

This Case Study was prepared by the 2009 Children's Bureau Family Connection Grantee:

The Children's Home Society of New Jersey

Kinship Connections Program of Mercer County

FSC Success Stories

Mrs. T

Mrs. T raised her 11 year-old fraternal twin grandchildren, Cecilia and Craig, from birth. Their mother, who had been an active drug addict during her pregnancy with the twins, had abandoned them at birth and their father, Mrs. T's son, was not very active in their lives.

One day Mrs. T received a phone call from Craig's therapy program asking her to come pick him up abruptly. They told her that his health insurance was no longer paying their claims, and that Craig could not return until this was sorted out. Distraught for Craig, it was then that Mrs. T learned that the twins' health insurance had elapsed. Unaware of why or when, she immediately found herself burdened with paying uncovered medical bills and trying to reinstate the health insurance coverage her young grandchildren desperately needed.

To get assistance with this matter, Mrs. T turned to one social service group after another but rarely heard from them after the intake process. As a woman who had her own challenges with self-esteem and feeling overwhelmed, she felt discouraged and hopeless by the time she was referred to CHS of NJ's Kinship Connections Program (KCP).

Flustered, Mrs. T shared her story with her new KCP worker, stating that she did not even know the name of the agency from which she had most recently sought help. Her KCP worker listened, and empathized with her, being mindful to document as much information as she could. It was then that Mrs. T felt heard and understood. Her KCP worker referred her to another resource that would help her, encouraging Mrs. T. to share with that resource her contact with the KCP program and she did. After her time with this KCP worker, Mrs. T admittedly walked away feeling empowered to try again, and **this time she got results!** Within a month, Mrs. T. had health insurance for her grandchildren again. When asked during a KCP support group how she accomplished this goal, Mrs. T proudly shared, "I have the CHSofNJ KCP team working with me." This of course, was only the beginning.

As Mrs. T. continued to develop a rapport with her KCP worker, she began to share more of her family concerns, including constant fighting between the siblings and sometimes herself. Seeing the emotional toll it was taking on this grandmother, the KCP worker first urged her to consider seeking individual therapy for herself. Then, she told her about the KCP Family Success Conference process (FGDM). Finding comfort in the assurance that the KCP program had helped her before, Mrs.T decided to have a conference.

On the day of the conference, 3 family members participated: Mrs. T, Cecilia and Craig. Together they created a plan of modest goals, including sharing at least one family meal together and learning how to play a video game of Craig's choice. When asked if there was anything else they wanted to work on, Mrs.

T replied “it was best to start off small”. And they were right. One day not long after this conference, the KCP Director, Supervisor and team received a thank you card that read as follows:

“Thank you so much. You gave me and the kids a new start. We are putting the past behind us and starting over. We could not have done it without your support and caring. We all left with a better understanding of each other’s feelings and cares. Thank you so very, very much.

p.s. Thank you for the pizza. It was a treat for the kids.”

To date, the KCP team is still a support to the family through activities and groups but nothing we offer is more rewarding than the gift Mrs. T gave to us-**proof** that families have the ability to shape and define change as THEY see fit so that they can start over again.

Mrs. B

The KCP worker met Mrs. B while running the Kinship Connections Program (KCP) support group through our GrandFamily Success Center. At the start of the relationship with Mrs. B, the KCP worker noticed that she was not very open to engaging in conversation. However, unwilling to be discouraged, the KCP worker continued to offer support and casual conversation, until one day Mrs. B shared a serious concern regarding her oldest grandson.

Mrs. B explained that she had taken on the task of raising 3 of her grandchildren, the oldest of who missed school regularly; so much so that Mrs. B received a notice to appear as a defendant in a court hearing to address her grandson’s serious truancy issue.

Prior to her involvement with the KCP program, Mrs. B enrolled her grandson in different types of community programs where mentoring and counseling services were put into place for him. She also received assistance through the GrandFamily Success Center with similar referrals for youth mentoring and counseling for this child. However, in all cases, her grandson refused to cooperate.

As expected, Mrs. B felt very helpless at this point and shared that she did not know what she was going to do if she ended up being incarcerated due to the amount of the fines accumulated thus far. She explained that trying to get her grandson to respect boundaries, follow directions and go to school had proven to be quite a difficult task. This KCP worker sensed that Mrs. B felt like a failure regarding her responsibility to her grandson and that she further worried about the future of **all** of her grandchildren if she was not around to support them.

To assist Mrs. B., the KCP worker advocated on her behalf by writing a letter to the court sharing her ordeal, the efforts made and her results to date. Armed with this letter and the support of other community agencies, Mrs. B **prevailed** on her day in court. Not only did the judge agree to another plan to address the truancy issue but he gave Mrs. B and her grandson another chance to work things out for the sake of the family.

While her efforts with her grandson continue to be a work in progress, Mrs. B continues to show gratitude for the help she received from the KCP program and continues to come to support groups to advocate on the program's behalf.

It is because of her support that we continue to do what we do.