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California Foster Parent Honored for Transforming Teen Foster Care Through Adolescent-Centered Parenting

Chino, California — In a foster care system where normal adolescent behavior is too often misinterpreted as risk or defiance, one California parent is changing the narrative. Erica Jordan, a seasoned caregiver who welcomes teen girls into her home, has been named a 2025 Youth Law Center Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) Elevate & Celebrate Honoree for her deep commitment to developmentally informed parenting and her ability to create stability for youth who have often been misunderstood or discouraged in prior placements.

QPI's national movement is grounded in the belief that great parenting is not an exception dependent on extraordinary individuals, but something systems can intentionally design for. Erica's approach reflects the very changes QPI is working to embed nationwide so that every teen, in every placement, experiences the developmental support they need.

Her approach aligns closely with the newly published [Adolescent Development Consensus Statement](#), written by leading national and international developmental scientists in partnership with the Youth Law Center. The statement underscores a central truth: adolescence is a period of extraordinary growth and opportunity, and teens—especially those in foster care—need supportive relationships, room for autonomy, and a meaningful voice in decisions that shape their lives. Rather than viewing adolescent behaviors as problems to be corrected, the Consensus Statement urges caregivers and systems to recognize them as essential expressions of development.

Erica lives this science every day. Teens often arrive at her door with case files full of warnings about running away, refusing school, or "acting out." Erica refuses to let those labels define them. "So much of what gets labeled as behavior is really just adolescent development—especially when you add trauma," she said. "Teens are figuring themselves out. They push limits, negotiate rules, test boundaries. That's development."

Her home reflects what the Consensus Statement identifies as core to adolescent thriving: strong, emotionally secure relationships; predictable routines; clear expectations delivered with warmth; and space to make mistakes as part of learning. She balances safety with autonomy so young people feel both supported and

respected—an essential but often missing component in foster care. When a teen argues about curfew, becomes attached to their phone, or shuts down during a hard moment, Erica sees meaning rather than misbehavior and responds with steadiness instead of fear.

Research shows that adolescents in foster care face a “perfect storm” of challenges, and that even one stable, emotionally attuned adult can change a teen’s trajectory. Erica serves as that anchor, offering care that is protective without being punitive and responsive to each teen’s unique needs and lived experiences.

Her strengths do not come from instinct alone. Erica actively seeks out training and reflection through QPI’s adolescent development sessions and incorporates what she learns into her daily parenting. “Teenage girls are figuring out who they are,” she said. “My role is to give them stability while they do that work—not take their behavior personally.” This perspective has allowed her to stabilize youth previously described as “too challenging,” simply by interpreting their behavior through a developmental lens.

Erica intentionally chooses to parent teens, not because the work is easy, but because she sees the potential in every young person who enters her home. Her selection as just one of six 2025 Elevate & Celebrate Honorees nationwide honors not only her extraordinary caregiving, but also the possibility of a foster care system where adolescents are understood, supported, and empowered to thrive.

The award will be presented at a virtual ceremony on December 18, 2025.

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The Youth Law Center (YLC) is a non-profit law firm that advocates to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation so that every child and youth can thrive. The Youth Law Center leads the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), a national movement spanning more than 75 sites and nearly 1,000 QPI Champions committed to ensuring that every child in foster care receives excellent parenting and remains connected to the people who love them.. www.YLC.org.

