



Calaveras County Office of Education

PRESS RELEASE

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“Youth Mentoring Pair Still Close After 10 Years”

Part 2 of the Series: “Where are They Now?”

When Valerie Olson met Brandy Phillips, the 9-year-old girl was hyper, “angry and a little anxious,” Olson remembered.

Ten years ago, Phillips was recommended by an elementary school teacher as someone who may benefit from having a mentor in their life, and the Calaveras Youth Mentoring Program (CYMP) paired her with Olson, a former recreational therapist, local realtor and mother of two grown boys.

Due to her extensive background working in behavioral health, Olson felt that she was up for the task.

“I caught her at a very vulnerable time,” said Olson, who added that Phillips had an unstable home life when they were introduced.

Phillips, now 18, remembers that first “trial meeting,” facilitated by CYMP at Murphys Park.

“I thought that she was really nice,” Phillips said. “I didn’t know, at first, if we would get along. I wasn’t used to nice people at that point.”

From then on, the pair spent time together each week, continuing their official mentoring relationship into Phillips’ teenage years, when another mentor was introduced. Brandy was matched again, with Angela Hanson and their beautiful friendship still remains close to this day.

“As each year went on, things got a lot easier,” Olson said. “I think the main thing I taught her was that I would show up—that I would be responsible and show up each week, and that she could depend on that, because I think she was lacking that in life.”

The two share fond memories of doing homework, cooking meals at Olson’s house and celebrating their birthdays together. Today, they still see each other about once a month. In December, Phillips helped decorate Olson’s Christmas tree—a tradition they’ve forged over a decade-long relationship.

“It went from being a friendship to more of like a family-type friendship, which was really nice because I didn’t really have a lot of family,” Phillips described how their relationship evolved into her adult life.

“Years later, we tell each other we love each other,” Olson said.

In watching her mentee grow and mature, Olson said her proudest moment so far has been seeing Phillips graduate from high school.

Over the past year, Phillips adopted, trained and certified her own Queensland Heeler service dog, Zelex. The experience helped her realize her passion for training dogs, and she is considering pursuing a career in that field while she works as a dog groomer.

Phillips said her mentor taught her important life skills that she's utilized as an adult, such as cleaning a house and managing money. In the future, she hopes to offer her own insight and emotional support to a young person who may need it.

"I would like to be a mentor, because it's really nice to help," Phillips said. "It really helps kids that are troubled and really don't have a family member or a friend or someone to look up to."

Though she has not taken on another mentee since Phillips, Olson and her husband Gary remain involved in CYMP, and deliver presentations to promote the program.

When asked what her advice would be to a prospective mentor, Olson said, "Just to know that the program offers so much training and so much support that any concerns and fears you have will be addressed."

The Calaveras Youth Mentoring Program currently has a long list of youth waiting to be matched one-on-one with mentors, girls in the Arnold area and boys in the Valley Springs and Copperopolis areas. Our young adult programs are always looking for group mentors from anywhere in the county! Please visit our website www.calaverasmentoring.org or call Kaila at (209) 736-6078 for more information.



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