

## REGION

# FOSTER CHILDREN GET TO RECONNECT WITH SIBLINGS

BY ELENA CRISTIANO  
For the North County Times

Of the 4,300 foster children residing in San Diego County, nearly one in five can only see their siblings occasionally.

"It's really hard to be apart," said 11-year-old foster child Miriam, who sees her sisters Ruth, 14, and Stephanie, 10, only once or twice a month. "When I feel upset or sad, I want to be with Ruth because with her I can express myself."

Through this weekend, 80 brothers and sisters had a rare opportunity to frolic and play together at Whispering Winds Camp in the mountains near Julian thanks to the United Way and the nonprofit Promises2Kids, who fund and help organize Camp Connect.

The four-day free annual camp is open to children, ages 5

**"We just want to give these foster children a chance to just be kids and spend time with their brothers or sisters."**

**MARGO FUDGE**  
Executive assistant to the director of children welfare services for the County of San Diego

to 18, who have current cases with the juvenile court and are separated from one or more of their siblings while living with relatives or in foster homes or group homes. Referred by their

See **Foster, B4**

## Foster

Continued from Page B1

social workers, they spend four days rock-climbing, zip-lining, swimming, scrapbooking, horseback riding, playing miniature golf or "just hanging out."

Seventeen-year-old Sherron said Saturday that while all the activities are wonderful, she mostly just enjoys the lazy time she gets with her brother A.J., 15, whom she has been separated from since she was 3, but who is still "like a best friend."

"We don't have to rush or say goodbye after a few hours," Sherron said. "It's great."

The youngest camper was Anekyn, who turned 5 while he was there.

He said he really liked spending his birthday at Camp Connect with his 7-year-old brother Cesar.

"This is fun because I love him a lot," said Cesar as he held his little brother's hand.

"We just want to give these foster children a chance to just be kids and spend time with their brothers or sisters, something the rest of the world takes for granted," said Margo Fudge, executive assistant to the director of child welfare services for the County of San Diego.

Fudge is one of 56 volunteer staffers from the county, the United Way and Promises2Kids that allow for a nearly one-to-one ratio of adults to children.

"It's important for the kids to see the same faces year after year and realize that these adults are not being paid, but are here because they really care," Fudge said.



**La'Toya, 11, holds a picture of herself and her brother Al'Lyn, 9, which was taken earlier Saturday by Fostering Memories, an organization of volunteer photographers and scrapbookers. La'Toya, her brother and several other foster children and teens separated from their siblings made scrapbooks during Camp Connect at Whispering Winds near Julian.** Photos by HAYNE PALMOUR IV | NCT

### TO LEARN MORE

To donate or volunteer, visit [www.promises2kids.org](http://www.promises2kids.org).

Having caring adults in their lives "really helps," according to 15-year-old Pedro, who wrote a poem that his younger brother Edgar, 10, read aloud at Friday night's talent show.

Amongst the singers, and rappers and dancers, Edgar stood and read the piece about hope that, to Pedro's surprise, was a big hit.

"You can really get down in this life, when you don't see your parents or your siblings," Pedro said. "Sometimes you cry because you miss them."

"It's also about forgiveness, because nobody's perfect and people make mistakes," he added softly.

He wrote the piece using



**Seventeen-year-old Sherron and her brother A.J., 15, talk about being together during Camp Connect.**

"inspirational phrases" borrowed from some of his favorite songs, woven together to "remind people to never give up on life."

Pedro sure doesn't plan to. The honor student kept getting his homework done a top priority over the long weekend and has his sights set on UC Berkeley or

"maybe Harvard Medical School" upon graduation from high school.

Camp Connect is the longest organized chance for the siblings to reunite each year, but not the only one. They have outings to Padres games, Sea World and other places about once a quarter.