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DIGNITY • EMPOWERMENT • HOPE

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Dear Faithful Friends,

I have some exciting news I wanted to share with you personally.

Families Forward has received a grant from the Fieldstone Foundation in conjunction with Claire Rose Foundation for me to take a 3 month sabbatical. When we applied, it was after review of the literature describing the benefits of the Executive Director's sabbatical on many areas of the organization: succession planning for all positions, a time to grow leadership depth internally, increased engagement in governance and Board development by the Board leadership, and broad-based staff development, in addition to refreshing the leader and leadership approach.

We are all anticipating the growth and transformation Families Forward will go through as predicted in the literature. It is an exciting opportunity.

I will leave March 12 and return to work the week of June 12. During my absence a team has been selected to cover my responsibilities. Madelynn Montoya, Director of Property Acquisition and Management, Liz Andrade, Director of Housing Programs and Services, and Elizabeth Childs, Executive Assistant, are the team! Families Forward is an amazing group of dedicated individuals who will be able to take this opportunity as a chance for growth and true development. Feel free to contact any of them during my absence. They will be eager for the opportunity to talk with you!

One of our dedicated Board members, Mike Kaufman, will also act as a liaison to the Board for the sake of continuity. One of the important parts of this grant is the planning process. It has been an interesting learning experience and has made all of us THINK about what, how and why we do what we do!

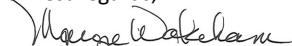
The foundations have strict rules for the grant that include no contact with Families Forward and no following email or other means of communication. I am not allowed to drive by, visit the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon in April, listen in on a staff meeting or a Board meeting, or attend Orange County meetings or even those at the United Way. After 25 years it will be hard not to know what is happening here! I am really grateful for the opportunity to go away myself, but also grateful for the opportunity to use this as a way to build a stronger organization.

The advice from the "sabbatical experts" is to leave town right away, which I will do. Otherwise I would probably find a small way to "know." So, John and I are leaving the country! Our good friend has helped us design two months in Europe. We will spend our first month in Spain driving around the country and practicing our Español! We will then board a boat for a cruise from the Mediterranean to St. Petersburg and return from Amsterdam on May 15. The last month will be spent with the grandkids catching up on everything we missed!

There have been a couple commonly asked questions: "Are you sick?" No. "Are you retiring?" No, someday, obviously, but no plans.

If you have any insights you would like to share with me and the organization before I leave in March, we would love to have you visit our program center or schedule a call. My email is mwakeham@families-forward.org and my direct line is 949-552-2729. Thank you for your part in making things possible here for the more than 9000 people we touch every year. We could not do it without you.

Best regards,


Margie