in March 2003. She was 6 years old and now she is a remarkable young woman who just turned 20 and is working part-time, going to community college and living on her own in a foster youth transitional apartment. We have stayed close all these years and consider each other extended family at this point.

Two things stand out to me as I think back on my experience. First is how offering just a simple thing of

time and attention made a big difference. Being Special Friends wasn't complicated. We went to parks, baked cookies, colored, had a meal together and sometimes did more special outings like a movie or Chuck E. Cheese (her favorites at age 7). But it was just being together on regular basis and taking an interest that seemed to have the most benefit.

The second thing that played out powerfully in our case is how crucial it is for kids in foster care to have someone who is outside the system who is interested in them and can be a consistent presence. Five Acres staff, social workers, therapists, teachers, etc. came and went and placements changed numerous times for my Special Friend (she stayed in foster care until age 18). Within just a few years of meeting her I was the only adult around who had known her since age 6. And today I'm the only person who understands and can remember with her what her childhood journey has been. Every child needs to feel that they “have someone.” Being that person has been the most rewarding part of the Special Friends program for me.

## **What advice would you give to others who might be interested in becoming a mentor and a “special friend” to a Five Acres child(ren)?**

**Suzanne:** As they explain in training, expect some testing. After a few months, my Special Friend tested my commitment by pushing me away and telling me she didn't want a visit. It happened two or three times. I respected that each time and went home, but still showed up the next weekend. I passed her test and here we are 13 years later!

**If you are interested in becoming a Five Acres Special Friend, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Susan Lowe [slowe@5acres.org](mailto:slowe@5acres.org) or by calling (626) 798-6793.**