

Colusa Native Returns to Help Teens



Pictured: Florence A. Soares-Dabalos. (Photo by: Elizabeth Kalfsbeek)

By ELIZABETH KALFSBEEK

When most people describe their “favorite” type of client, it’s safe to bet that few would say, “the angry, moody 15 year old girl with attitude.”

But Florence A. Soares-Dabalos, MS, LMFT, thrives on working with adolescents. The psychotherapist recently opened a private practice in Colusa one day per week, and operates out of her Chico office the rest of the week.

“I love working with teens,” Soares-Dabalos said. “I’ve focused on teens for 13 years now, ever since my first job out of grad school as a Residential Family Therapist for a group home for teen girls.”

The psychotherapist graduated from Colusa High School in 1984 and took four years off before pursuing further education. She graduated from CSU Sacramento in 1994 with a degree in psychology and a minor in philosophy, completed her Master’s degree three years later in Marriage Family Child Counseling.

“I hope to offer Colusa County residents, middle school and high school kids primarily, a place to get counseling services without having to travel to Yuba City and/or Chico,” Soares-Dabalos said. “I’ve spoken to some of the health care professionals in the area and they tell me how pleased they are to have another therapist close by to refer their patients.”

Besides working with adolescents, Soares-Dabalos’ also focuses on empowering women to assert themselves, as well as fathers of teen girls who want to better understand their daughters.

“I’ve always been quite fascinated by people’s stories,” she said. “I’m very curious by nature. From day one, I fell in love with the counseling profession. There is such joy when a client tells me s/he learned something they can use for the rest of their lives because of their time in session with me.”

Soares-Dabalos began her profession while still in graduate school, interning for Dyer-Kelly Elementary School in Sacramento. She

worked with kids on issues such as bullying, building self-esteem and peer relationships. Some of the students on her caseload were dealing with poverty, moms who were prostituting themselves out for drugs and issues of child abuse of all forms.

The following year she interned at the Educational Opportunity Program in Sacramento working with college students dealing with relationship struggles, depression and anxiety.

Before testing for her licensing exams Soares-Dabalos earned 3,000 client-contact hours at a group home for severely emotionally disturbed teen girls. She then became a supervisor for a child abuse prevention program where she taught bonding and attachment to parents of newborns.

Finally, the therapist began working at Catholic Healthcare West in one of their counseling centers to hone her clinical skills, where she became known as the resident teen expert.

Soares-Dabalos will continue to operate her Chico private practice serving adults and teens. She will look at the needs of the community before deciding if she will work more than one day in the new Colusa office.

“Having grown up in Colusa, I wanted to give back in some way,” she said. “I thought there might be a need for teens to have a neutral, objective person to talk to. I also offer an understanding of this area and what it’s like to grow up here.”

Contact Florence Soares-Dabalos by calling 899-0220 or 781-3844. She can also be reached through her Web site www.florencecmft.com