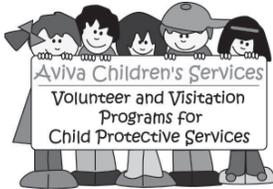


Kids at Heart

SPRING 2007



Mentoring Program Can Make the Difference in a Child's Life

by Claudia Sandoval, M.S.W.

As the volunteer coordinator, I often find myself at outreach and recruitment events sharing the importance of the mentoring program we have here at Aviva Children's Services. I believe in this program and know that the mentors are making a difference.

Having been a CPS (Child Protective Services) social worker in California, I know first-hand how lonely many foster children can get. Just a small treat like a trip to a bookstore is such a big deal for some foster children. Not just getting a book, but having an adult be as excited as they are about the experience and having that person investing time in them is often a treat in itself.

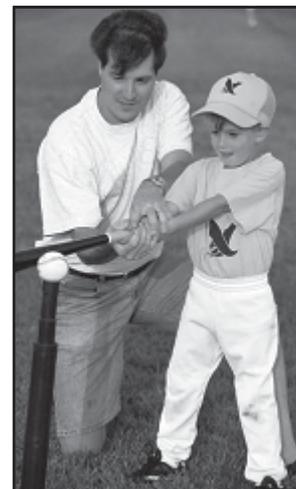
Aviva was recently mentioned in the monthly paper, *Good News Tucson*, which featured articles on mentoring. While working with the writer for that article, I shared some of the reasons why children under the care of CPS need mentors. As many children are waiting to return to their birth parents, or to be placed in the care of a relative, or for a permanent home by way of adoption, they may find themselves alone. Sadly, many foster children move around for a variety of reasons and a child that makes multiple moves may experience a sense of loss, and may no longer feel a connection to anything.

Mentoring is one way to help children and youth, while they are under the care of CPS, feel that they have "someone." The constant moves and multiple transitions may turn the mentor into the ONLY consistent person in the children's lives since case workers, therapists, teachers and schools often change.

Aviva volunteers have to complete a thorough background check that includes fingerprinting, a five-year driving record, three references and an interview that details the volunteer's life. This information

allows coordinators to see if the adult is a "good fit" and in the "right place" to take on some of the issues that children entering the CPS system may face. All mentors must complete 16 hours of training as well, including a variety of topics from understanding abuse and neglect to understanding loss and attachment issues affecting foster children. Descriptions of the two sessions and the training calendar are posted on our web site:

www.avivatucson.org.



We struggle every month to match children and youth with mentors. We receive numerous requests for mentors for boys, which we cannot match because there are so few male mentors!

The following account explains more clearly how a mentor impacts a child's life. One particular youth was removed from her birth mother due to the mother's drug abuse and her subsequent inability to care for her then 16-year-old daughter. The mother was verbally abusive and would leave the teen alone at home. CPS became involved because, in this case, the youth did not want to return home. It was clear to the courts and to CPS that the mother did not want this youth back either. She was unable to complete parenting classes, do random drug testing, or even compose herself to find a job or adequate housing. The youth was placed in a foster

Continued on page 5

www.avivatucson.org.

Aviva Children's Services

Mission Statement

The mission of Aviva is to enhance services that improve the quality of life for children who are victims of neglect, abuse, and poverty, and who are in the care of Child Protective Services.

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Cathy Tullgren

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Receptionist

If you have article contributions or ideas for our Fall 2007 issue, please contact Bonnie at 327-6779, ext. 13.

All articles and photos by Aviva staff unless otherwise noted.

Every charitable act is a stepping stone towards Heaven — Henry Ward Beecher

Aviva's Mentors Have Been Helping Children Thrive for Nearly 30 Years

In 1978 when the Child Protective Services Volunteer Program was in its inception stage, social workers were asked to identify how volunteers could best help clients and staff. A frequently mentioned request was the Big Brothers/Big Sisters model, which involved volunteers working with children in foster care and with children living with stressed parents or relatives. (At that time, any child who had a same-gender adult in the household was not eligible to participate in Big Brothers/Big Sisters.) So the new volunteer program offered adults the chance to be a "Special Friend" to a child in CPS custody.

It was heartwarming to see wonderful individuals eager to befriend a child and willing to undergo the screening process necessary.

One applicant told us



by Anne Sankey,
Executive Director

that a young woman had taken a serious, long-term interest in her, which helped her keep her life on track. She knew her friend would help her with schoolwork, would encourage her at tough times and praise her when she succeeded. "Whenever I thought about skipping school I knew she would ask me about my grades, and I didn't want to have to tell her I messed up. I wanted her to be proud of me. And the more I tried, the easier it became to do the right thing,

and then I saw the positive results." She grew up and came to us to give friendship back to another child.

Mentors, the more recent term for the "Special Friends", provide one of the greatest contributions volunteers can give, by helping one child at a time to break the cycle of abuse and hopelessness.

One of our most sensitive and critical responsibilities is to carefully screen applicants who will be working unsupervised with vulnerable CPS children. Our volunteer coordinator for mentors, Claudia Sandoval, is up to this daunting task. In addition to her master's degree in social work, her former experience as a CPS social worker, a foster care worker, and a mental health legal advocate, Claudia has a heart for the struggles of these children and is a mentor herself. We are fortunate to have a person of her competence and caring.

Mentoring Rewards Everyone Involved

By Richard Reynolds

Takoda* loves riding his bike and playing ball. He wants to be a professional football player when he grows up, but may settle for being a pharmacist. He is doing well in school and likes Chinese food. In short, he is a typical 14-year-old boy.

I first learned about Takoda through Aviva's mentoring program, from Claudia Sandoval and from his CPS case worker. I learned about his family too. Unfortunately it was the all too familiar story in our society—drugs, neglect and physical and emotional abuse.

With other foster children in the home, Takoda's foster parents welcomed the opportunity for him to have a mentor. As we drove up to their house, I had my first glimpse of Takoda—riding his bicycle. You could tell that he was not sure about this "mentoring" thing.

In the following weeks, we did a variety of things. We went bowling. We went to the rodeo, where Takoda gazed longingly

at the horses. We just hung out and talked.

Takoda is a nice kid who cares about others. He can be very helpful, but like many children in the foster care system, he is wary of developing really close relationships with anyone, so ours is developing slowly.

I cannot say that I have seen much change in Takoda thus far. After all, we have only been meeting for a few months. But for me, it's extremely rewarding to see this young man working hard to move beyond the tragic circumstances that have shaped his life.

They say you often don't know how much you have affected a child's life until later, yet I know right now that mentoring has become an important part of my life. Growing up, my father was always there for me. Not every child is blessed in that way. There are hundreds of boys (like Takoda) in our foster care system who are in need of a good male role model.

*This child's name has been changed to protect his privacy.

Reunification of Families—How it Helps

by Cathy Tullgren

Visitation services for children in foster care and their families are essential for maintaining the natural bond and attachment children have with their parents, despite any previous occurrence of abuse or neglect. Historically, visitation was used as a reward for parents who made efforts to complete their case plans. Improvements in child welfare laws have established rights to visitation for children and their parents. Parents and children have the right to see each other on a regular basis even when CPS removed the children.

Traditionally, visitation was restricted to one hour, once a week, because not enough funding for these services was allocated.

Research indicates the more immediately and frequently visitations occur, the greater the likelihood parents will succeed in their case plans and the family will be reunified. Recent improvements and increased allocations for child protection services have allowed increased frequency of visitation for families. Also, family court judges, recognizing the importance of visitation, have been ordering increases in frequency and duration.

Realizing the impact of visitation services on family

reunification, we have become more open to innovative ways of expanding children's opportunities for family interactions.

One example is the concept of "shared parenting" involving direct contact between foster families and biological families in a variety of every day circumstances. It is hoped this concept will become more familiar and accepted.

Another is that visitations may be facilitated or "hosted" by foster families, relatives, family friends, or other volunteers who have an interest in the welfare of our families. Also, parents may be allowed to attend medical appointments, school functions and other activities from which they have been traditionally restricted.

These innovations in practice will facilitate continuity for children in care, therefore helping them make necessary and positive adjustments to being temporarily separated from their parents.

If you are interested in participating in visitation services and in making a positive impact in reunifying families, please contact us at 327-6779 ext.18 or ext.12, or avivaadmin@avivatucson.org to explore the opportunities open to you!

Visitation Helps Keep Families Together

by Kim Beck

Aviva's Visitation Services Program is a vital part of reunifying families. It's also required by law. Mandates in the Child Welfare Act require states to provide visitation to separated families. Aviva helps by providing supervisors for those visits, which children in foster care seem to very much want. The 45-50 supervisors that Aviva employs make a difference every day in the life of a child.

Visitation Program Field Supervisor Jason Farlee loves what he does. He has spent the last five years helping families work at staying together. He recently graduated from the University of Arizona with a BA in psychology and plans to eventually go into law enforcement.

Originally from California, Jason began working with Aviva on a recommendation from a friend. "I didn't know what to expect," Jason said.



Jason Farlee,
Visitation Program
Field Supervisor

While some of his training has been on-the-job, Jason especially finds training that has been applicable to real-life situations helpful. His job includes supervising team leaders to ensure rules are followed, as well as leading his own team of visit supervisors. It also includes helping families work on their parenting skills in a program called

Project Vital (Visitation Involving Togetherness, Attachment and Learning.) He said this program has made a difference in the visitation experience through, for example, something seemingly as simple as a parent learning to get on the floor to play with their young child.

When asked about the most interesting aspect of the job, Jason noted that seeing the various kinds of family interactions and dynamics is intriguing. He enjoys working closely with the families and seeing that differences are being made. "It's not always easy to see, but it's nice when it is noticeable," he said.

For information on becoming a visitation supervisor, please visit our website at www.avivatucson.org for a detailed job description.

Email us at avivaadmin@avivatucson.org or call 327-6779, ext.12.

Community Donors Important to Aviva, Clients

by Bonnie Demorotski

Keeping you informed with what is happening in Child Protective Services (CPS) and especially in regard to the Abused Children's Fund (ACF) that is distributed through Aviva Children's Services is important to us. The Sun Riders' annual contribution from the 2006 holiday toy parade comprised close to 70% of the total fund.

The ACF is used to provide assistance such as food vouchers to the Community Food Bank's Value Food Purchase Store, clothing vouchers to several thrift stores, shoe cards to Payless Shoe Resource stores (with a built-in 30% discount), transportation on Sun Tran buses, recreation or child care registration fees and educational needs not met by other sources.

The largest use of the 2006 funds was for food and furniture, followed by recreation or meals for siblings during a visit, and then child care

registration, which isn't covered by CPS. For other major donations for our clients, we depend on several community organizations to supply these necessary items.

Two local organizations need to be mentioned and thanked for their huge contribution to the children and families connected with CPS. One is the Community Diaper Bank, which, via Aviva, provides approximately 22,000 diapers to children in CPS care every year.

CPS caseworkers may come to our clothing bank and pick up a package of 24-28 diapers. The diapers are intended for one-time emergency use to help the caregiver until their paycheck or assistance kicks in. If you want to help support the Diaper Bank, contact Barbara or Cheryl at 325-1400.

The other organization we want to recognize is the Assistance League of Tucson (ALT). The women of this organization put together SOS (Starting Over Supplies) kits every

week for clients who are setting up their new households. This could be a teen getting his/her first apartment, a family reuniting, or a single parent on her own or starting over. The SOS kit includes dishes, pots and pans, silverware and glasses, cooking utensils, cleaning and hygiene items, and linens. Every item is new and purchased in bulk with the proceeds from the Assistance League Thrift Store located at 1307 N. Alvernon.

To help support the SOS program, please drop off your good used items to sell, or if you are a thrift store user, please consider shopping there.

Partnering with so many organizations in the community is what makes it possible for Aviva to offer all the resources to help the children and families.

Thank you Sun Riders, ALT, Diaper Bank, Payless Shoes, Sun Tran, Miracle Center Thrift Store and Swanson's Furniture Store for your generosity and caring about children in CPS care.

Meet Aviva Staff Members: Cindy Lingel and Marnie Pollard

Cindy Lingel, pictured at right, is responsible for coordinating the Life Book project. This means she matches the request made by a case worker to have a Life Book created for a child, who is to be adopted, with a volunteer. This person should be willing to put in six months or longer to research all the files and make phone calls to relatives, former foster parents, and any other adult who has been in the child's life. Cindy reads and edits each Life Book and makes a copy of each page, or coordinates with a volunteer to copy the book, before it is given to the child, adoptive parent or therapist.

Cindy, who has been with Aviva since 1996, also thanks the donor/creator of each and every quilt, afghan or blanket that comes



through our doors.

She and Monica, our receptionist, then tie them up with yarn and place a stuffed animal in the pocket before it is given to each child who has just entered the Child Protective Services' system.

Marnie Pollard is shown below with her youngest daughter, Riley. She is the coordinator for the Bags for Kids project as well as the annual Sew-A-thon.

Marnie, who has been with Aviva since 2002, is responsible for collecting, counting, logging and distributing the bags.

When the handmade duffle bags come to Aviva, they are sorted by size in order to make it easy for each case worker to find just the right one.

Each child is given a bag with necessary items, such as diapers, clothes, blankets and toys that are collected from the donation closet at Aviva.



Holiday Toy Parade Brings Smiles

Where did the money raised in 2006 go when passed through the Abused Children's Fund?
Directly to the children!!

There are no administrative costs taken out, so every penny is used to help the children.

The majority of the funds—around 33%—were spent on gift cards to Target.

These were used during the holidays to supplement gifts for teens.

During the rest of the year, these cards are used to purchase new underwear and socks.

The remaining funds were distributed as follows:

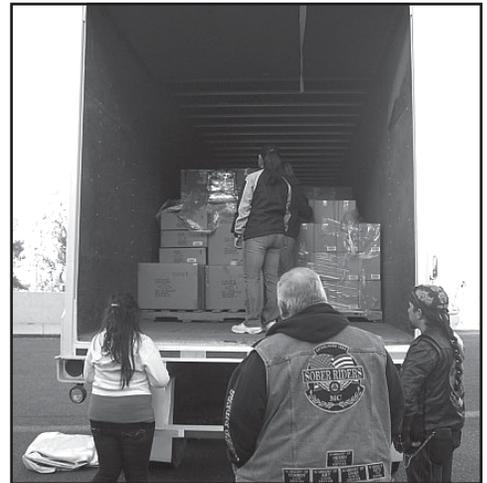
Food—17%, Furniture—15%, Transportation—12%, Clothing/Diapers—11%, Recreation—6%.
Child care registration, cleaning supplies, baby items, housing/utilities and personal grooming items made up the remaining 6%.

Thanks to the generosity of the Sun Riders, along with riders from numerous other riding clubs plus hundreds of individuals, Aviva Children's Services was able to provide toys to more than 1,500 children in 2006.



A very special thank you to Lisa Frank Company for donating more than 2,200 toys, as seen in this semi-truck.

That is Sun Riders president Joe Bruno looking on from the corner as volunteers unload the truck.



MENTORING continued from page 1

home. The foster parents met her needs, took her to school, attended IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings and would drop her off at the mall to hang out with friends. From the outside it appeared that she was doing well. But she shared in therapy that she was terribly lonely and didn't want to talk to her foster parents about her loneliness because they were always busy with the other children in the home. Per the therapist's recommendation, the CPS case worker made a referral to Aviva's mentoring program.

This young girl was matched with a mentor who had no background in public child welfare. She attended the trainings and was terribly upset by the reality of children in care. But, she was committed to make a difference in a young person's life. Upon meeting her, the mentor called to tell me that she was worried that they wouldn't "click." I encouraged her to be as consistent as she could be and not fail to attend any visits. For the first few months they did small things together. They went up to Mt. Lemmon, to the Melting Pot (the first time this young girl had ever been at a sit-down restaurant with cloth napkins!), to the movies, and sometimes they would take a walk around Reid Park and talk about their day.

Soon the teen was e-mailing and texting her about

events and activities at school. The mentor attended her school play, helped her study for the pre-SATs and with her schoolwork. This youth would come to the mentor's home and have dinner with her family and on occasion bake cakes with her younger daughter.

What the mentor did for this young girl was provide her stability, of which she had had very little in her life. Although she was living in a great foster home, the foster family wasn't able to give her some of the things the mentor provided.

How is the teen doing? She is still under the care of CPS. She is now 18 years old, attending high school and still living with her foster parents. She has no contact with either of her birth parents. Thanks to her mentor she has been able to catch up with her credits and is in the process of applying to the University of Arizona. She and her mentor are working on her letter of intent for admission.

We invite you to consider becoming a mentor or to encourage your friends and family to do so. I would be happy to come to your church, clubs, organizations, place of business or group of friends to talk about our mentoring program. Please contact me through email at claudia.sandoval@avivatucson.org or by calling 327-6779 ext. 11.

Sew-A-Thon 2007 a Success!

Although the weather was gloomy on January 20, the morale certainly was not for the 2007 Bags for Kids Sew-A-Thon. Approximately 100 volunteers refused to let the cold, rainy weather prevent them from joining together for the day to sew duffel bags for foster children. Nearly 760 bags were completed in seven hours and many more were taken home to be completed. Thanks to our dedi-

cated volunteers, Tucson's foster children will not have to use garbage bags as luggage. Instead, they will be given beautiful, handmade duffels, which will be theirs to keep. On behalf of Tucson's foster children, Aviva Children's Services thanks the volunteers and community sponsors for their commitment to the Sew-A-Thon and the Bags for Kids Project. We look forward to seeing you next year!



Sew-A-Thon volunteers enjoy the comradarie of the day!



Several pre- or mini-Sew-A-Thon events occurred before the big official Aviva all-day Saturday event. One of these was with Brownie Girl Scout Troop #175, shown here with the bags they made.

Thank You Sew-A-Thon Community Donors

The Bags For Kids Project is a collaboration between the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona, the Arizona Division of Developmental Disabilities, Child Protective Services and Aviva Children's Services.

Arizona Mail Order/Old Pueblo Traders
 Barbara's Interiors
 Bashas'
 Bernina Sewing Center
 Beyond Bread
 Eege's
 Fry's Food Stores of Arizona
 GameZone By GameWorks

Golden Pin Lanes
 Leonard Steinberg
 Magpies Gourmet Pizza
 Mama's Famous Pizza & Heros
 Nadine's Bakery
 Perry Design
 Praxair
 Red Robin Restaurant

Safeway Food and Drug
 Sam's Club
 Southwest Energy LLC
 Target
 The Melting Pot
 Thomas Reprographics
 WALMART
 Western Drapery

In spite of our desire to thank each and every donor, we may have inadvertently left someone out. Please accept our sincere apology, if so, and bring it to our attention so that we may thank you personally for your continued support.

Holiday Adventures in Volunteering

Stuffing Stockings Can Be Fun!



Visit Supervisors do more than supervise visits. They also coordinated and participated in the stuffing of stockings for more than 1,500 children during the 2006 holiday season.



These 70 incredible handmade doll beds, with handmade quilts and baby dolls, were a huge hit with our caseworkers when picking out toys for their clients. A great big thanks goes out to the Camino Principal Ward of the LDS Church and Pasha Grant for all of their hard work.



C.D. writes:

"Dear Aviva, I just wanted to say thank you for the quilt and bear... They go perfectly with my room."

A card like hers makes our work worthwhile!

Wrapping Days Benefit Children



A view of the mountain of toys that faithful volunteers had to choose from when wrapping gifts for children. At right, wrappers share their time.



Thank You for Making Their Holidays Brighter

Thank you—our cash and toy donors—for your generosity in 2006.

Because of you, we were able to provide holiday gifts worth approximately \$107,000 for 1,524 children, through cash and more than 6,000 toy donations.

Each child received—

- A stocking filled with toys, such as trucks or dolls, candy, socks, mittens and/or hats
- A handmade Bags for Kids duffle bag
- Toys or \$25-30 gift cards (for teens)
 - A handmade blanket (about half—mostly babies and teens received these)
 - A stuffed animal

Thank you for making a difference in the life of a child!



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Web site: www.avivatucson.org

Kids at Heart is a
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a non-profit, non-sectarian
organization.

Craft Corner

Thank you for your contributions!

Quilts

Aviva provides between 50 and 60 quilts per month to children. Children of all ages love blankets and quilts of all sizes! The love that is stitched into each blanket brings these children so much comfort.

This project can use donations of yarn, cotton fabric, and quilt batting. It's a great chance to clean out your stash! Aviva Children's Services is happy to give you a tax receipt for your donations. Contact Cindy at 327-6779 ext. 14.

Bags For Kids

The need for bags is ongoing. If you want a simple project, Bags For Kids may be just right for you. The bags are easy to construct and we need them in lots of different sizes. Large bags are used to move children's belongings from place to place, medium bags are used as diaper bags, and small bags are used to hold toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo.) Call us if you would like a pattern for the bags, or if you have fabric that you would like to donate. Contact Marnie at 327-6779 ext. 16.

Christmas Stockings

Many of you like to start making Christmas stockings this time of year. Christmas 2006 saw more than 1,500 stockings stuffed and given to children to open on Christmas morning. Along with regular size stockings, a special request has been made for bigger stockings that can hold larger stocking stuffer goodies. Give us a call and we will mail you a set of basic stocking patterns that includes the bigger size. Contact Cindy at 327-6779 ext. 14.