

# Mutual Healing



*The Children's Family Mentor Program offers parents a unique—and powerful—way to cope with their child's diagnosis*

After learning her son had cystic fibrosis, Marchet Butler struggled with the pressures of caring for a chronically ill child. “Despite wonderful healthcare providers at Children’s, I felt alone,” Butler said. “I needed another CF parent to assure me our lives would be OK again.”

In the Children’s NICU, Dana Lowenthal was experiencing a similar rollercoaster ride of having a sick child whose improvements were measured in milliliters and grams. “Unless you’ve had a child on the edge of life, you can’t fully comprehend it,” said Lowenthal.

Just two years ago, there was no standard way for our patients’ parents to connect. Today, there is: the Children’s Family Mentor Program, created to match caring and experienced parent volunteers—like Lowenthal and Butler—with parents of newly diagnosed patients who need emotional support.

#### How it works

Currently, the Children’s Family Mentor Program is in place for CF, NICU and cardiac service lines (with inpatient rehab in the planning stages). Any area within those service lines wishing to offer the mentor program simply contacts Roni Mintz, Lead Program Coordinator, Family Services, and designates a staff liaison to match new parents with mentors. Experienced parents interested in becoming mentors first must complete the application process. Then, they participate in a Children’s mentor training session, where they learn how best to offer support and process their own emotional responses that may arise during mentoring. Once trained, mentors offer support—generally by phone—to a mentee family for a one-year period.

During the one-year period, mentors draw support from regular group meetings, coordinated by Mintz, with staff liaisons in attendance. “Ultimately, everyone involved wins,” said social worker Amy Shipp, a staff liaison for the CF program. “Mentees feel comforted and gain confidence.

Mentors have the satisfaction of making newly diagnosed parents’ lives easier. In so many ways, it’s healing for both.”

#### Life-changing connections

Even though the mentor program is only a few years old, the impact it’s already had on participating parents has been life-changing. Just ask Mandy Rodgers.

In 2010, Rodgers’ son Reid was diagnosed with CF. Like Butler and Lowenthal, she felt alone—until Butler became her family mentor. “We had an immediate connection,” Rodgers said. “She knew firsthand what I was dealing with. Her first question wasn’t about Reid; she wanted to know how I was. She really listened, pointed me toward resources and offered reassurance. Marchet eased the burden of the whole situation.”

During their year as mentor and mentee, Butler and Rodgers talked weekly by phone. “Marchet helped educate me in a way the internet, with its staggering amount of information, couldn’t. She helped me focus on enjoying each day with Reid, rather than on future uncertainties. And

she helped me see that, although our lives will be different than expected, life will go on, and we’ll be fine. What a gift to have that level of support.”

#### Paying it forward

Rodgers and Butler have officially finished their mentorship, but they’ve cemented a lifelong friendship. And the program has come full circle, with Rodgers eager to become a mentor herself.

“Having the support of a parent mentor was priceless to me. Now that I’ve found my footing with my son’s diagnosis, I’d love the opportunity to return the favor and do just the same for someone else.”

Could your service line benefit from having a Family Mentor Program? Contact Roni Mintz at [roni.mintz@choa.org](mailto:roni.mintz@choa.org). 