



Mentors Give Family Hope

by Karen K. Goh

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as "Mentors help rescue broken lives"*

Mary Wayner had every reason to give up. She had surrendered her body to drugs, her children to CPS, and her life to hopelessness. Today drug-free, Wayner has been reunited with her children; she has a job and a house. "I'm doing fantastic," she tells her mentor, Patricia Mitchell." This month the two are celebrating Wayner's 45th birthday together and National Mentoring Month.

Wayner, placed in foster care as a young child, began using marijuana and methamphetamines at age 11. Like her birth parents, she became an addict and eventually ended up on the streets with her children.

"My life was a mess," Wayner says. "You're done, you're tired, and you know that there is something more to life than this. I knew I had to make a change before I lost what meant the most to me – my children."

Early in 2007, Wayner made a change. She voluntarily turned over her two youngest children to Child Protective Services, and then turned herself into Probation.

Through substance abuse treatment, Wayner was able to get off drugs. But she recalls that she needed more. "The classes showed me how to get clean," she says. "But I realized that it wasn't just quitting dope; there's a whole lot more to learning how to live."

Guided by a referral from the Kern County Department of Human Services, Wayner enrolled in Garden Pathways' Family to Family Mentoring program in September 2007. She engaged in group mentoring, received job search guidance, and then was matched with Mitchell as her mentor. Within weeks, Wayner had found a job. A house soon followed, and then transportation.

Wayner tells the Garden Pathways team, "You didn't hand me a job or a house, you gave me the courage to take steps to get a job and a house." She pauses, and then beams with pride. "My boss tells me that I'm an asset at work. My job loves me so much, they come to pick me up and drop me home."

When Mitchell began to mentor Wayner, she first guided her to focus on her strengths. "She had the will, the right attitude, but lacked confidence," Mitchell recalls. "She needed someone to care and encourage her. We were able to share our faith together."



Photo: Corrie Wayner / Garden Pathways, Inc.

Mary Wayner and Garden Pathways mentor Patricia Mitchell reflect on the positive changes in Wayner's life as they enjoy a sunny afternoon in the park.

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In the summer of 2008, Wayner joyously celebrated the return of her children, Corrie, age 14, and Dustin, age 15. However, the family soon encountered the challenges of the extended separation. During this transitional period, Wayner garnered support from Mitchell in learning how to communicate effectively with her teens and how to establish boundaries and consequences. “She showed me how to be a mom,” says Wayner.

Both children entered Garden Pathways’ youth mentoring program. Corrie now has the additional support of her mentor, Bre Carlson. With Carlson’s guidance, the fourteen-year old is making major strides in communication and anger management. Wayner reports that family dynamics have improved tremendously. “Change is scary, but it’s awesome,” she says.

What happened this Christmas would have been unimaginable to Wayner a year ago. TIC–The Industrial Company adopted the Wayner family and generously showered them with gifts. But the best

was yet to come — presents from Wayner’s two grown children. Her eldest son, age 28, shared the first surprise. He informed Wayner that he had recently given up drugs: “If you could do it, Mom, so could I.”



Photo: Tamira Smith / Garden Pathways, Inc.

Dustin and Corrie share their first Christmas together with their mother, Mary Wayner, after being reunited as a family.

Then Wayner’s 24-year old son called from out of state after nine years of silence. At age 6, he had been removed from Wayner. Mother and son had spoken once in 18 years. Since Christmas, they have been talking almost every night.

Wayner attributes the changes in the life of her family to the support from mentoring, “When I came to Garden Pathways, they showed me how to pull myself together,” she recalls. “I felt accepted, worth it, and that I had value. I learned how to forgive

myself. I was encouraged to take little steps and let God handle the rest.” She tells Mitchell, “I get on my knees every night. I’m so blessed.”

Mitchell, a project manager with McIntosh & Associates, had initial reservations in becoming a mentor. She remembers asking herself, “Do I really have the time?” A year later Mitchell says, “I’m surprised that mentoring is a lot easier than I thought it would be. I expected it to be more work and harder than it is. It’s amazing how little we have to give someone else for it to be so valuable.”

NATIONAL MENTORING MONTH

January 2009 marks the eighth annual observance of National Mentoring Month. Initiated by the Harvard Mentoring Project, MENTOR, and the Corporation for National and Community Service, the month-long campaign highlights the need for mentors. It calls to action individuals, businesses, and organizations to work together to increase the number of mentors and strengthen their communities through mentoring.

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“Kern County is in dire need of mentors to guide and encourage at-risk youth and adults,” says Karen Goh, executive director of Garden Pathways. “The investment of a mentor can change the future of a family forever.”

Goh applauds the community teamwork that enabled the changes in the Wayner family:

“Substance abuse treatment programs, the Kern County Probation Department, the Kern County Department of Human Services (CPS), and non-profits worked together – each supplying a necessary component,” Goh notes. “At the same time, Wayner’s journey underlines how the personal support and encouragement provided through mentoring is an essential partner to public programs.”

Wayner compares her life before and after mentoring. “I didn’t know how to lead a normal life,” she says. “My world was all I knew. My family now has a future because people cared. **Mentoring gave my family hope. We will never be the same.**”

GET INVOLVED

You can become a mentor or volunteer through Garden Pathways to help your community in one of the following ways:

- Attend a training to become a mentor and be willing to commit one hour a week of your time for one year to mentor at-risk youth or adults one-on-one, as a group, or as part of a team.
- Commit to becoming a “mentoring consultant” to train or support mentoring participants or mentors in your field of expertise.
- Sponsor a mentoring event or enrichment experience for at-risk youth.
- Donate financially to support mentoring.

Other local organizations also offer opportunities for mentoring.

For information on how to get involved, contact:

- **Garden Pathways, Inc. (Family to Family Mentoring)**
Karen Goh, Executive Director
(661) 633-9133
www.gardenpathways.org
- **Stay Focused (Reach 4 Greatness Mentoring)**
Manuel Carrizalez, Founder/President
(661) 322-4673
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- **Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Central California**
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- **MENTOR**
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