

Volunteer Spotlight

May 2009 – Lee Salerno

By Volunteer Kate Schuman

In nearly 20 years of volunteering at Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services (SFBFS), Lee Salerno has tried her hand in a variety of programs including Sunday Lunch, Food Assistance and Clothing. She also helped her friend Helen Edmondson, a friend of 40 years, to cook meals for staff and volunteers.

But as a mother of four and grandmother of seven with a degree in Early Childhood Development and years of experience running a daycare center, Salerno found her volunteering niche in the Mother-Baby program. Salerno has been volunteering in the program for 13 years, primarily serving as a mentor to mothers. In one-on-one sessions with new moms, or when greeting at the front desk, she answers questions about feeding, nutrition, teething, potty training and child development. She learned Italian from her parents as a child and took Spanish and French in school, so she's able to communicate with the program's many Spanish-speaking clients.

"All the mothers seem like me," Salerno says. "I understand where they're coming from because my husband and I were raising four kids with one paycheck for a while."

Salerno also teaches a "Making Reading Fun" workshop where she holds a story time with the children and passes on reading tips to parents.

Her wisdom as a mother and grandmother and her years of working with young children make her an asset in the Mother-Baby program notes Program Manager Lorena Carranza. "It's really a good fit for her," Carranza says. "Lee leads many educational activities, she loves reading with the children and she's really animated during story time. She helps families learn how to help themselves."

Salerno, spry and witty at 82, started volunteering at SFBFS after her husband passed away in 1989. Her family had encouraged her to volunteer once a week, but she didn't expect to stay so long. "The time goes by so quickly," she says. She also jokes that she's bored on the days she doesn't volunteer. Aside from SFBFS, Salerno volunteers in the gift shop at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center one day a week, walks every morning for exercise and is part of a book club.

But her work in Mother-Baby is perhaps most rewarding, Salerno says. "You get back more than you give. You meet new people, you get to understand other people's situations and where people are coming from. The Lord gives me good health and this is what I can give back."

SFBFS is continually amazed and inspired by volunteers like Lee. If you are interested in volunteering your time for one of SFBFS' programs, please contact the Volunteer Services Manager at volunteer@sfbs.org