



Smithson Valley begins 2019 with stacked victories, losses.

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SMPF investigate apparent murder, suicide.

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NEW BRAUNFELS Herald-Zeitung

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Foster children, families face challenges

The justice system poses unique difficulties for those who participate in foster care



By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

Statistics show again and again that children who are placed in a stable, long-term homes do better than their

counterparts who don't.

Children who grow up in a group home are 2.5 times more likely to become involved in the justice system compared to kids

who grow up in a foster-home setting.

About 90 percent of kids who have five or more foster placements will enter the justice system

at sometime in their life.

Texas teenage girls in foster care are getting pregnant at a rate five

See **FOSTER**, page 5

The heart of the city



Back row, from left, Cathlab RN Brandi Richerson, Dr. Rahul Bose, Cathlab RN Derek Seymore, RT Wade Satsky, supervisor of Cardiac Rehab Services Lori Lee and RN director of the Cathlab Michele Valerio served as Mark's cardiac team. Front row, from left, is Grace Gettys, Mark Gettys and Wendy Getty. **LINDSEY CARNETT | Herald-Zeitung**

Loop 337 signage structures attract attention

By Dalondo Moultrie
The Herald-Zeitung

Don't fret, wary travelers, those towering concrete structures on the side of the stretches of Loop 337 under construction in New Braunfels don't signal any double-decker highways or numerous bridges in New Braunfels.

We here at the New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung have heard the rumors. Some speculated that the Loop project was going to include an upper and a lower level and the structures on the side of the road under construction would support the upper level. Some whispered that the structures would support bridges flying across the Loop in town.

In fact, OSBs — overhead sign bridges — serve a very practical purpose, said Hernan Rozemberg, Texas Department of Transportation public information officer.

"They go across the roadway and hold signs," he said. "There will not be any second level, upper level.

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CHRISTUS patient shares heart attack experience

By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

At 8:15 p.m. on Sunday Sept. 30, New Braunfels High School senior Grace Gettys was just getting

home from being out with some friends when she heard a strange noise coming from her parent's bedroom. When Grace

went to investigate, she

found her father was lying on the ground, twitching and sputtering, unresponsive.

Grace remembers yelling for her dad to stop,

thinking maybe it was one of his practical jokes, but when he didn't take heed of her pleas, she knew something was seriously wrong. Drawn by the yells

of her daughter, Wendy Gettys sprinted into the room as well, and upon seeing her husband on the ground screamed for

See **HEART**, page 8

A special friendship

Local getting ready for basic says goodbye to longtime friend with autism

By Lindsey Carnett
The Herald-Zeitung

In a back booth at IHOP, donning a gray and black Hurler cap, Chandler Faulkner looks down and drinks from a glass of water, listening steadily to his longtime friend Alex Aseltine describe the latest Transformers movie.

Aseltine is dressed in a gray

T-shirt emblazoned with the Canyon Lake High School mascot, a hawk, peering fixedly at passersby. The two 25-year-old men sit shoulder to shoulder.

Aseltine switches topics and begins impersonating characters from his favorite movies and TV shows; the voices of Stitch from Lilo & Stitch, Gol-

lum from Lord of the Rings and Steve Irwin or "The Crocodile Hunter" all spill effortlessly from his mouth.

Still looking down, Faulkner smiles, a silver chain around his neck shifting slightly. The single word 'Army' dangles from the chain, hardly moving as Faulkner looks up at Aseltine.

See **FRIENDS**, page 8



Chandler Faulkner, right, sits with his longtime friend Alex Aseltine, who has autism. Faulkner will be leaving for basic training for the Army National Reserves on Feb. 26, and the two friends said their goodbyes Saturday morning at IHOP. **LINDSEY CARNETT | Herald-Zeitung**

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FOSTER

Continued from page 1

their life.

However being a foster or adoptive parent is no small task, and also has unique challenges.

In part one of this series, the Herald-Zeitung examined the numbers and how local population growth also means seeing more local children enter the system. Part two of this series breaks down the process foster children go through, the problems they face and the trek and difficulties their caretakers must overcome.

The child's journey

Reports in 2016 of two children found tied up in their backyard, beaten and surrounded by their own feces shook the greater San Antonio area as people responded in outrage.

A late-night phone call to police about a crying child prompted the investigation that led to the horrific discovery of the shackled kids, which is commonly where foster children's journey starts — a phone call.

"Children come into care initially because someone in the community called in suspicion of abuse or neglect," said Cheronda Tillman, Region 8 Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) rural foster and adoption recruitment specialist.

DFPS gets a call through an anonymous hotline, which functions as the statewide intake line, and is based in Austin, said Mary Walker, spokeswoman with the DFPS.

"Once that call is determined to be something that Child Protective Services (CPS) needs to investigate or look further into, then the hotline folks will send it to the appropriate area," Walker said.

From there, a local investigator will go out and talk with the alleged perpetrators, the children, close family friends or relatives (called the "collateral") and more, Tillman said.

If the investigator determines abuse or neglect occurred, CPS then looks at if the children can remain in the home, Tillman said.

"If it is determined that children cannot safely remain in the home, ... we take conservatorship and that's when we try to find a foster family," Tillman said.

Being abused is traumatic enough, but then being taken out of the home is often also traumatic for a child, Tillman said.

"We find children who have been battered or abused in some of these homes and you take them away and it's a horrible situation for them — but that's mom and dad, that's the only mom and dad they know," Tillman said.

"So we have to take that into consideration."

After a child is removed from their home, he or she may be placed with a relative or godparent. If someone cannot be found who is willing and fit, the process to find a foster family begins. Group homes and shelters are typically a last resort.

"Our goal is always to find a foster home first, because I believe a home is the best place for kids," said Sondra Ajasin, founder of TruLight127 Foster & Adopt Ministries. "But, earlier teens and large sibling groups, that's hard sometimes."

Located in Guadalupe County, TruLight127 Foster & Adopt Ministries is a non-profit contracted with DFPS to license families for fostering and adopting.

Typically the court process for a child who has been taken away takes between a year to 18 months, said Tillman.

"They won't go back (home) any earlier than that usually," she said.

While going through the court system, children may be paired with a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer. In the Comal-Guadalupe area, children are paired with a volunteer from CASA of Central Texas, which serves Comal, Guadalupe, Hays and Caldwell counties.

"The judge appoints CASA volunteers from our program as what's called a Guardian ad Litem or a GAL, and that is just a legal term meaning guardian for the courts purposes only," said Eloise Hudson, community relations coordinator for CASA of Central Texas.

The CASA volunteer advocates for what he or she feels is best for the child as the child goes through the court process, Hudson said.

Meanwhile, while the child is living with a foster family, a case manager will regularly check in on the child and the foster family, said Natalie Motl, Assistant Director at Strawberry Creek Services, New Braunfels' recently opened child placement agency.

"We try to have permanency planned, so the court does try to set up, 'Okay, do we want to return this child back to the parents or are the foster parents they're with able to adopt?' Because they want to give them a permanent situation as soon as they can," Motl said. "What's ideal is for the parents to do what they need to do so they can get their children back."

From the court process, three outcomes exist; reunification, adoption or going into the system until adoption or aging out occurs. Children age out between 18 and 21.

A foster family's journey

To become a foster family

is no small task, Motl said. As an agency that licenses local families for fostering and adopting, Strawberry Creek Services helps New Braunfels families go through the process of becoming foster-ready, Motl said.

"The licensing process is a lot," Motl said. "I mean they have to tell us everything, ... so that (our case manager) can tell where they came from, and we always tell them, 'It's not so much if your experiences were negative, it's how you came and overcame those.'"

Mary Buchholz, Strawberry Creek Services case manager supervisor, said during this phase she gets to know a family through a home study.

"The home study is based on what the licensing requires," Buchholz said. "So I have to follow a whole lengthy guideline, so what I ask them, how specific and then we just need that information."

Once a family is approved as fit for fostering, they then must go through extensive training, Motl said.

"The minimum is 50 hours of training, and I say minimum because they always end up doing way more than that," Motl said. "We train them on trauma, on how to handle discipline, on cultural diversity — and aside from all the training, they have to go and make sure everything is medically okay with them ... it's all state regulated."

The family also must have observation hours with another foster family so they can learn directly from a home that's actually doing it,

Motl said.

"The family is trained continually so they have to get 50 hours per year," Motl said. "We've been here since September ... and we just licensed our second family on Monday."

Challenges for the children

Statistics show children who have been in the foster system — especially teens or children who have been in multiple foster homes — have higher rates of homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse, incarceration, teen pregnancy, mental illness and more.

A study in 2003 of 100 former foster care youth found that after they had been on their own for six months, 45 percent had been in trouble with law enforcement, 41 percent had spent time in jail, 26 percent were involved in the court system and 7 percent were incarcerated.

Tara Roussett, CEO of St. Jude's Ranch for Children - Texas (SJRC), said on average, the children who come through or live on an SJRC campus are two years behind in school.

SJRC is a nonprofit that offers services for children or families who have been affected by trauma, abuse or neglect, including housing foster children. Its housing campuses are located in New Braunfels and Bulverde.

"Most of the kids that are in residential are teenagers," Roussett said. "Col-

lectively all across all of our programs we take care of over 100 kids in the foster care system every single day."

According to recent DFPS figures, 550 teen girls out of 5,226 in foster care, or 11 percent, were either pregnant or parenting.

"Our location in New Braunfels is an emergency shelter and a long-term residential, and the foster youths that live there are pregnant or are parenting, so it's foster mamas and their babies, teenagers," Roussett said.

Data shows that being in a long-term foster home can help lower these rates — research published in 2017 by Sage Journals showed children who have been in a long-term foster home had less negative behaviors and more optimistic perceptions of their surroundings than those who had been in a group home.

"A child needs love and needs security and ultimately by design should be in a family," said Jenni Lord, founder of Chosen Care, a New Braunfels-based nonprofit that provides resources to foster families and children. "So if they're not able to be at home with their biological families, it's critical that we're providing that safe loving environment for them to overcome the adversity that they've experienced in their young life."

Challenges for the families

Apart from the long process a family faces to get licensed to foster or adopt, families face other unique adversities as well.

Data shows that about a quarter of foster parents quit before reaching the one-year mark, and that only about only a third of foster parents felt "trained enough" for fostering before taking in a child in need.

Children who are brought into a foster home have usually been through a lot of trauma in their young lives, and may have different behaviors than a lot of children, Lord explained.

"About 25 percent of our families that come to us are already at the point of crisis because the behaviors they're experiencing at home are so difficult that they are in a place of desperation for help," Lord said.

Lord's younger brother Justin was adopted into her family when Lord was 19 years old. Justin was 19 months old at the time and entered Lord's family the day after her grandfather's funeral.

"It was very difficult in the beginning. He had experienced a lot of trauma in the first 18 months of his life and we didn't know what that was and didn't know what the triggers were," Lord said. "There were a lot of tantrums and out of control behaviors, and he was so precious but there were these things that we just didn't understand

See CARE, page 14

TUESDAY EVENING												FEBRUARY 19			
	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00	1:30	
2	KCWX Chicago P.D. (H)	Chicago P.D. (H)	Chicago P.D. (H)	Chicago P.D. (H)	Sports	Sports	Live PD	Live PD	Paid	Paid	Mother	Dish			
4	WOAI Ellen's Game	This Is Us (N) (H)	New Amsterdam	News	Tonight Show	Access	Seth Meyers	Paid	Daly						
5	KENS NCIS (N) (H)	FBI "Exposed"	NCIS: N.O.	News	Late-Colbert	James Corden	Extra	Paid	Minute						
9	KLRN Finding-Roots	American Masters (N) (DVS)	Independent Lens (H)	Amanpour-Co	Independent Lens (H)										
12	KSAT House Kids	blackish	Splitting	The Rookie (N)	News	Jimmy Kimmel	N'tline	No	Ameri	Comics	ES.TV				
23	KHCE Praise	Prince	Jesus	Joyce	Youseff	Praise	Why Is	Over	Seku	Jente	Jewish	Watch			
28	KPXL Criminal Minds	Criminal Minds	Criminal Minds	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)	Private Eyes (H)			
29	KABB Lethal Weapon	The Gifted (N) (H)	Fox 29 News	Broke	Two	Seinfeld	Seinfeld	Broke	King	Paid					
35	KMYS The Flash	Roswell, NM	Mike	Two	Last	Last	Simp	Family	blackish	Million	Funny	Tejano			
41	KWEX Jesús	Mi marido	Amar a muerte	Noticias	Notici	Deportivo	Soy tu dueña	En tierras salva							
A&E	Hoarders	Hoarders	Many Sides	Many Sides	Many Sides	Many Sides	(11:03) Hoarders	(12:03) Hoarders	Many Sides	Many Sides					
AMC	*** Rocky III (82)	Sylvester Stallone.	*** Rocky IV (85)	Talia Shire	(11:35) ** Concussion (15)	Will Smith.									
DISC	Garage	Garage Rehab (H)	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Garage Rehab (H)	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper	Amer. Chopper			
ESPN	Basketball	College Basketball	Teams TBA. (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)	SportsCenter (N)			
ESPN2	Basketball	College Basketball	Teams TBA. (N)	Basket	UFC	Ariel Helwani's	UFC Unleashed	Now/	UFC						
HALL	Love on the Slopes (18)		The Story of Us (19, Romance)	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden	Golden			
HIST	Digging Deeper	Drilling Down	Project Blue	Project Blue	Drilling Down	Project Blue	Project Blue	Project Blue	Project Blue	Project Blue	Project Blue	Project Blue			
LIFE	Married Married	Married-Sight	Live Wedding	Married-Sight	Married Married	Married-Sight	Live Wedding	Live Wedding	Live Wedding	Live Wedding	Live Wedding	Live Wedding			
TLC	Fat Fabulous	I Am Jazz (N) (H)	Seeking Sister	Fat Fabulous	Fat Fabulous	I Am Jazz (H)	Seeking Sister								
TNT	** Shooter (07) Mark Wahlberg. (DVS)	** Red 2 (13) Bruce Willis. (DVS)	NCIS: N.O.	NCIS: N.O.											
USA	WWE SmackDown! (N)	Temptation Isl.	Law & Order	Law & Order	Temptation Isl.	Chicago P.D. (H)									

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