Personal Perspective

Dear Dr. Deirdre Banks, Family Resource Specialist

Being a Family Resource Specialist has been a very rewarding experience for me. It feels so good to be able to engage a family and assist them with the needs they have.

“Sometimes small things – such as connecting a family with free after school programs or family counseling can already make a tremendous difference in a family’s dynamic. It is surprising how many families don’t know about the many community resources that are available to them.”

Here is a card that I received from one of the families that I am working with. A mother and a 14-year-old daughter. The mother was in a custody battle with the biological father, which was traumatizing to the child, traumatizing the child so much that the child was unable to sleep in the bedroom by herself when it was dark outside. She would scream and not want her mother to leave her side. So what I did was refer the family to one of the partners of Pathways to Safety, a therapist, who worked with the family and linked the daughter to some really good resources, including a self-confidence group and a peer mentor group. The mother now has full custody, the daughter lives with her.

They are doing very, very well.

The card reads:

Dear Deirdre,

I cannot thank you enough for all your help. You are truly a living angel. Where there was no hope, no end, there is now hope and an exciting future. We are learning about empowerment and love, respect and our right to own dignity. We are also using our bookmarks!

Thank you again.
We hope to see you soon.

Blessings & Peace

And the daughter wrote:

Thank you so much Deirdre.
I am doing better.
I am so thankful.
Thanks again.
That was really nice of you.

With Pathways to Safety, we are working with a whole constellation of community agencies to help them be as strong and effective as they can be. They are stretched thin with the families they are already serving and with Pathways to Safety we are potentially identifying several thousand more families who need services.

So the question is, how do we stretch further to meet those needs?

Jane Parker, Associate Director, ACTION Council

Differential Response is a statewide, early intervention initiative designed to keep children safe in their homes and out of the child welfare system.

In Monterey County we call it:

Pathways to Safety...

The initiative is based on a couple of core beliefs – that families can resolve issues more successfully when they voluntarily engage in services, supports and solutions and that children are safer and families stronger when communities work together.

In California

More than 90% of calls to child abuse hotlines do not qualify to become official child abuse and neglect cases.
Statistics show that about one-third of hotline referrals are re-referrals of the same families from the previous year.
Community support and services assist families with issues that, if unaddressed, can harm children and families, and lead to a later removal of a child.

In Monterey County

About 300 families are referred to Pathways to Safety every month and offered support by a community-based Family Resource Specialist.

We need your help – even a small donation can make a significant difference for a child, a family and our community!

You can Help!
For information about donations please contact:

(831) 783-1244

ACTION Council of Monterey County • 369 Main Street • Suite 201 • Salinas, CA 93901
A referral to Pathways to Safety begins with a call to Family and Children’s Services.

The majority of calls are not from individuals that witnessed a child being hit or sexually abused. A more typical example of a call is from a concerned community member, such as a neighbor who...

...notices that the utilities in the home of the child have been turned off...

...or that children appear to be unsupervised.

Or the call could come from a teacher...

...who notices that a child is coming to school late or dirty...

...or hears from the child that there is no food in the home.

A simple referral to a service in the community may change the path a family takes forever.

You can help us stretch further to build the capacity of our community-based organizations to meet the needs of these families.

Traditionally, these families received no further assessment because the legal threshold for abuse and neglect that would allow Family and Children’s Services to respond is not met.

Now, these families are referred to Pathways to Safety and offered support and services to address the problems that may have triggered the call in the first place.

Depending on each situation and the level of risk, families are either directly referred to a community-based Family Resource Specialist or jointly approached by them and Family and Children’s Services.

Within 24 hours of the referral, the family is assigned to a Family Resource Specialist (FRS) and sent a welcome card. Within one week of the referral, the assigned FRS visits the family in person. Several attempts are made to connect with the family. Families are not obligated to work with a FRS – engagement is absolutely voluntary. The FRS works with the family to identify their strengths and needs. They work together to work on those issues that have the highest potential to move the family towards self-sufficiency.

“Many families are in crisis – they haven’t been able to pay rent and are at the brink of getting evicted, they can’t pay the utility bill, or their car is broken down and they can’t get to work. They first need help with these basic needs before deeper problems can be addressed.”

Jane Parker, ACTION COUNCIL