

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering with Healthy Families program gives Auburn woman purpose

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It's been said that families are the most important building blocks of life. Angela Leone, of Auburn, thinks so, too — as life has revolved around her family and work.

Unemployed because of an accident three years ago, Angela was tired of being at home. Bored, doing nothing, she decided to offer her skills as a volunteer. She went to the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency to see if they might have something available. She was directed to the Healthy Families program.

The Healthy Families program serves pregnant women and families with children younger than 3 months. One of 36 programs throughout the state, it offers home-based services to expectant families and new parents. The program is free, voluntary and confidential. Both short- and long-term services are available to eligible parents. Angela says she knows how difficult it can be for young parents starting out, and that this program is a wonderful resource.

Angela had never volunteered before. As she said, she got married, had kids and was working more than 10 hours a day. There was never the time to do other things. But her accident changed all that. While she cannot work, Angela says she has a lot to offer and wanted to give back to the community. She thought that even if volunteering at the Healthy Families program didn't work out, there were other volunteer opportunities to be found. It has turned out to be a great match.

Angela assists in the office. Though she had no prior office experience, she calls herself a very organized individual. She completes a variety of tasks, like putting packets together, filing and data entry.

"Angela has been tried and true," said Kathy Gallinger, the program's director. "By having her in the office, it helps us have time for more direct client contact."

"Volunteering has definitely met my expectations," Angela said. "While I started doing it for myself it has helped make me feel like I'm actually helping someone and the community. I really like helping others."

She states that she has learned a lot about needs in the community by working with the Healthy Families and staff. Parenting can be stressful for anyone, and if you're young or unprepared, it's even harder. Angela says she likes helping people, as it makes her feel needed as well.

The goals of the Healthy Families program include supporting positive parent-child bonding and relationships, promoting optimal child development, enhancing parent self-sufficiency and prevent child abuse and neglect. The program helps parents learn about such things as

infant/toddler nutrition, family activities that promote child development, and balancing the demands of parenting with other responsibilities. According to Kathy, the Healthy Families program currently enrolls 78 and could expand to serve 120 parents and/or families.

Kathy says you would never know that Angela had no prior office experience, as she displays a high degree of skill and understanding. "Angela is very flexible and has always been very available when we needed her. She gets along well with others and is very positive," she states. "Having her in the office has made a huge difference."

When not volunteering, Angela enjoys spending time with her friends and her granddaughter who will be two in February.

"I used to say that I wished I had an office job and when I finally got one, it was a dream come true," Angela said.

For more information about the Healthy Families program, call (315) 283-2030 or visit cscaa.com.