

# The Mentor Connection

SPRING 2002

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Produced by the  
AIA Resource Center

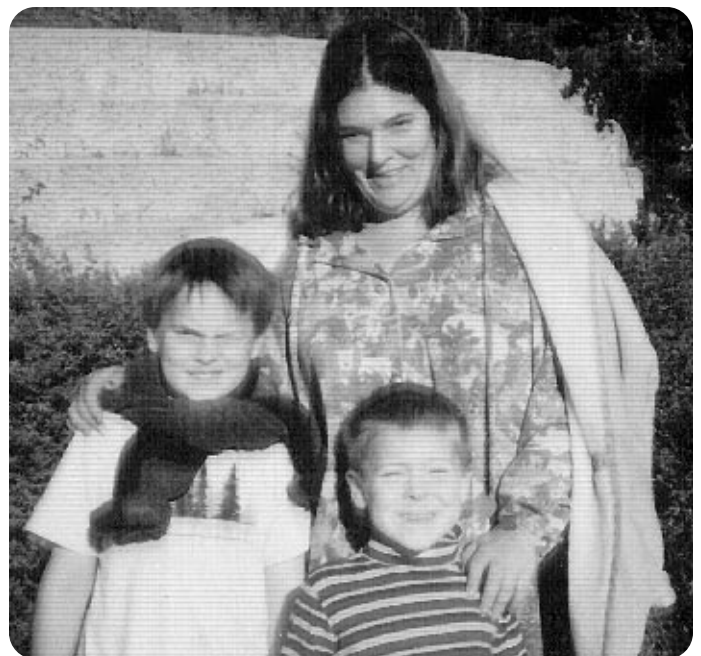
Funded through a grant from  
the Zellerbach Family Fund

Editor: Lauren Wichterman

## A SUCCESS STORY

**A**нна S. was a participant in the Contra Costa County Shared Family Care program in 2000. When I sat down with Anna, she had a lot to say about her experience in the program and why it was so helpful to her. A year out of the program, Anna has many goals and dreams that she is working towards. Anna just moved into a new, 2-bedroom apartment with her son, and plans on gaining full custody of her other two boys in the next few years. She still has a close relationship with her mentor, whom she sees every week.

— Interview done by  
Lauren Wichterman,  
Graduate Student  
Researcher



Anna S. with her two sons

### What motivated you to participate in SFC? To make changes in your life?

I didn't know about SFC until I stumbled across a brochure in the FamiliesFirst lobby. FamiliesFirst had placed my boys in foster care. When I asked staff members there about getting involved, they told me that I would need a referral from my CPS worker. My main motivation in getting involved with SFC was that I wanted to get my kids home. I didn't want them in foster care. I wanted them

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home, dysfunction or not. Once I got some sobriety under my belt, I realized that my lifestyle before really sucked. I realized that my party time was over, and that I needed to make changes. Having my kids taken away woke me up to the fact that I needed to change.

### **How did your mentor support you in this process?**

Grannie (which is what I call my mentor) was so cool. She helped me recognize that my kids weren't respecting me. First, Grannie opened up her house to me, and then she made it clear that she wanted to help me in any way she could. Before I got my SFC placement, I prayed for someone that would help me; and Grannie prayed for someone she could help. It was a God-thing. My mentor helped me get to appointments, and allowed me to talk about stuff. Grannie is and was so easy to talk to.

### **What did you find most helpful about the SFC program?**

It was nice to have FamiliesFirst match my savings. The caseworkers and housing specialist were great and kept me motivated through welfare-to-work and mentee meetings. Also, seeing other mentees going through the same things was really helpful. Kim MacDonald, the housing specialist, was a resource goddess and hooked me up with a lot of good services.

### **How did you and your mentor handle conflict when it arose? Could you give me some specific examples?**

We never really had conflict. We got along really well—in some ways, I think we were a rare pair. I was very compliant with what Gran asked of me. I was able to recognize that sometimes she would have different opinions than I would. I recognized these as her suggestions and observations. I

would either take them or leave them. She shared her life experiences with me, and sometimes I would learn from them. Other times I needed to go through the experience myself. It's really important if conflict arises to take a step back and take some space. Then rethink the issue. Try to approach it again, and come up with a solution that integrates both of your perspectives.

### **Now that you have graduated from the program, could you describe your current relationship with your mentor?**

My mentor watches my son every day after school. She is still very involved in my life. We have a great relationship still. I feel very blessed to have been accepted into my mentor's family. Everyone in her family knows me. I feel blessed to be part of a family. We also go to church together.

### **What advice would you give to mentors around supporting their mentees to make positive changes in their lives?**

Don't pre-judge the mentee before he/she gets there. They're only human. Try to have an open mind and open heart. Not every pairing will work out like mine. In a good situation, both mentor and mentee can benefit and learn from each other. Be committed to honesty and communication.

Mentors should get training about warning signs for addicts—the things that might lead them to relapse or get hurt. They should also learn about flare-up periods. Mentors should visit an out-patient facility, and maybe have a drug counselor educate them about the circle of addiction, and behaviors that might indicate relapse. This information will allow mentors to help mentees get the help they need (by recommending that they go to a counselor, attend an NA meeting, etc.).

### **What is the best way for a mentor to get started with a new mentee family in their home?**

When I moved in, my mentor sat me down and told me that I could do whatever I wanted. She told me where she would be at different times, and that I could call her anytime. It's important that you let your mentee know the deal. The mentor has a life. Tell your mentee that you will try to be there as much as you can. Show them around the house. Mentors should be realistic about their availability. Give your mentees your phone numbers, and help them get to appointments. Both mentor and mentee need to make sure that they set aside quality time to spend together.

### **How can mentors make the mentee family feel at home while still setting appropriate limits?**

It is important that mentors treat their mentees like they're human. The mentee is supposed to be respectful to the mentor and the mentor's home. Mentors should treat mentees like he or she is a normal family member. Don't single them out or be suspicious of them. Trust isn't going to be immediate, and some mentor/mentee matches won't work out. Trust will grow, but you need an open mind because we're only human.

### **What about your mentor was most helpful? least helpful?**

The simple fact that she was kind enough to open her house to a stranger, and allow me to go about my life in order to get my life back on track. My mentor has a lot of faith—she didn't come into the program for money, but to help people. If you come into the program for money, it will just explode because you're involved with the program for the wrong reasons. I say this to both mentors and mentees: if you come into SFC with an open heart, the benefits will be phenomenal.

# Mentor

## Teleconference



**O**n Wednesday, February 20, 2002, four Contra Costa County mentors and three mentors from Milwaukee, Wisconsin joined each other via teleconference for a mentor support group. SFC staff from both programs were also present. Kathy Carr, MSW, led the discussion and invited mentors to share their SFC experiences. One mentor from Wisconsin discussed the importance of respite care, and how valuable it can be for mentors and mentees when they need some space from each other. Mentors in the Milwaukee program are entitled to a certain number of respite hours which can be used, for instance, to take a weekend off.

Another topic of discussion was the need for pre-training of mentees in order to improve their chances of succeeding in the program and on their own. Mentors and staff also discussed ways to engage and build trust with new mentees. Most mentors felt that it was very important to be honest and upfront with their mentees. One mentor stressed the importance of meeting your

mentee where she's at. For example, this woman stated that her mentee would always complain about her nagging her to do her chores, and told the mentor to write her notes instead. The mentor began doing this, and after a short period of time of going back and forth with the notes, the mentee ultimately decided that it would be better to just communicate with her mentor directly.

At least one mentor from Contra Costa expressed frustration with policies and practice that allow mentees to work long or inappropriate hours. All the mentors agreed on the importance of having the mentee around the house in order for them to work together and establish a relationship. Many felt that if mentees were going to work late hours, or work more than 40 hours a week, a therapeutic relationship could not be established and these people would not benefit from the SFC program. Additionally, all agreed that these schedules are not conducive to raising children.

The teleconference lasted for 1-1/2 hours and was very productive. Mentors and staff both agreed that it was a good forum to provide support and get feedback from each other, and to identify creative ways to work with mentees and improve the programs.

*The AIA Resource Center will be setting up another teleconference for SFC mentors this summer. All mentors are encouraged to participate, not just those who currently have placements! Contact your SFC program coordinator for more information.*

## Donation to the Contra Costa SFC Program

*By Kim MacDonald,  
Housing Services Specialist  
Shared Family Care Program, FamiliesFirst*

**I**n September 2001, The Loyal Order of the Moose Lodge in Concord made a charitable donation to the FamiliesFirst Shared Family Care program. SFC staff decided to use the money to support program graduates in their move to independent housing. Specifically, staff will purchase household items and make "welcome baskets" for the families when they move in to their new place. Most of our graduates who are starting over have very little in the way of household items. We believe these gift baskets are a very good way to start them off!

*If you know of any other organizations that would be interested in donating money, gifts or services, or assisting our SFC participants, please have them contact the Contra Costa SFC Program at (925) 602-1750.*

# Anger Management Workshop



**A**nger management was the topic of the January mentor support group in Contra Costa County, CA, led by Kathy Carr, M.S.W. The following techniques were discussed as ways of dealing with someone who is angry.

### ■ Mental Relaxation

Deep breathing, counting backward, or using imagery to reduce tension and redirect away from the trigger.

### ■ Repetitive Response

Calm, monotone repetition of what you want. Example: "Please give me my stereo back."

### ■ Sensitivity Listening

Listening to the other person's feelings.

### ■ De-escalation

Sequence of responses that increase assertiveness in order to obtain a desired outcome. Example: "Please give me my stereo back." "I asked you to return my stereo." "I want my stereo."

## A HOLIDAY EVENT

By *Saundra Marshall, JD*  
Supervisor, Shared Family Care

**F**amiliesFirst' Shared Family Care Program held an Appreciation and Holiday Dinner on December 19, 2001 in the Concord Office. All active mentors (with and without placements) and their families were invited as well as current and graduated mentees and their children. Hosting the dinner was our way of saying Thank You and Happy Holidays to all of the families who have participated in the SFC program. Over forty people attended this event, in addition to the SFC staff.

Mentors were presented with a framed Certificate of Appreciation for their dedication and commitment to their mentees and the SFC Program. The mentees were presented with food gift certificates to Raleigh's and McDonald's. We also acknowledged their hard work and commitment in working towards a successful future for themselves and their children.

The evening was very enjoyable and was a wonderful opportunity for everyone to relax and visit with each other. We are looking forward to another great year and having even more families at our next holiday dinner!

## Shared Family Care Graduates



**FamiliesFirst, Inc. is proud  
to announce the  
2001 Shared Family Care Graduates**

The graduates for 2001 and their mentors:

	<b>Graduates</b>	<b>Mentors</b>
January	Judith Comparan	Jackie Broussard
April	Travis Williams	Boaston Woodson
April	Fannie Lee	Dorothy Capers
July	Cynthia Wright	Joyce Parker
July	Janice Hollin	Jackie Broussard
November	Synetta McDaniels	Frieda Adamson-Hughes
November	Kimberley Bence	Yolanda Flores

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

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

Congratulations to all SFC graduates and their mentors!

## Easy Recipes for Kids



**E**ver wish you could find some easy recipes for the kids in your house to make? Pass these on to the kids!

### Little Pizzas

1 package of English muffins  
1 8-oz. can of pizza topping OR  
1 8-oz. can of marinara sauce  
Grated or sliced cheese  
Whatever else you like

Open muffins. On each half, spread 2-3 tablespoons of sauce. Sprinkle grated or sliced mozzarella cheese on top. For cheese pizzas, broil now.

Otherwise, add salami, sliced olives, sausage, or anything else you like.

Broil until bubbly. Watch carefully.

### Easy Fruit Salad

1 box orange jello  
small carton cottage cheese  
small carton cool whip  
2 cans of mandarin oranges  
1 20-oz. can of crushed pineapple

Drain oranges and pineapple for 1 hour.

Put the oranges and pineapple in a bowl. Sprinkle jello over it and stir.

Add cottage cheese and carton of cool whip. Stir and mix together.

Put in refrigerator to chill. Serves 6-8 people.

Excerpted from *The Kids' Cookbook*, by Dragan and Dalton.