

“Every Family Should Go”

Karina’s Story

Nunez disease had taken over his small, fragile body long before birth. Deep inside the chromosomes, the disease had told the growing fetus the child would not want to eat like other children once he was born. Now Karina had the Child Protective Services telling her she should give the baby to them so they could give the baby one-on-one care. It was important, they said, to get Thomas away from the stress of living with three other children—a stress they thought might be causing him not to eat.



Karina loved Thomas, but knew all the love in the world could not make a baby with this genetic disease except the nourishment she offered; all the love in her heart could not keep him from dying from malnutrition. Karina, a young, spirited woman with joyful dreadlocked hair and a big, Cheshire cat grin, loved Thomas so much that she eventually gave him up to Child Protective Services and took parenting classes to prove she was able to take care of this special child. It was in parenting class that she came to know an Alliance staff member, a woman that helped Karina become the self-reliant and self-confident woman she is today.

“When I went to see the Alliance worker it was usually about the problems in my past,” Karina commented as we sat in a dusty blue-walled room, sipping on cokes and talking about her experiences with the Alliance programs. *“I usually try to forget about the past, but it’s hard. When you’ve been in a predicament, a terrible predicament like I was, and you know, you kind’a draw back on things – memories and stuff – memories from the past start to come up. And with me, mine weren’t that great.”*

“It all started when my mother had a nervous breakdown,” Karina continued. *“There were four of us kids in my house in Georgia, but the Court said that we didn’t have the same last names so we couldn’t go with each other. I went to my mom’s side of the family. My sister and brother (went) to their dad’s side of the family. I was five and my sister was four. We were all so close. We were always together. When one person went someplace we all went. To be separated really tore us apart. Since then we haven’t been very close.”*

“I came up to Sacramento after my aunt’s first husband molested me and I became pregnant. My aunt, pregnant at the same time, was ashamed but she refused to believe her husband would touch me like he did. She never did let me tell my grandparents why I was sent to Sacramento. Instead of me feeling all bad and sad about myself, now, though, I now believe I can do anything regardless about what anyone says. The Alliance staff person helped me to believe in myself despite all my circumstances.”

“Along with parenting classes (the Alliance staff member) introduced me to Early Connections’ Family Night, which me and my children participated in every Friday. In the morning we parents participated in the class and interacted with the children. In the afternoon

there was childcare and time for me and other hard working parents to take care of errands, go shopping, or take a nap! Early Start and Head Start gave my daughter and sons a head start in school, too. Volunteers and teachers took special care to attend to what they call developmental task development, such as brushing teeth, combing hair and taking care of their bodies.”

“The Alliance staff made it easier for me,” she went on. “By talking to her, she motivated me. For the longest time I didn’t think I could do anything, but she built up my self-esteem. More confidence in myself both listening to me and telling me ‘I am a beautiful, black, strong woman and I can do it’! After she kept saying that and I kept remembering, remembering, remembering, it built up my self-confidence.”

Karina

Karina couldn’t say enough, however, about the parenting classes. *“Every parent should go!”* Karina exclaimed. *“You learn more! You may know (something about parenting), but it helps to learn more. When your child is trying to communicate, get down to eye level and talk. A lot of parents yell at the child from the other room – that’s not communicating. I used to do that; I never thought to get down on my children’s level!”*

“There is such a big difference between how I grew up and how my kids are growing up. When I was going to school we couldn’t afford things. Early Connections provides financial support and food for my family, as well as parenting classes and emotional support!”

Although not in school at the moment, Karma does see a future in medicine. *“I want to be a heart doctor,”* she stated. *“I have a heart problem, along with my two sons. I have lots of experience helping care for my sons with the machines, etc. Both my sons are developmentally delayed, and the oldest one has hearing loss in the right ear and asthma. The youngest has eating problems. Both are due to the Nunez disease, which is passed down genetically.”*

“I feel everyone in the program treated me well,” Karma concluded, “I just got more support from the Alliance staff – more motivation. I can trust them (workers at the Alliance). I don’t trust everybody – only people who work with me and understand my problems.”

