

Engaging Families, Empowering Communities, Enriching Lives

in Amador and Calaveras Counties

*They gave me the safety that my life lacked
They helped me accept my past as fact
Their gifts of love gave me vision to see
That hope could replace the despair in me*

from A Mother Lode Treasure by Judi

The Foothills region that includes Amador and Calaveras counties is often described — by those not from the region — for its history, its scenic beauty, and its rural qualities. But these perceptions are only part of the story. They reveal little about the actual lives of the 84,000 residents who call any one of the many unique communities of Amador or Calaveras counties “home.”

Rural communities face challenges that are similar to and also unique from their urban counterparts. Residents worry about safety, employment, housing, health, education, and the well-being of their families and communities. The Resource Connection, which is rooted in many of these communities, is committed to working collaboratively to develop programs and services that address local and regional challenges in ways unique to the culture and traditions of the area.

The Resource Connection recognizes that the strength of the region is best defined by the people who live and work here. It is through their eyes that struggles and successes are seen; it is through their stories that abstract issues become meaningful; it is through their experiences that we best understand the need for the Resource Connection.

Multiple Challenges, Multiple Resources

All families struggle to provide the best for their children, but sometimes it’s complicated. Larry’s struggle began when he rescued his eleven-month-old granddaughter, Brooke, after she was abandoned by her mother. Larry took Brooke to his home in Sutter Creek, and he and his wife became her legal guardians. Larry credits the Resource Connection with helping his family find much-needed stability. “We couldn’t really afford child care, yet we needed to keep working to provide for Brooke. They helped us get child care subsidies, so we could find a high-quality family child care provider close to home, which made all the difference.”



Today Brooke is a happy, outgoing, nine-year-old who continues to thrive in the same supportive and caring home she’s been in for the past eight years.

Like Larry, Judi’s path was also unexpected. And like Larry, the Resource Connection played a critical role in helping traverse challenging terrain. When Judi moved to Calaveras County with her husband in 2002, she thought she had it made. She was 41 years old, had enjoyed a successful career, and decided to retire to the Mother Lode. But things started going downhill fast. “My husband became addicted to meth; he became violent; and was often in jail.” Unable to cope with a situation that was spiraling out of control, Judi turned to drugs and alcohol to ‘numb the pain.’ She lost everything — her home, her nest egg, her marriage, her sense of self. She found herself living in her truck, seeking help only after being attacked by a wild dog. At the hospital, she heard about the Crisis Center, a program of the Resource Connection. It was at the Center where she found support and a safe place to heal. “I learned about the cycle of violence. Looking back, I can now see that there were some red flags.” In her 14 months at the Crisis Center, she learned a great deal, but not without hard work. “They give us the tools and the support but we make it happen,” says Judi. She has also taken advantage of other Resource Connection services, from the Once Again Thrift Store (OATS) to the Food Bank to nutrition programs, and continues to praise the Resource Connection: “They work so well with other agencies, so if they don’t provide the service you need, they know exactly who does and they can connect you.”



*“This program requires
us to do the real work.
It’s up to us to
turn our lives around.”*

Judi

Committed to Children, Committed to Community

Moana describes herself as having come ‘full circle’ with the Resource Connection — first as someone who used almost every program, and later as an employee. A mother of three, Moana first experienced the benefits of the Resource Connection through its Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. She credits WIC staff for their role in maintaining the health of her children. “It was the WIC staff — not a medical practitioner — who



pointed out that Jonathan’s hemoglobin levels were low. I didn’t even know what that meant! They worked with me to find ways to put more iron in his diet, which was no easy task, since he wasn’t fond of meat. So we worked together to find alternative sources of iron and to figure out how to get the most out of our food choices.”

Soon after the birth of her second child, Moana again sought out the Resource Connection — this time to help her with the impacts of a failing marriage. Moana and her husband fought constantly. He was addicted to drugs and would disappear for days at a time. Child Protective Services (CPS) stepped in and

Moana approached the Resource Connection’s Crisis Center for help, where she received domestic violence counseling. “They were so supportive,” Moana recalls. “They helped me to see that things were not the way they should be and they supported me in my efforts to get out of the situation.” The Crisis Center helped Moana with a restraining order, and she attended their parenting classes.

With the help of the Resource Connection’s legal services, Moana filed for divorce. Since then she has been working to complete her degree and achieve her goal of becoming a teacher. Currently an associate preschool teacher at a Resource Connection child care center, she struggles to make ends meet. When money is tight, she relies on help from the Resource Connection’s Food Bank and she shops at OATS for clothes for herself and her family. (She notes that this is her way of supporting the Crisis Center.) And Moana’s boys have enjoyed the goodies that come to them through the Resource Connection’s Santa’s Express program. Moana’s story is complicated, but her sentiments about the Resource Connection are simple: “These people are genuine and caring. They aren’t condescending; they encourage and equip us to become independent.”

Cindi has lived in Calaveras County since 1970. A mother of five and grandmother of four, Cindi’s relationship with the Resource Connection spans more than a generation. “I started using their services back when they were run by three women —

when it was called Mountain Family Services Agency,” recalls Cindi with a laugh. But laughter has not always come so easily. She and her husband struggled for years to further their education, in order to improve their job prospects — requiring late nights and tackling a tight household budget. The Resource Connection worked with Cindi to obtain child care subsidies and to enroll her in its WIC program,

which she acknowledges “helped keep my family fed.” Cindi elaborates, “Because of WIC, we could always be sure that our children were well-nourished. They showed us how to spread the food around, how to maximize our dollars and taught us how to understand nutritional content so everyone got what they needed and no one was hungry. I also learned how to make inexpensive, nutritious, and creative dishes that my kids liked.”

In 1989, Cindi started taking advantage of the Resource Connection’s Head Start home visiting program, when her third child, Alana, was four. Cindi learned appropriate preschool activities that she could do at home with her daughter, as well as effective parenting approaches and discipline skills. Later, when her fourth child was ready for preschool, Cindi enrolled him in one of the Resource Connection’s Head Start centers, which enabled Cindi to go back to school to get a degree in child development.

Now — twenty years later — Cindi is the guardian for her three-year-old granddaughter who is enrolled in a preschool run by the Resource Connection. Like the generation before, she receives excellent care and nurturing. Cindi credits the Resource Connection’s Head Start program for its enormous impact on her children’s and grandchildren’s lives. “Head Start gave me a renewed sense of direction, and it helped my kids with their development.”

Today Cindi is an active member of the community. She continues to nurture her children and her children’s children, and others in the community.

Focusing on Today, Focusing on the Future

The Resource Connection provides the kind of support that allows people to get through each day, and also to look ahead as they plan for their future. For Judi, who spent more than a year with the

Resource Connection’s Crisis Center, this now means serving as a ‘staff sister’ — helping wherever and whenever she’s needed, while giving herself the time she needs to think about what comes next. “All my life I’ve been a problem-solver, a real math nerd. Now I feel like I have the opportunity to do something different. I want to give back; I want to use my experience to help others. After all this organization has given to me here at the Crisis Center, that’s the least I can do. This place saved my life.”

*“They support families
by providing us with
the tools and resources
we need to succeed.”*

Moana

Thirteen percent of children in Amador and Calaveras live in poverty. Just four of California’s 58 counties have a higher percentage of low birthweight babies than Calaveras; Amador’s percentage is better than the state average. Both Amador and Calaveras have lower percentages of college graduates than the state.

