

Volunteer Spotlight – January 2009

Helen Parra

By Katie Williams

The Mother-Baby program at Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services (SFBFS) has been a safe place for parents and their babies to turn during difficult times. For nearly 17 years, the Mother-Baby program has provided education, baby supplies and support for families, helping parents to secure a healthy future for their children. Through the assistance of dedicated volunteers, the Mother-Baby program has expanded to two locations, providing much needed services for over 400 parents and their children each month. From the very first organizational meeting, volunteer Helen Parra has been involved with the Mother-Baby program, helping the program become what it is today.

When Father Dan Madigan, founder of SFBFS, first announced the start of the Mother-Baby program, Helen Parra wanted to become involved. She had previously helped to organize a pregnancy hotline, which later became the Sacramento Life Center, an organization dedicated to helping women with unexpected pregnancies. Interested in helping parents and their children, Helen decided to dedicate her time to the Mother-Baby program at SFBFS. Years later, at the age of 75, she is still involved with the program on a weekly basis.

Helen helps with a variety of tasks in the Mother-Baby program from working in the clothes are to taking home and cleaning donated stuffed animals. She enjoys interacting with the new parents and seeing mothers overjoyed to receive clothing, diapers, food and toys for their children. Helen especially likes the personal connection of volunteering at SFBFS and seeing how her work impacts the clients in a positive way. Helen said that she appreciates, "how clients are treated with kindness and respect at SFBFS, and not just like a case number." Her favorite part is when clients ask if they can "re-donate" clothing after their children outgrow them, showing that everyone has the ability to help. She finds it very rewarding to do something that "in a tiny way, is making life better for people on a one by one basis."

For years, Helen volunteered every day that the program was in operation, but has recently shifted to volunteering once a week. Helen also takes home laundry and mending needed for the program. When she isn't volunteering at SFBFS, Helen is deeply involved with her family, immediate and otherwise. Helen has four sons, a daughter and fills the role of "mother-hen" to her extended family, helping care for her sister's ten children and four grandchildren. On top of the care she provides to her disabled daughter, Helen finds time to volunteer not only at SFBFS, but also at the Sacramento Children's Receiving Home mending clothes.

Helen plans to continue volunteering at the Mother-Baby program as long as her and her husband's health allows. Although she cannot spend the same amount of time with the program as when it first began, she still loves being a part of it. "It feels like my baby, and I have loved working with it from the very beginning."

Without volunteers like Helen, the Mother-Baby program would not be the success that it is today. Helen's work has impacted numerous lives, making a positive difference in the community. On behalf of SFBFS, thank you Helen for all of your dedicated hard work throughout the years.