

# The Bakersfield Californian

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Photo by Henry A. Barrios

Charlotte Daniel and her children, from left, Brittany, 12, Joseph, 13, and Ryan, 9, have been helped by Family to Family Mentoring, which is part of Garden Pathways Inc. Daniel's mentor, Lyla Aberle, who passed away, continues to have a huge influence in the Daniels' lives.

## Mentor helps unite family torn by drugs

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There was a time when the Daniel children didn't stand a chance in life.

Substance abuse, run-ins with the police and Child Protective Services, even jail, were familiar to the adult family members of Joseph, 13, Brittany, 12, and Ryan, 9, who live in Oildale.

Had it not been for the positive influence of one mentor in their mother's life, the destructive cycle of drugs and neglect might have continued in their family.

In 2001, the children were removed from the home of their mother, Charlotte

Daniel, 39, a methamphetamine addict with a criminal record.

They were placed with their grandmother, then removed from her home in early 2002 and separated.

Joseph was put in long-term foster care, Brittany was passed around from foster home to foster home and Ryan was placed in a pre-adoptive home.

Charlotte Daniel's situation was dire: She could lose all three of them. But she was still not cooperating fully with the authorities.

"I would show up at court under the influence of drugs," she said. "When you're on drugs, you don't see straight."

Daniel hit bottom when her mother died of a massive heart attack in March 2002, just a month after the children had been removed from her custody.

"I felt like everything was taken away from my kids," she said.

She checked herself into Tabitha's House, a drug recovery program for women and families.

"When I got on the mission to be clean and sober, I was clean and sober," she said.

But about a year into her recovery, when regaining custody of her children finally looked like a possibility, Daniel still needed help.

## Enter a mentor

One Friday night, Daniel went driving around with her children, looking for spiritual support. She pulled into the parking lot at First Assembly of God Church on California Avenue.

Just at that moment, Lyla got out of her car.

"She didn't treat me like, 'Who are they in the parking lot?'" Daniel said about Lyla Aberle, the woman who would be a big influence in her life for almost a year before Aberle died in June 2004.

Aberle was a Family to Family volunteer mentor with Garden Pathways Inc., a local community-based nonprofit that works with other social services agencies, such as the Department of Human Services, and faith-based organizations.

Aberle invited the family to dinner in the church, Daniel said. The two then started developing a relationship. "She bought us a toaster so I could prepare

meals for my children," Daniel said.

And then she brought Daniel to Garden Pathways' community center on 22nd Street downtown.

Daniel, who has a ninth-grade education, began volunteering as a receptionist there, learning clerical skills and eventually earning a wage.

Karen Goh, executive director of Garden Pathways, said mentors like Aberle make a difference in the lives of struggling community members by taking the time to teach them life skills: how to shop for groceries in a healthy way, how to develop job interview skills or how to enroll in adult school.

Some mentors do it so well they're remembered after they're gone. Aberle was honored posthumously at the organization's "Women with a Heart for Bakersfield" annual fundraiser last year.

Local Department of Human Services Assistant Director Pat Cheadle said the department refers clients in

welfare-to-work, teen and foster youth, and independent living programs to Garden Pathways' various mentoring programs.

"They are a support base to our families and children outside of our 8-to-5 hours," Cheadle said.

Thanks to the mentors in her life and her own commitment to her recovery from drugs, Daniel has her children back and works as a parent leader at the Department of Human Services. She is "providing emotional support and hope" to parents who are trying to reunite with their children, said her supervisor, program specialist Emily Thomasy.

## Lessons learned

Daniel's children have seen a change in her.

"She's gotten better than when we were in the foster care," Brittany said. Joseph said, "Before she never would work, she was always in her room." Recently, Joseph told Daniel he thought she would be employed forever, she said.

## Ending the cycle

Crying, Brittany said, "I won't do drugs because I know what it does to your family."

She has a friend in foster care whom she now mentors herself. And Daniel takes Brittany to the support groups she helps lead, where her daughter reminds participants that foster care isn't fun for kids.

Daniel said that seeing the change in her life has inspired aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives to give up drugs.

Joseph said, "I feel I have a positive future because my whole family has quit drugs."

## BECOMING A MENTOR

You can become a Family to Family Mentoring volunteer or supporter with Garden Pathways in one of the following ways:

- Attend a training program to become a mentor and be willing to commit a minimum of 20 hours of your time over three or four months to mentoring adults or youths one-on-one, as a group or as part of a team.
- Commit to becoming a "mentoring consultant," who might provide educational support in a specific area of expertise.
- Attend the fourth annual Family to Family Mentoring "Women with a Heart for Bakersfield" High Tea fundraiser at the Seven Oaks Country Club on Sept. 15 at 11:30 a.m.

To volunteer, reserve a seat or table at the fundraiser or for additional information, call 633-9133, e-mail [familytofamily@gardenpathways.org](mailto:familytofamily@gardenpathways.org) or visit [www.gardenpathways.org](http://www.gardenpathways.org).

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# Another witness to a mentor's legacy

Beverly Hicks, 46, runs the Baby Brigade child care service in southwest Bakersfield.

She said that from the fall of 2002 until early 2003, while she was depressed and in the throes of a divorce, she somehow found out about Family to Family Mentoring.

She was put in touch with Lyla Aberle.

Hicks started going to the mentoring meetings at the First Assembly of God

church, which Aberle also attended.

Aberle would also call her at home once a week and lend her helpful literature to read, Hicks said.

Just two weeks ago, Hicks decided to look up Aberle again, just to say thank you somehow.

"When you have someone that encourages you at some point in your life, you may not think of them all the time," she said. "I really wanted to tell

her how much I appreciated her caring enough to listen."

Hicks phoned the church, was told to call Garden Pathways, and finally learned about Aberle's death.

"There's a torch for Lyle that still burns in me," Hicks said. "She left a deposit on my life, and I want to do the same for others."