

# Center helps Parents 'Stay in School'

By Fernando S. Cabildo  
Staff reporter

The green flier junior Kiyomi Arai eagerly hands out emphasizes graduation as a way "out of poverty into self-sufficiency" -- one of the mottos of the SF State Stay-in-School Family Resource Center.

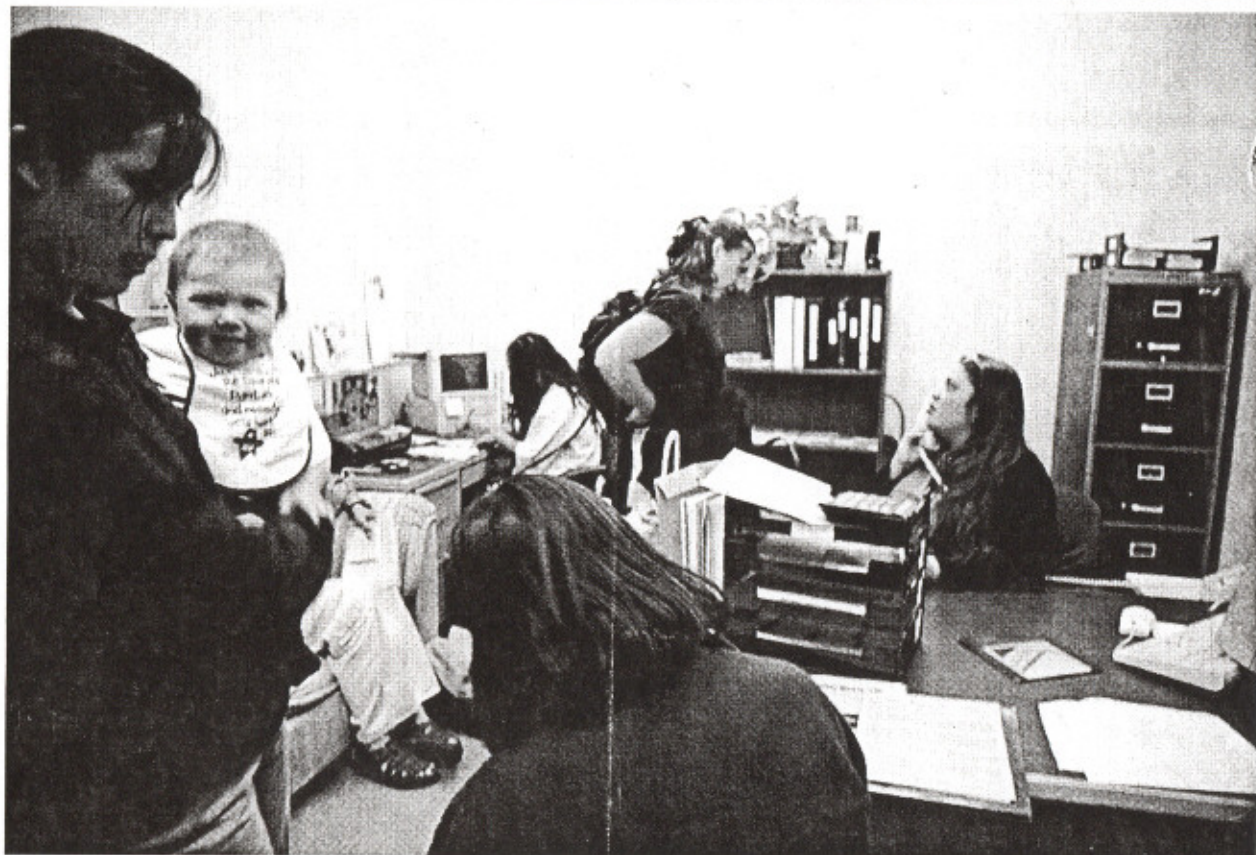
The center, located in a small, yet lively, office in the Health and Human Services Building, opened this past June and has so far helped about 100 SF State student parents in their quests to stay in school and to ultimately reach their goal of a college degree.

Some of those who have received help have been single, low-income students who are on the state welfare program, or CalWORKs -- but all student parents are welcome.

The center was created by the SF State San Francisco Urban Institute in collaboration with the Bay Area Homelessness Program (BAHP) and Low-Income Families' Empowerment through Education (LIFETIME), a nonprofit organization working to ensure opportunities in higher education for CalWORKs parents.

"These organizations heard the voices and understood the needs of student parents on campus," Arai said.

The center offers various services for SF State student parents, including information regarding financial aid and scholarships, class registration,



Vicky Graham/Staff photographer

**The recent opening of the Stay in School program, in HSS 116, is part of a quiet revolution to help struggling parents cope and obtain their college degrees.**

and ever-changing welfare laws. But the most crucial of the center's services are its referrals to on and off campus professional counseling, advising, mental and physical health services, housing and childcare.

Junior Anita Salter, a transfer student who is in her first semester at SF State, is a student mother. Salter walked into the center and began to use its resources immediately, receiving information and an application for a savings program designed to help students save for college expenses.

"Without the center I wouldn't have known about the program," Salter said. "So it's nice to know

it's here."

The importance of the information resources of the center is stressed by junior Tracey Faulkner, who visits it frequently. Faulkner recalls an adopt-a-family program offered to CalWORKs families during the holiday season.

She was not informed about the program, Faulkner said. "But this center has all the up-to-date and correct information."

The center also contributes to and hosts a number of workshops covering topics such as time and stress management, parenting skills, and welfare rights, according to Arai.

Because of the recent Welfare Reforms Act enacted by the

Clinton administration, CalWORKs recipients have an 18 to 24 month time limit to complete their educational goal before being cut off from public assistance.

"A lot of CalWORKs students don't know they can still go to school even after the time limit is reached," junior Viviana Venegas said. "We're here to help them find work or work study beyond that point, so they can finish school." Venegas, one of three of the center's staff members, is also a student parent.

During the 18 to 24 month period, CalWORKs recipients are required to do 32 hours of work activity per week. For

many student parents it is difficult to juggle classes, work, family time, and academic success under the new restrictions, said Arai. But the center does more than offer services. It also fights to change welfare laws.

Arai recently traveled to Sacramento to lobby for changes in CalWORKs rules. She, along with other supporters, lobbied for Assembly Bill 1039, which would allow homework and study time to be included as a work activity. The bill is in its final stages of legislation.

But Arai understands that sometimes a struggling student parent needs is a caring ear and

sharing their life stories and chatting.

"She was a couple months pregnant," Arai said, "but wanted to stay in school." "She was confused and nervous. Not only did she want to raise the baby, but she wanted to return to school soon after."

"When I transferred to this

emotional support to make it through the rough spots. Arai herself is a single parent who knows what it's like to struggle.

Arai recalls a recent visit by another student who walked into her office with her shoulders slightly huddled over.

The shy young woman and Arai spent almost an hour

College of Health and Human Services Building (HSS) in room 116 and is open to all student mothers and fathers. Hours for this semester will be announced this week, but student parents are invited to drop into the center at their convenience to meet the staff or contact the center at (415)405-0410.

university, I did not feel this campus was family friendly toward student parents," Arai said. "But after being here for a year and with the opening of the Stay-in-School Family Resource Center, SF State has gotten a lot friendlier."

The Stay-in-School Family Resource Center is located in the

**SCHOOL: Welfare parents helped**

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