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The Connection

Welcome to the First Edition of The Connection

“The Connection” is a publication of The Resource Connection, formerly Human Resources Council (HRC). Its purpose is to provide residents of Amador and Calaveras counties with news about the organization.

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There is an average of 40 residents per square mile in Calaveras County; about 60 in Amador; and about 200 in California. More than 75% of homes in Amador and Calaveras counties are owner-occupied, compared to 57% in California.

Engaging Families, Empowering Communities, Enriching Lives

THIRTY YEARS AGO a small group of concerned women from Calaveras and Amador counties, along with dedicated county employees, worked together to create an organization that could address the needs of our communities. That organization, Human Resources Council (HRC), which opened its doors with a staff of just four, is moving into a new and exciting era — energized to continue to support the residents of our two counties, and mindful of both the hoped-for change described by the new President and the complexities of the economic crises which are impacting the lives of families and communities throughout the Foothills.

Today, our 170 employees play an important and ever-expanding role in the region — offering an array of child and family, nutrition, and prevention and intervention programs and services. On March 20, 2009 — nearly three decades since the official start-up of HRC — we take a bold step to clarify our goals and the ways we will continue to support our community. We grew up in Calaveras and Amador and are proud of what we have accomplished over these years. But we are prouder still of where we are headed and of our capacity to help the communities of our two counties become stronger, healthier, and better prepared to tackle the challenges we face.

In most ways we remain the same organization you have known for decades — with a new name. But in other ways we are a new organization — more united, more activated, and more aware of the importance of our role. Today we become ...

The Resource Connection

... a nonprofit organization expanding its role in *engaging families, empowering communities, and enriching lives*. We invite you to join with us to support the people of our community.

The Resource Connection Board of Directors

Shirley Stroble, *Chair*; Denise Dooley-Bailey, *Vice Chair*; Mike Kriletich, *Secretary-Treasurer*; Jeanne Boyce, Melissa Eads, Trisha Frazier, Karyn Gregorius, Lindsay Howard, Don Lloyd, Linda Mariani, Frank Meyer, Janet Orvis-Cook, Mel Welsh

It was 1977. It was the year that Luke Skywalker rescued Princess Leia in the award-winning movie, *Star Wars*. A gallon of gas cost 62 cents and the best-selling car in the U.S., the Chevrolet Caprice, cost \$5,300. It was also the year that a group of county employees from Calaveras and Amador began meeting with the Mountain Sisters Collective. Both groups were concerned about issues facing the community — notably the lack of adequate child care and increasing instances of domestic violence. They worried that local families needed additional services not currently provided by the county, and that rural areas were increasingly challenged to meet the needs of dispersed populations. Eventually, in 1980, a nonprofit organization was formed: Human Resources Council (HRC). With this status, HRC could seek newly available government funding for child care, including resource and referral services, subsidies, and the food program. Locally they called themselves the Mountain Family Service Agency. (While instrumental in getting HRC started, the Mountain Sisters continued their independent efforts to confront domestic violence issues for a few more years — attempting to shun government funds and the associated mandates.)

It soon became apparent that the residents of Calaveras and Amador counties — particularly low income families — lacked access to other services that HRC's staff and board believed were important to the health and well being of the community. In the first instance of what would later happen numerous times, HRC decided to broaden its service array to better meet the needs of families and the broader community.

Growing Services; Growing Together

HRC quickly added programs to address child abuse, to help parents choose child care, and to ensure the distribution of surplus commodities. By 1984, just four years after its founding, the Calaveras Women's Crisis Line, Emergency Food and Shelter Program, Calaveras Legal Assistance Service, and Head Start were brought under HRC's nonprofit umbrella. A year later, state preschool funds were awarded to HRC. By this time, the organization was operating in numerous communities in both Amador and Calaveras counties (with a particular palette of programs in each county). In 1992, the federal Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program contract was awarded to HRC.

For close to three decades, HRC has been governed by a small, committed, community-based board of directors who bring to the organization a broad range of talents and skills, and who have worked diligently to maintain and enhance programs that benefit residents of the two counties. During these years, HRC continued to identify needs within the community and developed and implemented diverse programs to meet those needs.

Expanding Needs; Expanding Facilities

In 2002, HRC identified the need for a new food bank. The program was housed in overcrowded facilities with no capacity to accommodate growth. Lack of storage space hindered the effective delivery of services.

A committee recommended the purchase of five lots on George Reed Road in San Andreas. Initially a campus to house most of the programs was envisioned, but later the board decided to concentrate its efforts on using the property for a greatly expanded food bank and to hold off on the development of the remainder of the site.

The groundbreaking, in 2007, for the 6,000 square foot Food Bank — dedicated to long-time board member and local community member Carol Phelps — signaled a new era in the growth and stability of Human Resources Council. Construction of the Food Bank was made possible by funds from Community Development Block Grants, Housing and Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and private donors. Beyond the funding, the development of the

Food Bank required a major commitment of time and energy from HRC's staff and board. The building includes space for food storage, distribution, and administrative offices. The full project includes infrastructure and grading for future build-out.

Looking Forward; Looking Strong

In 2009, following an extensive strategic planning effort to revisit the role HRC had been playing in Amador and Calaveras counties, the board recognized the importance of better articulating its vision and goals. This process resulted in the realization that the organization's growth and breadth necessitated changes. (HRC had grown from just four employees in two locations, and an annual budget of less than \$100,000 to more than 170 employees who work at 16 sites throughout Amador and Calaveras counties, with a budget of approximately \$8 million.)

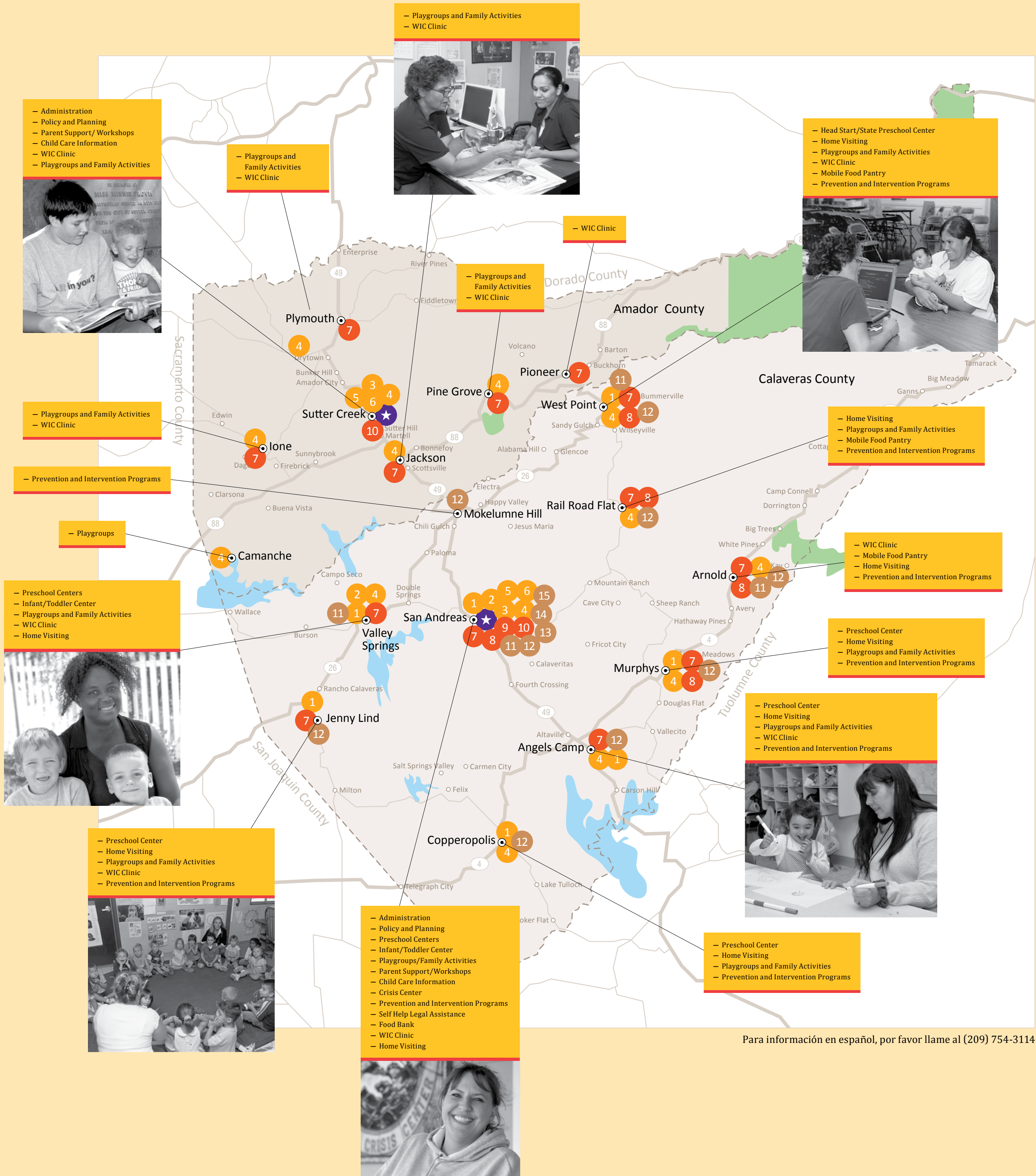
Armed with information about the impact the programs were having on families and communities and the reality that its name, Human Resources Council, no longer reflected its mission and philosophy — the board embraced two big changes: a new name and a newly developed mission statement.

Human Resources Council is now The Resource Connection, an organization that engages families, empowers communities, and enriches the lives of the residents of Amador and Calaveras counties.



The Resource Connection

Each year Head Start serves 500 children, 350 families; Child Care Resources - thousands of families, children, and providers; Crisis Center - 2,700 individuals ; WIC - 1,200 women and their families; Food Bank - 4,500 families and individuals.



Programs Throughout Amador and Calaveras

★ **The Resource Connection's** administrative offices are located in San Andreas and Sutter Creek. Programs and services related to Children and Families, Nutrition, and Prevention and Intervention are offered to residents throughout both counties.

Amador: 223-1624; Calaveras: 754-3114

Children and Families

Families play the central role in a child's ability to achieve and to thrive into productive adulthood. The Resource Connection's Children and Families programs and services engage, enrich, and empower families by offering a wide range of opportunities to support their children's growth and development.

- 1 **Preschool Programs** for children ages 3 to 5 in Calaveras County through **Head Start** and **State Preschool** (center-based part, full, and extended day; parent policy councils, and nutrition and health services). **772-3980**
- 2 **Infant/Toddler Programs** through **Early Head Start** Child Care Centers, including home visiting, playgroups, and developmental screening. **772-3980**
- 3 **Policy and Planning** to support the needs of families and children through partnerships with *Calaveras Child Care Council* and *Constructing Connections*. **754-1075**
- 4 **Parent Support** to families throughout Calaveras and Amador counties through parent education, home visiting, and playgroups. **Amador: 223-1624; Calaveras: 772-3980**
- 5 **Child Care Information** throughout Amador and Calaveras counties, including resource and referral (R&R), resource libraries, help paying for child care (subsidy program, including CalWORKS), and Centralized Eligibility List (CEL), a waiting list for families who are eligible for federal and state programs. **Amador: 223-1624; Calaveras: 754-1075**
- 6 **Information and Services for Child Care Providers** such as workshops, training, licensing assistance; expansion of child care (CCIP) and CARES; training for grandparents and other license exempt providers (*Growing, Caring, Learning*); and resource libraries. **Amador: 223-1624; Calaveras: 754-1075**

Nutrition

The Resource Connection's Nutrition programs and services offer a range of opportunities for families and individuals to meet their nutritional needs.

- 7 **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**, a federally-funded USDA program that provides nutrition and education programs for low-income pregnant women and mothers of infants and toddlers (birth to 5) throughout Amador and Calaveras counties; vouchers for nutritious food; breast pump loan program; feeding and nutrition support and education. **223-7685**
- 8 The Resource Connection's **Food Bank**, offering opportunities for eligible Calaveras County families and individuals to receive nutritious food at the main San Andreas site and at **Mobile Pantries** and food distribution locations. **754-1257**
- 9 **Santa's Express**, an annual event where the Food Bank distributes special food baskets to low-income households during the holiday season. **754-1257**
- 10 **Nutrition Policy and Planning** through the Resource Connection's involvement in WIC, the Breast Feeding Coalition, and through the Food Bank's role in Second Harvest. **Amador: 223-7685; Calaveras: 754-1257**

Prevention and Intervention

The Resource Connection has created numerous "safety net" programs for people facing issues of violence and sexual assault.

- 11 **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services**, for victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault, including counseling, advocacy, and support services; outreach to Calaveras residents who are in violent environments, have suffered abuse, or are at risk of abuse; emergency and long term shelter for battered women and children in Calaveras County at the **Crisis Center**; transportation for victims of violence; support groups; counseling; victim advocacy; hospital response related to abusive events; **24-hour hotline**. **Hotline: 754-4011; Office: 754-1300**
- 12 **Violence Prevention Services** including interpersonal violence prevention focused on children in Calaveras schools. **754-1300**
- 13 **Self Help Legal Assistance** including legal and restraining order assistance in Calaveras and Amador counties. **754-1443**
- 14 **Policy and Planning** related to prevention and intervention focused on the Resource Connection's work with Calaveras Violence Reduction Council. **754-1300**
- 15 **OATS (Once Again Thrift Shop)**, providing clothes and household items at discount prices. Proceeds from the shop support prevention and intervention programs. **754-0692**

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 res-



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.

cued 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.”

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

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

Judi

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.”

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

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

Moana

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.”



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.

