



Mental Health Association

OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

Empowering People to Create Their Best Life

REPLANTING THE FAMILY TREE WENDY KODAMA

The holidays are times when families get together and remember shared history and plan for the future. The 2017 holidays were the first time in many years that this family was able to reunite and truly celebrate.

We first met Wendy Kodama in 2014. Having no safe place to live, she came to Spring Street Shelter after completing a rehabilitation program for addiction. Working hard on her sobriety and her mental health following 5 years of living on the streets, in a tent, and in a shed, she recalls, "I lost my soul out there...I didn't even feel like a person. Staying clean and getting the help she needed to address her depression, Wendy focused on one goal, reuniting with the most important person in her life; her sister, Diane. "I thought of my sister a lot. We were very close when we were young. At first, I got clean for Diane, because I wanted to be around her. I knew I needed to really be committed to being healthy and have some 'real' time clean before I could even imagine seeing her."

Diane missed Wendy just as much during the five years they were apart. "It was so hard. I felt like an only child during that time and it was



"Thank you MHA for the energy and hard work. All of it paid off. I'm a very good investment. And I continue to be."

really hurtful not to have my sister."

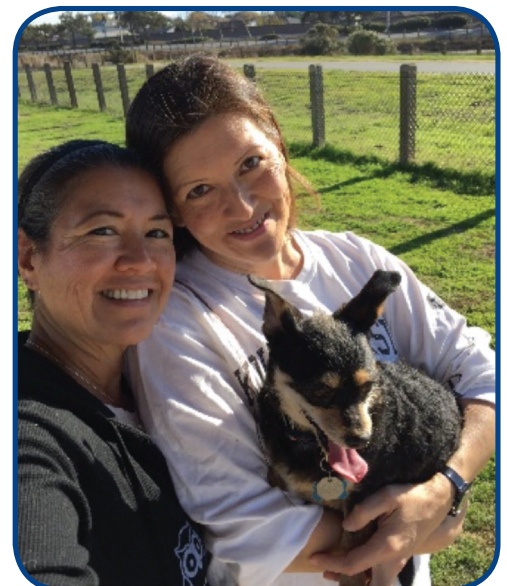
Wendy recounts, "when I came to Spring Street, everyone at MHA was so kind. I felt like I was entering a new life; that having the right support at the right time made all the difference." While at Spring Street Wendy wrote to her sister for the first time in five years. Within the week, Diane wrote back to her. "When she wrote back I thought that God had answered my prayers," Wendy says. Diane remembers that "the first meeting was really hard, it was like we didn't know each other."

Soon after their reunion Wendy was selected for permanent housing at Belmont Apartments. "Tiffany and Amanda helped me move in here," Wendy recalls. "When they left I lay on my back on the bed and just cried. It had been so long since I had a home."

The next step in making her house a home would be a pet. It was Diane who helped to make that happen. According to Diane, the sisters had dogs growing up and she knew how much Wendy would like one. In January of 2017, Diane found Arty, who was also waiting for a new home. The sisters made a trip to visit him. After some play time, Diane knew that this was meant to be. "After playing with him for 45 minutes or so, I asked if we would be on a waiting list because I knew Wendy had fallen in love with him. They said we could take him! He is absolutely the best dog and I feel it was meant to be."

Diane finding Arty proved to Wendy that her sister's love was still strong and their relationship was on the mend. Bringing him home, Wendy remembers thinking, "this, today, is the most hopeful I have ever felt." From Diane's perspective this is a special time too; "When it was Wendy's birthday I went to the card aisle at the store and it felt so nice to pick a card that said 'Sister'.

On behalf of MHA staff, Board, volunteers and clients, we thank you for your support in 2017 and we wish you all the best in the New Year. ☺



Wendy, Diane and Arty at the dog park.



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- **SAVE THE DATE – MARCH 1, 2018**
Brian Copeland and The Waiting Period
- MHA Holiday Party
- Community Service League

MHA'S MISSION

The Mental Health Association of San Mateo County (MHA), a nonprofit organization, enriches quality of life, restores dignity, and reduces homelessness, particularly for those affected by mental illness and HIV/AIDS. MHA strengthens hope by providing shelter, support and opportunities for socialization.

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