

## Changing Course

*Family School  
Parenting education since 1976*

**William and Shareen** (all names are changed) met 17 years ago at a special education high school. They have been together ever since. William's needs for special education may have resulted from physical trauma as a child. Shareen has cognitive limitations and neither she nor William are strong readers, but they are excellent at budgeting and running a household. Still, due to their mental inadequacies they felt they were not able to care for their two young babies. They gave both children up to the foster care system. The babies were placed with separate foster care families, and both died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Although anxious about SIDS, William and Shareen had another child, named Faith, two years ago. Faced with caring for a baby at risk for SIDS, Shareen could not cope, and Faith was placed in temporary foster care, but this time the family was referred to Family Support Service's Family School. After a year of parenting courses, work with a social worker, nurse educators and early childhood education specialists, both the child and the parents were judged ready for reunification in late November.

Of his time at Family School, William says, "When I first came to this place I thought God was against me. It gave me insight...(and it) has helped me a lot...If it wasn't for Family School I would be down in the dumps. My child is someone I can love and she can love me (too)." William is proud of his choice to be a better parent than his own father was. "My father was abusive, but I made a choice (and) I'm glad I'm nothing like him; two of my bothers and sisters turned out to be just like my father."

Family School's toddler program is the joy of young Faith's day. William says "She says 'Daddy, please come to school with me.' She knows...(that) every Monday and Wednesday she gets up early...(she) wants to go to class."

Their social worker, Robin, says " given the right ongoing support, I think that Faith can grow and develop while living with her parents. This child is extremely bonded to William and Shareen and it is great that we can support this family as they try to make it together."

***\*All names have been changed.***

*Family School is a bi-weekly, six month to one-year family program, where Philadelphia Department of Human Services (DHS) referred parents learn about child development, acquire confidence as a parent, and come to understand all of the many emotional, nutritional and physical needs their young children have. While mothers and fathers are in parenting classes, their children attend baby, toddler or preschool classes. For several hours each day, children and parents also play and work together under the supervision of teachers and staff. This is just one of many families' stories.*

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