

Mentors help provide stability in a child's life

By Alissa Nourse

Happy New Year to all of you! It seems fitting that my first article for *Lake Tahoe News* readers is to celebrate January 2012 and National Mentoring Month. First, I want to thank all of the current and past mentors at Tahoe Youth & Family Services and mentors throughout our community. You are heroes unleashing the innate greatness and unlimited potential of children.



I have been a mentor for three years to an 8-year-old girl who was in foster care when I met her. We'll call her Jasmine to protect her anonymity. When Jasmine was 4 her mother died in car crash, and her father is in and out of prison. Jasmine and I like to ride bikes, go sledding, bake, read, go to the library, watch movies and walk my dog.

During the past two years I have helped her learn how to crack an egg for baking, how to ride her bike without training wheels and practice reading.

Jasmine is sad sometimes. Life has not been easy for her. She now lives with her grandmother and four other children.

We get together about once a week and the time that we spend together gives her the opportunity to learn and grow and build resiliency and skills that will protect her from substance use, teen pregnancy and school failure. She is learning those skills through the successes and encouragement she gets when we are together. We don't do anything special or spend a lot of money. We spend time, the most precious gift of all.

She gives me the gift of her time and I give her the gift of

my time. It's a simple relationship – but a relationship that is important to both of us.

We just celebrated her 8th birthday with a party at the Carson Valley Swim Center, one of TYFS' Safe Place sites. My husband and I are also now mentoring Jasmine's brother Emilio. Emilio is 6 and a total firecracker. He has brought a lot of laughter to our life.

I encourage each of you to consider mentoring a child during National Mentoring Month. Mentor a child involved in one of TYFS' mentoring programs, volunteer with our Girls' Project or mentor a child you know already.

For more information about mentoring through TYFS, contact Eli Stevenson at eli@tahoeyouth.org or call (530) 541.2445 and ask for Eli.

10 things to do in January to Celebrate Mentoring Month

1. Learn more about mentoring online.
2. Tell five friends about National Mentoring Month.
3. Visit a mentoring organization like CASA, TYFS or Boys & Girls Club.
4. Remember the mentors in your life; post a tribute online at TYFS' Facebook page.
5. Meet a local mentor for coffee and talk to them about their experiences.
6. Read the latest research and find resources on mentoring.
7. Serve your community on Martin Luther King Day of Service, Jan. 16, with a child or teen you are mentoring.
8. Make a financial contribution to a mentoring organization in your community.

9. Go to YouTube on Thank Your Mentor Day (Jan. 26) and make the National Mentoring Month videos the most popular of the day.

10. Become a mentor in your community.

Alissa Nourse is executive director of Tahoe Youth & Family Services.