

# Share the Spirit: Concord agency takes pain out of being a kid

[By Rick Hurd](#)

[Contra Costa Times](#)

Posted: 12/31/2011 08:10:15 PM PST

Updated: 01/02/2012 09:57:09 PM PST



Rose Marie Wallace, right, a staff member at the Child Abuse Prevention Council, visits



In the worst times, Claudia Gonzalez's bedroom doubled as a cave. Not much bigger than four office cubicles pushed together, the small space in the Concord apartment served as Gonzalez's sanctuary, her living quarters and her escape.

She left Jalisco, Mexico, in 2000, with her boyfriend, "because I wanted a better life," and they settled in Concord. By 2001, she was pregnant with her first daughter. She didn't speak English. She didn't know her neighbors. She barely saw her boyfriend.

So the bedroom became home. For two years, she said, she never left it.

"And without support," she said, "I'd still be in there."

That support came largely from the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County, part of Bay Area News Group's annual Share the Spirit campaign.

Today, Gonzalez, 29, is a student at Diablo Valley College, studying childhood development. Her English is not as steady as she'd like it to be, but she is fluent enough to hold a steady conversation with someone not well-versed in Spanish.

## **Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County**

Gonzalez is raising three children -- daughters Ariadna, 10, and Amber, 6 months; and son, Jordy, 4 -- with their father, and she says her relationships with all of them are stronger than ever.

She also said that without the Child Abuse Prevention Council, her story would be a far darker tale.

"Mainly, I just have to say thank you because the program has helped change me as a person, as a mother and as a spouse," she said. "They gave me support and taught me skills, and that's one of the reasons why I'm in school now, so that I can teach those skills to others."

The Concord-based agency provides safety net programs for at-risk families in a bid to reduce neglect and abuse, and executive director Carol Carrillo said more than 700 children and their families were educated last year.

"Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, 'Today, I'm going to abuse my kid. Today, I'm going to be a bad parent,'" Carrillo said. "But, what you have are patterns of behavior that are established and sometimes can last generations, and those are the cycles that need to be broken."

"You show people another way and give them the skills and the support they need."

The Child Abuse Prevention Council provided 6,000 pieces of parenting and resources information to families last year, Carrillo said, from fliers to pamphlets to poster contests at public schools. The agency uses 2,588 teachers, child care providers, social workers and health care providers to work with children and parents, Carrillo said.

The goal, Carrillo said, is to equip families with the skills to see what child abuse is, the courage to speak up about it when they see it and the power to tackle it elsewhere.

"Our program teaches parents alternative ways of dealing with things," said Maggie Velasco, the agency's program director. "The goal is that through educational tools, we strengthen the whole family."

Gonzalez will vouch for it. She said she no longer engages in battles with Ariadna over how to deal with the pressures Ariadna says she feels to excel in school. Nor does Gonzalez feel as overwhelmed about the addition of Amber, whose arrival in June meant more demands and less sleep for mom.

"Happier" is how Ariadna puts the family dynamic, while smiling. "Better."

"The goal is to build mutual respect between parent and child," said Rose Marie Wallace, a family support specialist. "As parents, we often think that because we know what's best, that we also know their feelings. We try to develop empathy between the children and adults. Quite often, we don't treat them as our equals, and that's where the communication barrier occurs."

And when the barrier is removed, she said, the result can be drastic.

"Mainly," Gonzalez said, "my behavior is different than before. Because my behavior is different, the behavior for my kids is different. This is what the program has taught us. There are other ways than you learned or are used to. Again, all I can say to them is thank you."

Contact Rick Hurd at 925-945-4780 and follow him on Twitter at [Twitter.com/3rdERH](https://twitter.com/3rdERH).

**Child Abuse Prevention Council of Contra Costa County**

share the spirit

The Share the Spirit campaign, sponsored by Bay Area News Group, benefits nonprofit agencies in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Readers who wish to help can clip the coupon accompanying this story and send it to the address printed on it. The Volunteer Center of the East Bay administers the fund. Readers with questions and corporations interested in making large contributions may contact the Volunteer Center at 925-472-5760.

[Share the Spirit](#)