



InsideOut

Family & Youth Services of San Joaquin County

Serving the Stockton/San Joaquin County Community Since 1969

Vol. 11, No. 3
Fall 2009

Ready to move forward

Lena's not quite twenty, but she's held down the same job for nearly a year, she's on the waiting list for the Delta Community College nursing program and, in January, she will be setting up housekeeping in her own apartment. If these accomplishments don't strike you as remarkable, consider one more fact: less than two years ago Lena was living on the streets, addicted to drugs and doing whatever she had to do to support herself. As she puts it, "I've come a long way in a short time."

When she's asked about the circumstances that brought her to Family & Youth Services' Transitional Living Program (TLP), Lena starts by talking about her history of using drugs. Taking responsibility for her mistakes is an important step for Lena, but there's a lot more to the story. When questioned, Lena describes a deeply troubled family.

Her father was an alcoholic (now recovering), the source of constant problems. Lena was being molested at home and, when she told her parents about it, they didn't take it seriously. Lena was one of the family's two adopted children. Her biological mother gave her up at birth and her adoptive parents were never able to accept their adopted children on an equal basis with their two



Lena at the Youth Drop-In Center.

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Make our family your family: Adopt-a-Youth

For most of us, holiday celebrations take the chill out of the cold winds of December. We brave the crowds at the mall, warm our homes with the sights and smells of the season, share sweet memories with family and friends. In an age-old tradition, one to share them. He has run out of hope. Instead of enjoying the warmth of togetherness, homeless youth may feel like they're on the outside looking in.



Here at Family & Youth Services we bring homeless youth in from the cold. We know that every youth deserves a loving home, not just for the holidays but every day of the year. And, along with warm food and a safe place to sleep, every youth deserves a respite from the chilling winds that have blown their hopes away. On December 23th the Youth Drop-In Center will host Family & Youth Services' annual holiday party for the community's homeless youth. Agency staff members will bring their favorite holiday dishes and Santa will be on hand to make sure that every young person receives a gift.

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Director's Perspective

Do you hear what I hear? A child laughing in our center with a smile so big and so bright. Do you see what I see? A center full of children with full bellies and a warm place to sleep for the night. Do you know what I know? Without help these children would be lost to the streets, hungry and cold.

Here we are giving thanks for what we have, planning our Christmases with friends and family. I feel quite fortunate to have what I have, a loving husband, a warm home and friends to share the season with.

Linda J. Mascarenas-Colgan

Our drop-in center has had a 200% increase in the number of youth seeking food and shelter. We have two toddlers and two infants in our long term shelter. Some days we run out of food for the drop-ins. Some days some kids go hungry. I ask myself "How did this happen?" Usually it is because we plan for what was usual a few days ago and now there are many more hungry mouths to feed. We are preparing more food and working on an emergency plan for the days we run out.

My friend recently had a 60th birthday party. I was racking my brain trying to decide what to get someone who really has everything. My husband and I agreed that we would "Adopt-a-Youth" in her name. A youth will have a nice Christmas and my friend won't have to return something she did not like. My friends Carla and Blake Bomben have done this for the past few years. They adopt in the name of their nieces and nephews and the kids receive a personal thank you letter and later read their names listed in our newsletter. It makes them feel good to know they have helped a homeless youth have a nice Christmas. A little food for thought, my friends.

I send you all the warmest wishes for the holidays with hopes that you will be surrounded by family and friends and enjoy the season together. As always, give me a call, come on by and let's have a cup of coffee and solve the problems of the world. Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Adopt-a-Youth

Continued from page 1

You can help by making our family a part of your family. A \$100 contribution supports all gifts for one youth or child. Smaller contributions are welcome and will be combined to make sure everyone's wish list is met. Businesses and individuals who want to be a part of the "Adopt-a-Youth" program can get more information by calling Maryann at 209-929-6700.

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November is National Runaway Prevention Month

Moving forward

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natural children. Just 16 years old, she was the one who had to leave. When Lena quietly comments, "I have abandonment issues," no one wonders why.

Lena was a chronic runaway from her foster care placements. She was using alcohol and drugs, living the hard life of street survival for most of 2007 and 2008. She knew something had to change, so when a friend suggested she try the Opportunity House TLP she decided to apply. Lena was surprised by the warm welcome she received. She remembers that she looked pretty bad when she came in from the streets, but no one at the Youth Drop-In Center seemed to see that. "Are you hungry? Do you want something to eat? Would you like to take a shower?" She was greeted with acceptance, not judgment, and that made all the difference.

Meeting a crisis

Jgt"Łtuv" o qpvju"cv"Qrrqtvwpkv{" Jqwug" ygtgpöw" gcu{0"Ngpc" didn't really want to get a job—a program requirement—and didn't like the idea of putting 75% of what she earned into savings. She was losing a lot of weight and program personnel knew something was wrong, but they didn't suspect her real problem. Lena was still using drugs. All that changed the day she "accidentally" spilled out her stash of cocaine on her case manager's desk. As required by law, program staff called the police and Lena was taken into custody. Five days later, when she was released from county jail, Lena returned to Opportunity House. She was amazed that the program welcomed her back and explains that she just wouldn't have made it without the program's support.

Associate Executive Director Jennifer Jones went with Lena to her court date and program staff members supported her as she complied with a series of court-supervised treatment

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Thank You to everyone who helped make FAYS' 40th Anniversary celebration a success.

(Below) Executive Director Linda J. Mascarenas-Colgan (l.)
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options to address her drug problem, including drug-testing at the TLP itself. She continued seeing her counselor here at FAYS and also met with the agency's music therapist. Lena is proud to say that she has been "clean" for 15 months.

Working in outreach

Although she knows that she is responsible for the changes in her life, Lena is deeply grateful for the care and support she has received from Family & Youth Services. Last year she earned her high school diploma and started her job as a youth worker on the Street Outreach Team. She has a special expertise. "I've been on the streets," she explains, "I know what it's like." She understands that youth are scared to come into shelter, where they think they'll feel trapped, and she is able to offer them only what they are able to accept. Lena also talks to community groups, including speaking engagements for the annual United Way campaign, to help people understand what brings young people to the streets and what can be done to help.

In January, Lena will graduate from the TLP by moving into her own apartment. TLP staff is helping her plan and prepare for the move. She is looking for full-time work and seems optimistic about her two interviews for The Gap. Lena admits that moving out of Opportunity House is a little scary. "This is home to me," she explains. But she also sounds ready to move forward: "It makes you feel better when you've yqtmgf" hqt" gxgt { v j k p i " { q w " j c x g 0 " k " v j k p m " k o x g " Ł p c n n { " created a life worth living."

Lena is prepared to continue working hard, but she's not afraid to dream. She'll work to support herself and pursue her educational goals. Eventually, she plans to join her long-time boyfriend in Los Angeles and give acting a try. "People tell me that it's unrealistic," she comments, "but I will do it." She will certainly go as far as hard work and determination will carry her.

In loving memory of Jerry Smith

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Mission:

The mission of Family & Youth Services is to build a stronger community by fostering the strengths of youth, adults and families to help them meet life's challenges.

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