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Celebrating Achievement

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It's about time. In fact, it is past time to recognize Biz Steinberg for her 30 years of impressive work at EOC – now called the Community Action Partnership.

She began working at EOC in 1978 as the Head Start Coordinator and since 1984 she's been the local face and the organization's quiet but powerful leader.

Her passion has been to provide our low-income residents with opportunities that many of us take for granted through grants, programs and the coordination of local agencies and groups. Sometimes those efforts go smoothly; sometimes it looks a little more haphazard, but always at the calm center is Biz.

EOC, the Economic Opportunity commission, was established in our county in 1965 as a non-profit public benefit community action agency in response to federal mandates required by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. After 40 years its roots run deep.

EOC recently joined an alliance of more than 1,100 Community Action Agencies nationwide serving low-income individuals. EOC's name change reflects the strength of community partnerships that make it work.

We would like to describe one local example. Some of the local agencies involved were the Partnership (formerly EOC), the Orfalea Family Foundation, the County Office of Education and the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation.

An eight-grade student was pregnant. Although her family supported her decision to keep her child, it did not have financial or other resources to make sure she would complete her education. Her teacher had already recognized the talent and potential of this bright child and encouraged her to stay in school and to set her sights on a college education.

The Partnership's teen pregnancy program helped with her child care and parenting education classes while she finished middle school. When she got to high school the child care and parenting assistance continued and the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program stepped in. AVID is a program administered through the schools to recognize and support those students who have the academic strengths to attend college, but who would be the first in their families to do so. The AVID class, which is an elective, provides a tightly-knit structure to assist with tutoring, college applications, counseling, and feedback that other students can receive at home.

AVID became a second family for this young mother, guiding and encouraging her dreams. She stayed in high school, graduated with honors, worked 20 hours a week at a local business, achieved impressive SAT scores and ultimately was accepted at Cal Poly in its engineering program.

The Community Foundation recognized her accomplishments with a scholarship from the Orfalea foundation. She has now completed her first year of college. She and her child commute to the campus by public bus, riding more than one hour each day. He is enrolled in the Orfalea on-campus child care program.

Without the tremendous confluence of support this story would most likely have had a very different ending. Obviously, this young mother has talent, determination and a strong work ethic. She is now well on her way to being self-sufficient and providing a wonderful role model for her child. But would her personal attributes have been enough to keep the young eighth-grader on track? Probably not.

Our student has certainly benefited from the services provided to her. Her gratitude is expressed when she talks about her guiding principle to not only pursue a career that can provide the financial means to allow her to give back to her community, but also to volunteer her time to assist other young women in similar situations.

So, to Biz Steinberg and the Partnership – and to all the other people and agencies that have made such a difference to this young woman and to so many others in need – the new name is good, the deeds are better.

Editor's note: This is another column written by five local women with extensive ties to the county. Their intent is to "stimulate intelligent thought and debate on important issues" in our county, all the while "promoting civility and constructive exchange." "As We See It" will appear periodically on this page.

