

PROJECT RESTORE

Through a Mentor's Eyes

Tehama County offers an alternative to the formal criminal justice system by redirecting young adults who have committed non-violent offenses to participate in a promising intervention program. The program, Project RESTORE, is a strength-based 18-week mentorship program aimed at **eliminating future delinquency by strengthening self-efficacy and social bonds**. The program uses community services, counseling and probation, and teams up with professionals, community members, and college students to serve as mentors to encourage, guide and reinforce positive changes in the lives of Corning's youth.

Angela Serrano first learned about this program in her criminal justice course at Chico State University where a recruiter shared information about Project RESTORE. Growing up in an area of high crime and gang activity in Los Angeles County, Angela was drawn to the program because it would allow her to continue her enjoyment of inspiring and empowering "the kid in the corner." She was immediately determined to participate as a volunteer.

Following a screening process, Angela was accepted as a Project RESTORE mentor. After training and orientation, she was matched with a mentee with documented anger issues who was not attending school regularly. The teen had previously struggled and eventually disconnected from her prior mentor; Angela shared her own concern about building a meaningful, authentic relationship.

This fear was quickly expunged during their first meeting. *"We talked for hours at the park,"* she recalled. *"We talked about everything."*

Through the course of weekly visits and open communication their bond was strengthened. The pair worked together to meet program expectations by setting a specific and attainable goal. The time-bound goal proved to be what the mentee needed to gain confidence. Shortly after achieving her first goal, school became a priority for the mentee and her behavior drastically improved. During their 18-week partnership, the mentee completed other tasks including finding a job and acquiring a car.

"I knew she had a passion – she just had to find it. I am so proud of her," said Angela.

Although the program has ended for the pair, Angela is choosing to continue her relationship with her mentee. She recognizes that long-term support is important for youth who have struggled in the past.

In retrospect, both mentee and mentor have grown and changed. For Angela, the program has solidified her own plans in life – to pursue a career in a helping profession and return to her community to build centers of change. She has already made a tangible and indelible difference in the life of one young adult in the Corning community with her investment of time.

Research supports the effectiveness of adolescent diversion models, with mentored youth less likely to initiate drug and alcohol use, less assaultive and missing few days of school. Since the implementation of Project RESTORE, there has been a reduction in recidivism rates of participants and declines in misconduct and crime by mentored youth.

Join the team who is making a difference in the lives of youth in the Corning community by reaching out to Gary Fortenberry at info@restoreprogram.org

