

Parental Guidance

A River Edge mom grows while mentoring another.

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Ten years ago, Christine Geiges-Krey stopped working to raise her 2-year-old son. She soon realized she needed something else in her life aside from her daily routine. That is when she saw an opportunity in the local community newspaper to become a Mentoring Mom, and it clicked. “I feel we are not just here to take care of ourselves, but to help others as well,” the River Edge resident says.

Geiges-Krey has been paired with the same mom since her first day. Her mentee, a young mom (in her late 20s) with three young kids at the time, was living with the father of her kids, who was struggling with major personal issues and caused a lot of strife which resulted in Division Youth and Family Services, now known as Child Protection and Permanency, to get involved.

The two moms met once a week for emotional support, but as their relationship grew, it became once a month with lots of phone calls and texting. Now that her mom is doing well on her own, they just meet up when they can.

“In the beginning we would meet every week, just to talk, go over things. Go to the movies together, go out to eat, shopping, or just get coffee,” Geiges-Krey says. “I knew it was important to meet to gain a relationship with her, get to know her. Everyone comes from different walks of life and wants to connect with each other. As women, we do share a lot of similar things, personal struggles.”

Cindy Andrade, director of Mentoring Moms, explains that when looking for volunteers they seek for women who truly understand how difficult life can be for a mom who is raising her family under challenging situations.

“We ask mentors to be good listeners, to be open to look at the world from another’s point of view and to be non-judgmental about the mom and her circumstances,” she says.

As the relationship grew between the two moms, instead of offering advice, Geiges-Krey felt her mentee just needed someone to talk to, and she supported her and just listened, hoping to provide confidence.

“Christine is so understated about her role as a mentor! She has been a consistent cheerleader, supporter and ‘friend’ to her mentee and family for more than 10 years,” Andrade says. “The match lasted because Christine built a solid relationship with her mentee based on trust and respect.”

Geiges-Krey says this has been a journey for both families and she feels it is a responsibility to be by her mentee’s side and keep growing together.

“Sometimes I feel like I cannot do anything more for her, but we stick together,” she says. “She really has a lot of courage and perseverance and really impresses me. She has inspired me that I can do more.”

In all these years, Geiges-Krey has seen her mentee through so many life changes and challenges, from family issues to graduating from Bergen Community College and, finally, Montclair State University.

“Her mentee did all the heavy lifting to change her life, but Christine stood by her side and did whatever she could to make her journey a bit easier,” Andrade says. “Their relationship makes me proud that a program like this exists.”

Loyal to each other, their family’s lives have connected, too, as their children have met and gone apple picking together, and attended fundraisers and holiday parties hosted by the Mentoring Moms program.

Geiges-Krey adds, “I felt that being a mom myself, this was something I can probably do. This was all new territory to me, and it kind of was what drew me in. I wanted to do volunteer work. I used to be involved in the cancer society and I knew I couldn’t do that with a small child. I felt I would be able to help and understand a mother. This seemed like a good fit.”

And it sure was. ■

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