

The Mentor Connection

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What's Happening for Shared Family Care on the National and State Levels?

by Lauren Wichterman and Amy Price

In the past six months, Shared Family Care programs have seen a number of exciting developments on the national front. On February 17, 2003, *Time Magazine* published an article about Shared Family Care in its Society section.

In this article, a mentor and mentee from Contra Costa County — Barbara Funderburk and Tina Cruz—were interviewed about their experiences with the program. In addition, Ayesha Mahmoud and Nettie Carter, a mentor-mentee match in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were interviewed about their motivations for participating in Shared Family Care. Anna Sangermano, a graduate from the FamiliesFirst Shared Family Care program in Contra Costa County, discussed her achievements since graduating from the program.

Shortly after the *Time Magazine* article was published, ABC's *Good Morning America* did a segment on Shared Family Care as part of a larger show about foster care. In a national TV interview devoted to talking about the recent crises within the foster care system, the hosts interviewed Antwone Fisher and then showed a small segment

on programs that serve as alternatives to foster care. In this piece, mentor Gwen Bridges and mentee Delana Clark from Contra Costa County were interviewed about their experiences with

Shared Family Care (SFC). SFC was presented as an important alternative to foster care, and an option that is available to some mothers trying to keep their families together.

In April, Anna Sangermano and mentor-mentee match Gwen and Delana were flown to New York to be interviewed on *The John Walsh Show*. In a highly evocative episode, Anna and Delana spoke about their struggles with drug addiction and the child welfare system before entering the program, and how having a mentor changed their lives. Gwen provided insights into her motivations for becoming a mentor, and discussed how being a mentor has enhanced her life.

On the legislative front, U.S. Representative Benjamin Cardin (D-Maryland) and George Miller (D-CA) introduced *The Child Protective Services Improvement Act*, which, if passed, would target specific areas of the child welfare system that need improvement. In particular, the legislation focuses



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on improving outcomes for children in foster care, enhancing caseworker retention, addressing substance abuse issues, updating foster parent eligibility requirements, and increasing resources for prevention and adoption activities¹.

Cardin and Miller cite the Shared Family Care program in Contra Costa County, CA as a highly successful alternative to foster care that should continue to be promoted and funded:

This local child welfare agency is having great success with the “shared family” program, which keeps an at-risk family together with a host family who provides around-the-clock parenting skills. Children whose parents complete the program are only half as likely to re-enter the child welfare system as those whose families reunite after foster care; the number of participant parents with a job doubles after they have lived with a mentor; and living conditions for these families once they’re on their own are much improved. . . This bill provides funding to encourage innovative efforts like “shared family”.

The Cardin-Miller bill would provide funds to States that improve outcomes for children in the child welfare system, with the assistance of programs like Shared Family Care.

Shared Family Care has also received growing attention on the state level. In 2000, California’s Governor Davis initiated the formation of a Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group to examine the current child welfare system and make recommendations for improvement. A final report from this group is due to the Governor in June 2003. Key recommendations for the redesigned child welfare system include: shared responsibility between public and private community partners for child safety, permanency and well-being; connection of families to an enhanced community network of services and supports; fairness and equity; collaborative decision-making using a team approach; and family involvement in planning and decision-making.

Because these principles are embedded in the shared family care approach, and based on the success of the Contra Costa

program, Shared Family Care has been recommended as a service model to be further developed, expanded, and evaluated. The program is viewed as a tool to prevent families from being separated, and as a strategy to help restore the capacity of families that have been separated and support them through the reunification process. It is hoped that the inclusion of Shared Family Care in the Redesign plan will result in increased availability of shared family care mentor homes throughout California.

Mentors are encouraged to contact their representatives to urge them to support the Cardin-Miller Child Protective Services Improvement Act .

Many thanks to shared family care mentors and staff whose commitment, skills, and perseverance have helped this model gain national recognition by proving that it can work!

¹ <http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/rel4103.html>

Motivational Interviewing Training

by Lauren Wichterman

On March 13, 2003, Pam Smithstan, a therapist and consultant from Sacramento County, gave a rousing and informative motivational interviewing training at Families First’s Concord Office. In attendance were Contra Costa County mentors, Families First Shared Family Care staff, and staff members from the AIA Resource Center. Motivational interviewing is a counseling method that motivates clients by helping them to discover their own reasons for needing and wanting change.

Pam discussed the importance of engaging mentees around their goals and helping them break self-destructive patterns. She discussed the stages of change (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse), and how critical it is for mentors and staff to meet a mentee “where they’re at.” To illustrate this point, Pam asked the audience to think about a time when someone had tried to make them change, and whether these efforts had been successful. Audience members talked about how resistant they felt when someone had

attempted to change them. Pam pointed out that in the case of Shared Family Care, trying to change a mentee will not only cause resistance, but will rob the mentee of any sense of agency if—under pressure by someone else—she does make a change in her life.

Through anecdotes and her engaging style, Pam pushed the audience to think about times that they had made change in their lives. She talked about the fact that we often don’t recognize that there is a problem—and that doing so involves moving from the stage of “pre-contemplation” (not thinking about changing) to “contemplation” (thinking about changing) (Prochaska & Diclemente, “Wheel of Change”). To help mentees move from pre-contemplation to contemplation without suggesting that they have a problem, Pam suggested asking mentees the following questions:

- **What would this (e.g., drinking, smoking) look like if it were a problem?**
- **How would you know it had become a problem?**

Key components of motivational interviewing:

- Ambivalence about substance use and change is normal.
- Ambivalence can be resolved by working with the client’s intrinsic motivations and values.
- Both client and clinician (mentor or staff person) bring expertise to the relationship—this relationship is a collaborative partnership.
- Be empathetic, supportive, yet directive—these are the conditions within which change can occur.
- Focus on the client’s strengths to support the hope and optimism needed to make change.
- Listen rather than tell.
- When a person is not ready to change, and we push them to change, the product will be **RESISTANCE**.

— Miller & Rollnick, “Motivational Interviewing”

Reflection



“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happened to him.”

— Aldous Huxley

by Regina Ginyard

What is reflection?

Community service, in itself, can be meaningful, pointless, or harmful. Reflection is a process by which one can think critically about their experiences and get meaning from them. It is simply an opportunity through which people can learn from themselves.

Why learn from experience?

Most of what we know about the world and our place in it is derived from learning through our experiences.

What is it that we take for granted?

Many of us take learning for granted. We are often unaware or unable to describe the knowing that precedes our actions. Reflection puts us in the habit of thinking about our thinking.

Why should I be attentive to my thinking?

Do you want to serve others well? Do you want the program you work with to be successful? Do you want to learn, improve, and grow? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you have provided yourself with good reasons to make reflection into a habit.

Journaling

Journaling is a wonderful way in which you can reflect on how your work as a Mentor has impacted your life.

What should I write in my Journal?

- ✓ Journals should be snapshots filled with sights, sounds, smells, concerns, insights, doubts, fears, and critical questions about issues, people, and most importantly, yourself.
- ✓ Honesty is the most important ingredient to a successful journal.
- ✓ A journal is not a work log of tasks, times and dates.

- ✓ Write freely, grammar/spelling should not be stressed.
- ✓ If you can't write a full entry, jot down random thoughts, images, etc. which you can come back to a day or two later and explain into a colorful verbal picture.

How do I structure my writing?

Here are some examples of questions that can be used for guided journaling. Don't simply answer the questions listed below, but use the questions as a diving board to keep your writing focused.

- ✓ What have I learned about myself through this experience?
- ✓ How have I benefited from my experience personally, academically, and occupationally?
- ✓ What happened? Describe the experience and the emotions that you felt.
- ✓ Do I feel my actions had any impact?
- ✓ What are the underlying or overarching issues that influence the problem?
- ✓ What does the future hold?
- ✓ What could be done to change the situation?

Sources:

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Training Update

for Contra Costa County Mentors

by Regina Ginyard

We are in the process of tailoring the monthly support group meeting to better serve the needs of the mentors. Recently, a survey was sent out to the SFC mentors to gather information on how to improve our support group meetings. One of the goals of the survey is to get information that will help us provide trainings that are relevant to the current issues that mentors face. As the needs of the mentors change, we will try to schedule an appropriate discussion to address their concerns/areas of interest.

The following is a list of topics that may be covered in mentor support group meetings in the next three months:

- The Danger of Making Assumptions
- Supporting Children and Families in Transition
- Mentor Case Consultation
- Mentoring from a Strengths-based Perspective

If you would like to suggest additional mentor training topics, please call Regina at (925) 602-1750.

Shared Family Care

Graduates



by Kim MacDonald, Housing Specialist

FamiliesFirst, Inc. 2002-2003 Shared Family Care Graduates, April, 2003

Shared Family Care is proud to announce the graduates for the year 2002, and the beginning of 2003.

These mentees worked very hard to accomplish all of their goals, and transition back into the community and their own homes. Congratulations on a job well done!

We would also like to thank the mentors who, through role modeling and leading by example, helped these graduates achieve their goals and become self-sufficient.

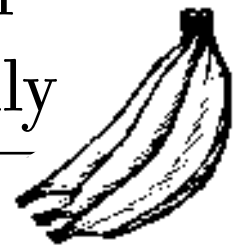
The graduates and their mentors for 2002 and the first quarter of 2003 are:

	Graduates	Mentors
January, 2002	Shorlensky Ford	Charmaine Cooper
January, 2002	Veronica Coley	Mary Brown
February, 2002	Tiffany Jenkins	Jackie Broussard
March, 2002	Amy Ronningen	Marcus Bradford & Kathryn Grant
March, 2002	Cordelia Jones	Dorothy Capers
March, 2002	Mary Davis Moore	Gwen Bridges
September, 2002	Josette Alvarado	Yolanda Flores
September, 2002	Dianne Schmerker	Janice & Gary Gray
December, 2002	Diana Brown	Frieda Adamson-Hughes & Charmaine Cooper
January, 2003	Tina Cruz	Barbara Funderburk
February, 2003	Wyvana Smythe	Marcus Bradford & Kathryn Grant
February, 2003	Lavette Jones	Chrystel Butler

**Kim MacDonald –
Housing Service
Specialist Role for
Shared Family Care**

My role as housing service specialist is to assist the families in obtaining safe, appropriate and affordable housing when they graduate from the Shared Family Care Program. After they are in the program for thirty days, I assist them in obtaining a credit report and beginning to look at how to improve their credit. I link them with the appropriate agencies and landlords with whom I have established relationships. I follow through with the clients until they obtain housing and also provide six months to 1-year aftercare, which is voluntary. This gives them assistance with maintaining housing even after their case is closed.

Easy Recipes for Your Mentee Family



By Regina Ginyard

Banana Cream Pies

Graham Crackers
Banana
Whipped Cream

Tear up banana into bite size pieces. Place on graham cracker. Add a glob of whipped cream. Place another graham cracker on top and have them "squish" down. Kind of messy, but kids love them!

Pennies & Potatoes

4 cups of cooked, diced potatoes
1 onion, chopped
1 package of hot dogs, sliced
3 tablespoons of margarine
3 tablespoons of flour
1-1/4 cups of milk
1-1/2 cups of shredded cheddar or american cheese

Grease a 1-quart casserole dish. Put the potatoes, onions and hot dogs in the dish. Heat the margarine in the microwave for 15 seconds, mix in the flour and stir. Add the milk, and keep beating and stirring for 30 seconds until it becomes a little bit thick. Now stir in the cheese. Pour all of this over your casserole. Sprinkle some more cheese on top. Bake at 450 for 30 minutes. YUM!!

You can add in chopped broccoli and make it a complete meal.