



The Relationships That Stay With Us: An HFA Story Years in the Making

Sometimes the impact of home visiting shows up years later, in the most unexpected places.

Recently, Healthy Families America National team members Sarai and Kelly attended Prevent Child Abuse Arizona's Child Abuse Prevention Conference. As they sat in the audience, they had the opportunity to hear Audrey, a former Healthy Families parent, take the stage and share her story.

But there was another familiar face in the room.

Melissa, Audrey's former Healthy Families home visitor through Southwest Human Development, was there too.

Audrey and Melissa hadn't seen each other in four years.

Their unexpected reunion was a chance to look back at a relationship that began nearly a decade earlier, when Audrey was a first-time mom going through an incredibly difficult time in her life.

A "baby tutor" and a new mom

Audrey had an affectionate name for Melissa when they worked together: her "baby tutor."

Shortly after Audrey became a mother, her own mother became seriously ill. She died when Audrey's daughter, Leia, was just 11 weeks old.

Melissa was there during those difficult early months, but what Audrey remembers most isn't Melissa arriving with answers or telling her what she should do.

"She let me cry and acted as the support I needed throughout the grieving process instead of acting on her own agenda," Audrey remembers. "She validated me as a whole human, not just a case to be managed."

Ask Melissa about those years, and you hear the other side of that same relationship. Audrey was one of the first families Melissa worked with after becoming a Healthy Families home visitor. Although Melissa had previous experience supporting families, she had never conducted visits inside someone's home and remembers being nervous.

Melissa remembers seeing determination and strength in Audrey from the beginning. Audrey asked questions. She showed up. And even while going through a difficult time, she remained engaged in learning about her baby's development, herself, and her own capabilities as a parent.

Over time, Audrey and Melissa built the kind of relationship where honesty and difficult conversations could exist alongside trust, respect, and compassion.

“I know I wouldn’t be the same mom I am today without her influence,” Audrey says.

Another relationship behind the scenes

There was another reason Audrey and Melissa’s reunion was especially meaningful for the HFA National team.

Before joining HFA National, Sarai had been Melissa’s supervisor.

Seeing Audrey onstage brought back memories of the conversations Sarai and Melissa had during supervision years earlier. They talked about how best to support Audrey, thought through strategies Melissa could use during home visits, and celebrated Audrey’s accomplishments as she progressed through the program and eventually graduated.

Sarai also remembers the qualities Melissa brought to her work with Audrey and other families.

Melissa was creative and caring. She paid close attention to families’ cues and adapted her approach to meet each family where they were. Most importantly, Sarai says, Melissa saw the good in people and helped them recognize and build on the strengths they already had.

Those qualities are reflected in the way Audrey describes her experience years later.

The relationship between Audrey and Melissa didn't happen in isolation. Behind a home visitor walking alongside a family was a supervisor walking alongside that home visitor, creating space to reflect, problem-solve, celebrate progress, and strengthen the work.

Years later, together again

And then, years later, those relationships unexpectedly converged in one room.

Audrey was onstage telling her story.

Melissa was in the audience, seeing a parent she had once visited at home now sharing her experience with others.

Sarai, who had once sat in supervision with Melissa talking about how to support Audrey, was now sitting in the audience as a member of the HFA National team.

And Kelly, also from HFA National, was there to hear firsthand what the relationship had meant to Audrey.

The next morning brought another reunion. Melissa joined Audrey and her family for breakfast, reconnecting with Leia and meeting Audrey's other children.

For Melissa, seeing Audrey again brought up one overwhelming feeling:

“PROUD! I am so proud of where she is at today!”

Audrey is now a mother of three, and the confidence Melissa remembers watching her build years ago was evident as she stood on that conference stage.

For those of us at Healthy Families America, families are at the center of our work every day. And every once in a while, we get the extraordinary opportunity to see that work come full circle.

A parent. A home visitor. A supervisor. A national network.

Different people playing different roles, but connected by relationships grounded in trust, respect, empathy, and a belief in families' strengths.

Sometimes, years later, you get the gift of seeing just how far those relationships can reach. ❤️