



# HEART TO HEART

**September 2016**

Hello, A Better Way Donors! Welcome to the September edition of the A Better Way Newspaper, Heart to Heart, exclusively for our donors. This newsletter will be your source of updates on our past and upcoming events. Look out for opportunities to partner with A Better Way and help us in our endeavors. Going forward we will be releasing this newsletter once a quarter. For more information, please contact the Development Coordinator and Grant Writer, Sandhya Darisi at [sroddam@abetterwayinc.net](mailto:sroddam@abetterwayinc.net). Have a lovely September!

## IMPORTANT UPDATES

### 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala – Huge Success

Dear Donors,

A Better Way hosted our third annual Spring Gala on a beautiful evening of May 21st at the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland. 160 Guests, 14 Sponsors, 100 Donated Items and 20 Volunteers made this gala a huge success. You would be happy to know that the gala night made a gross collection of \$110,000 through ticket sales, sponsorship, silent and live auctions and Fund-A-Need event. These funds will enable A Better Way to expand and provide high quality services to children and youth through our Permanency program. We extend our deepest gratitude for your enduring support to A Better Way and hope that our strong partnership continues because we have much work to do!!!



Parent Advocate, Armondo DePina with his family at our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala

### CEO Shahnaz Mazandarani, honored at Washington D.C on Sep 21st, 2016

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's (CCAI) Angels in Adoption® Program honors a wide spectrum of individuals and organizations making extraordinary contributions in adoption, permanency and child welfare. Shahnaz Mazandarani is among the few selected in 2016 for these awards. Each year, the awardees travel to Washington, D.C., to both celebrate their hard work and dedication to the issues and participate in special events designed to engage them in using their personal experience to effect change on behalf of children in need of families. Past recipients of this award include: Muhammad Ali, First Lady Laura Bush, Kristin Chenoweth, Scott Fujita, Deborra-lee Furness, Katherine Heigl & Josh Kelley, Patti LaBelle, Ne-Yo, Rhea Perlman, Shonda Rhimes, Korie and Willie Robertson, Al Roker, Jane Seymour, Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy, and Bruce Willis. [CONGRATULATIONS SHAHNAZ, YOU ROCK!!](#)

### The Joint Commission: A Better Way Accredited

In the early 2016, A Better Way chose to get accredited given our strong commitment to excellence and ensuring excellence in all our endeavors. We chose the



# HEART TO HEART

**September 2016**

gold standard of accreditation, The Joint Commission and became accredited with flying colors. The Joint Commission's mission is to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission has set high standards for behavioral health agencies that requires transparency in their policies and procedures that ensure high quality care and the experience of safety for clients and staff. Becoming accredited has ensured that A Better Way clarifies and communicates their policies and procedures to the staff. Becoming accredited tells our community and clients that we ensure excellence in our work and will only settle for the highest of standards.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Program Report for FY2015-2016: We closed our accounts for the year FY2015-2016 in June 2016. Our quality management and program staff are working hard to collect data from different programs and the program report for the fiscal year 2015-2016 will be available in the next newsletter.

## Board retreat in September 2016

At the end of this quarter, A Better Way's Board of Directors will come together to discuss several critical issues and opportunities facing A Better Way. The purpose and outcomes of the retreat are very specific including organization's fundraising goals, organization structure, clarification of board's roles and responsibilities and explore opportunities to add new board members.

## Holiday Toy Drive

Every holiday season, A Better Way, with the generous help of our donors, staff, board and members from the community collect gifts and toys for children in our various programs. Children enter foster care with very

few possessions and experience emotions brought on by staying away from their birth family. A Better Way reaches out to its donors to host a toy drive in their organizations through which its employees can make a real difference in a child's life. A Better Way would be grateful to receive support from donors such as you in our efforts to make this holiday season brighter for the children in need. Last year, A Better Way received 1,000 toys and 100 gift cards from 17 donors. If you or anyone you know is interested in hosting a toy drive for us, please contact Sandhya Darisi at [sroddam@abetterwayinc.net](mailto:sroddam@abetterwayinc.net)

## Peet's Coffee and Tea Holiday Giving

Thanks to the generosity of Peet's staff and their valued customers, A Better Way was able to raise funds for bringing vital programs and services to vulnerable children and families living in the Bay Area. In the last five years, Peet's Coffee and Tea Holiday program helped A Better Way raise \$60,000 for our Foster Adoption program and also educate the Bay Area residents on the criticality of our programs. If you or anyone you know are connected with this program, please contact Sandhya Darisi at [sroddam@abetterwayinc.net](mailto:sroddam@abetterwayinc.net)

## OTHER UPDATES

### HRConnection for A Better Way Staff

A Better Way is excited to announce the rollout of HRConnection, exclusively for the staff. HRConnection portal is a one-stop shop Intranet Site for human resources-related communications, including benefit communications, training opportunities, upcoming events, company facts and other valuable information. This was developed as an organization initiative towards efficiency and to improve the quality of service delivery.



# HEART TO HEART

**September 2016**

## CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

### Florene's Story: Being a Foster Parent



I have been a foster parent for over 18 years and have fostered over 50 children. Raised in the projects in East Oakland and being a part of a big family with very little means, I was inspired by my mother's efforts to send money to support an orphan girl in a foreign country. My husband and I became

foster parents for the very first time when our daughter was six years old and opened our home to a brother and sister. It was a valuable learning experience for my family. I realized that being a foster parent is challenging and yet rewarding and it takes patience and understanding.

There were times we wanted to quit foster care but our hearts wouldn't allow it. We decided to continue fostering and allow God to decide the time to retire from foster care. We currently have three foster children in our home - a 7 year old boy, a 14 year old girl and a 16 year old girl along with our biological daughter, Kristina, aged 11 and our transitional home in Antioch houses 5 young female adults.

When Families That Care Foster Care Agency notified us they were changing ownership, I personally thought, this is the perfect opportunity to retire from foster care. However, God had other plans for us and introduced A Better Way, Inc in our lives. He gave us a better way to create special memories for kids in foster care. I am thankful for having a supportive family and group of social workers at A Better Way, Inc who have helped us create wonderful memories for all our children we have cared for in foster care.

## MESSAGE FROM CEO



Years come and go and one day you notice that you have gray hair and you wonder if you have done enough to make the world a better place. Twenty years ago, I started A Better Way with the hope of being part of the solution by providing high quality services for vulnerable children and families. I count myself very lucky to have spent so many years helping heal families and communities. Over the last two decades, I have also seen positive changes in the larger foster care system. Don't get me wrong, there is still a lot of room for improvement, but we are getting there.

I started A Better Way with virtually no funding. All I had was \$5,000 loan as seed money from a person I had never even met. Our staff at that time consisted of one person: Me. With that seed, though I could begin to build the team that would realize the dream. Today, A Better Way has 120 employees with contracts of \$13 million. This solid growth can be attributed to our commitment to high quality standards, collaborative approach and capacity-building services. This approach has established a track record of delivering transformative services to communities around the San Francisco Bay. Just recently the Mental Health Director for one of the counties we work with told us: "We were looking for excellence and A Better Way has brought excellence to our county".

We had 29 children in our program at the end of our first year. Fast forward to 2015/2016, we have served more than 1,200 children through our programs. If we count the siblings and parents of those children, the number is much higher. We provide services in three counties through eight programs. Our programs offer a continuum of supports in the areas of foster care, adoption, mental health, school base mental health, parent training and advocacy services. To achieve



# HEART TO HEART

**September 2016**

excellence we offer our staff the highest level of training programs available.

In June of this year we had our annual gala which was attended by 160 people with many of you among them... people who held our hands (and held up their auction paddles) to support us in our ongoing journey. I was so moved by the outpouring of support by so many kind souls at the gala that I could not sleep that night. To receive such strong support from so many people who believe in our mission was a powerful affirmation of our staff who struggle every day to help us achieve A Better Way's goals.

I want to thank all our donors for their continued trust and support. Our promise to you is that we will do our best to always look for A Better Way to help children and families achieve their potential. Our promise to you is to help families discover their own way through new insights, capabilities and supportive relationships. Our promise to you is to never compromise on the quality of services and to always strive for excellence. Our promise to you is to share with you lives of children and families you have touched.

In the closing, I want to let you know that you are part of the reason that when I see the gray hair in the mirror, I smile.

With Gratitude,

Shahnaz Mazandarani

CEO & PRESIDENT

**CONNECT!!!**

*A Better Way is on Social Media! You can connect with us on*

[Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)