



Prevention Approach to Gang Violence
Garden Pathways Comprehensive Mentoring
QUARTERLY REPORT: DECEMBER 2009
Success Stories

*These stories and letters highlight participants who were referred to Garden Pathways' **Family to Family Mentoring** program for comprehensive mentoring services. Adult and youth participants initially attended a one-week group mentoring workshop and then voluntarily returned for additional group mentoring and/or individual mentoring. The names of participants have been changed.*

YOUTH

Letter written to Family to Family Mentoring regarding his son Cooper (he has been in the youth program for two years)

To whom it may concern: My son Cooper has made **incredible improvements** this last year. He is more talkative and expresses his opinion. I have seen Cooper **change so much for the good**. When I first got custody of Cooper he used to hoard food and he would stay to himself. Elijah (his mentor) plays a major role in Cooper's life. Cooper's **grades improved** a lot just in the last two semesters. He went from below 2.0 GPA to above a 2.3 GPA. Elijah took Cooper under his wing like he would his own grandson. He works with Cooper through a gang prevention program at Family to Family Mentoring. Through this program, my son has gotten to see software designers working in their fields of study. Cooper has decided to **pursue a future studying law and becoming a lawyer**. A year ago that was the furthest thing from his mind. I would like to thank everyone in the program that is helping my son out. I especially need to give great appreciation to his mentor **for helping my son out, no matter what the situation is**.

Sincerely: Jason

Information provided by youth in mentoring program at Golden Valley High School

When asked, "How the mentoring program has affected the youth participants' lives," several of the youth expressed, "**The mentoring program has changed our lives.**" One girl explained that she used to "do bad things (drinking /drugs)" and ditch school to hang out with the wrong crowd. Now her **attitude has changed. She is more positive. She is communicating more with her mother; she has stopped hanging out with the wrong crowd, and is attending school on a regular basis. She is focused on improving her grades, so she can mainstream**

back into regular classes (she understands this is necessary to pursue her goals and dreams). School administration indicates that she has shown such an improvement that she will mainstream in spring 2010.

Another young man (who had been adopted and then his adoptive parents went to prison for inappropriate behaviors; requiring that he be shuffled to another foster home) expressed that **everything had changed for him**. When he started the program he was in the opportunity class for skipping school and making wise cracks a lot. The mentors saw that he had a soft heart and realized he needed to know that **adults really do care**. He didn't feel like he had a family. He didn't know who he could trust, or if his foster parents were really going to keep him, and if he would get moved again. During one mentoring session he came in downcast and one of the mentors asked him, "Do you need a hug?" "How long has it been since you had a hug?" The young man replied, "I can't remember." **The mentor reached out and gave him a huge bear hug and the youth's face filled with a smile. He didn't let go for a long time.** Over a period of time, he came to trust **that the mentors really cared about him**. He also **built a better relationship with his foster parents. He did better in school and was able to mainstream from opportunity class to regular classes.** He continues to attend weekly mentoring sessions. He is more mature, happier, and focused on building a positive future.

Kathy shared that she is learning about respect and that you don't want to mess up your life because when you mess up and do drugs it gets you no where in life. **The program has helped change my life in a good way. I realize that I should stay on the right track, stay in school, graduate, go to college and get a good job.** I continue coming back to the program because I like talking about my feelings and problems. I get the opportunity to speak for myself. No one puts me down or anything. They listen.

Youth responses (Surveys are periodically given to youth in the program to determine how mentoring is influencing their lives)

- Our mentors teach us life lessons. They help us figure out our life plan. They helped us to learn how to look for jobs and give us great advice for our future.
- I have learned to love and respect myself.
- I feel super about myself.
- It seems like life is getting better.
- I feel cared for.
- I have learned to think positively.
- I can express myself without being judged.
- I have someone to talk to.
- I learned how to talk with and help my mom.
- I have career goals.
- I can control my anger.
- I have learned to handle difficult situations in a positive way.
- My attitude towards school has improved.
- I am getting along with my teachers and staying out of trouble.

Information given by David's mentor to Family to Family Mentoring regarding his mentee
(Original excerpt from September 2009 quarterly report)

David was in the opportunity class at Golden Valley High School. The opportunity class is where kids who are in trouble and on the verge of getting kicked out of school are sent. It is also the same place where kids who were attending continuation schools are placed when they transition back to mainstream high schools. Garden Pathways hosts weekly group mentoring sessions on campus for some of these students. **David was very open with the group and expressed that he had been going down the wrong path in life and he knew if he didn't get his life together soon he would end up on drugs or in prison.** He was very behind in his credits to graduate high school. **The mentoring group shared often about the power of "choices" and that each of the students was made for greatness.** One day David shared that he wanted to change and that he knew he had to get out of his environment. The mentoring staff discussed this with Project 180 partners and encouraged David to enroll at the Grizzly Youth Academy (a 5 ½ month military structured program for delinquent youth, located in San Luis Obispo County). He will earn fifty-five (55) credits towards high school graduation during this period. **David began the program in July and is doing great!!** He sent a letter to his mentor a week after starting the program (in his own words).

"Dear Calvin, I just want to say hi and to tell you how I am doing here at the academy. It has been alright this first two days and I just been trying to learn most of things that we have to learn and trust me it's a lot. Well I just want to say that I love it here and I believe that this school is going to help me a lot. Sorry that my letter is not so good and that righting is not so good but I am going to get better. [sic] I can't wait to see you. Your mentee, David"

David's mentor went to visit him at Grizzly Academy. He is doing very well. The structured environment has really helped bring focus to his life and he now has a positive attitude towards his future.

Update on David

David completed the Grizzly Youth Academy (5 ½ month military structured school for at-risk youth) in December. **He is a changed young man. He improved in his academics. He earned 55 school credits. His attitude is more positive. He is now planning for future goals and dreams.** His dad is very happy about the changes in his son's attitude. David's mentor attended his graduation ceremony at Grizzly Youth Academy. David was so thankful to his mentor for caring enough to encourage him to get out of his environment (wrong people, wrong place, and wrong time) and attend the Grizzly Youth Academy. The structure and discipline within the program helped David to see what it is to be a "man" and **to focus on what kind of future he wants.** He is grateful for the love and support he has received. He is mainstreaming back into high school for his senior year. **He is continuing on with individual and group mentoring, so he has a positive influence in his life to hold him accountable to pursue high school graduation.**

ADULT

Letter written by Jim to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

I took this really cool class that I had heard about from Flood Ministries called Family to Family Mentoring. I talked it over with my mentor and I realized this would benefit me in the future. **The best thing that I have learned is what a healthy relationship and a toxic relationship are, and how to avoid toxic people. I also learned a lot about communication which will help me build a better relationship with my daughter.** I also know that **communication is the key to having a healthy relationship.** I've also learned that it's better to **let go of your anger, and forgive yourself and others, so your anger doesn't build up inside you.** Finally, I can start **building boundaries** in my life, and not let bad things take control of me or the people that mean the most to me. I feel that after taking this class **I have let go a lot of issues that had me down.** Thanks for all the good advice.

Update on Jim

Jim continues to meet with his mentor and is doing very well. He recently graduated from his parenting classes and is strengthening his relationship with his daughter.

Letter written by group mentoring facilitator regarding Candis

Candis first attended Family to Family Mentoring sessions in September 2009. She **struggled with family issues such as parenting, boundary setting with immediate and extended family and communication of her feelings/needs.** She disclosed in recent ongoing group mentoring sessions a specific incident where **she was able to use "I language" and communicate her feelings.** She talked about what she needed and what she didn't like about a situation and communicates this with another family member. **She disclosed that she has been able to communicate things that have bothered her for years, things about the past, about her family and set boundaries about what is okay and not okay in her house.** She has participated in ongoing group, provided support to other members and been an active listener. She is now beginning to share her journey, failures, fears and successes recently with all members.

A letter written by Rita to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the classes. The staff was kind understanding and very helpful. **It's giving me some new tools to apply in my life.** I was able to talk to them and they listened and gave me different ideas. They made me feel like **I mattered.** Everyone was always kind and courteous.

Update on Rita

Rita has been matched with a wonderful mentor. They meet on a weekly basis. Rita's life is beginning to turn around. She has expressed that she now feels like that she has hope for the

future. Her mentor is actively engaged in helping her incorporate new life skills: planning, budgeting, and transitioning into a healthy housing environment.

A letter written by Ana to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

I made a commitment to myself to give Family to Family Mentoring a chance to see what it could do for me, because **I was in a situation in my life that was very unhealthy**. I was arrested with my boyfriend last year. Seeing him this year made me feel a lot of feelings, **but I chose to stick to my commitment**. Family to Family Mentoring helped me by providing a safe place when I was confronted with my past. **The tools I got in communication and forgiveness helped me not to be a victim anymore**. I feel important to myself now. Life to me is not so scary to live in. I left the past because that was good for me to do. I know it's (life) not always going to be a bowl of cherries, **but I have something (tools and support) that Family to Family has given me to (make it through)**. I believe I will continue to make good choices.

Update on Ana

Ana is doing very well. **She has remained free from drug use**. She regularly attends group mentoring sessions and has gained wonderful tools. **She was able to forgive her biological family for various family dysfunctions**. She was recently matched with a mentor and the relationship is going very well. She has surrounded herself with stable, healthy relationships. **She enrolled in Bakersfield college and will begin in January 2010**.

A letter written by Candy to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

Dear Family to Family, I learned a lot about myself during this class. I came in skeptical and left so blessed! I also felt compassion for those around me who shared openly about their hurts, dreams and desires. **I feel a lot freer**. **Changes are going to be ongoing**, but through this class, **I was given a lot of tools**. **I also am able to see myself helping others the way I have been helped**. Everything was done in a safe, loving, non-threatening environment. I am so thankful for the new relationships I found and the bonding that was done in my heart. I feel like I've been with family and I'm a little saddened for all this to come to an end! Thank you so much! Your program is a blessing!

A letter written by Melvin to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

To Family to Family, as I attended this program, there was fear of sharing about my past, confronting my past, and sharing issues of my problems. But as the days went on and class resumed **I began to open up and reveal everything about me and what was buried deep inside of me**. **As I opened up, I began to empty this stuff that was clogging my life up**. I told people things that I never ever told my wife. Now that this program is over, **I do not only feel better but want to continue on being counseled to stay clean and empty of fears-pain-hurt**. I love this program and I highly recommend this to everyone who have or had problems

before. I thank God for you and this program for helping me and cleansing me of the things I struggled with. Love you all.

A letter written by Mary to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

I know a lot about myself that **I can change** and **what I can do to have a better relationship with my spouse and family**. I know I can have **boundaries** and I can be a better person. I see how **important I am** to a lot of people and I am happy to have been here to learn what I can do for my life.

A letter written by anonymous to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

My experience in class has taught me how to **set better boundaries**. I never set boundaries before. I also learned how to **control my anger**. These last two weeks have taught me how to **feel better about myself**.

A letter written by Tanisha to Family to Family Mentoring after completing the workshop

Dear Family to Family, Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this program and class. It was a good experience to have. **I learned a lot, things that I can take home to my family. We all learned together to overcome communication issues, exercises for and healthy relationships, to not give up and to say no to the toxic things.** It's a really helpful class. I would like to come back and would really like a mentor.

Garden Pathways extends thanks to the County of Kern, Kern County Department of Human Services, mentors, donors, and other supporters for partnering to transform lives and to transform our community.