



Nikki's Story

After giving birth to her second son, born premature, and after years of living in an abusive relationship, Nikki had the courage to say this is enough; this is not how I want to raise my boys. Coming to terms with that decision and the knowledge that things would not change gave her the strength to plan the day she and her sons would leave and go to the YWCA's Domestic Violence Shelter. To keep her plans a secret, she didn't tell her older son, 15 year old Vincent, about her plan until the day before they were to leave. He had just hours to decide what, of his personal possessions, to take... Nikki and her infant son, Logan left with just about what they had on their backs.

Unfortunately, because of her older son's age, he was unable to stay with his mother and brother at the shelter. Fortunately Nikki had a brother who allowed him to stay with him temporarily. Being separated from her son would be extremely difficult for both Nikki and Vincent. Knowing they would be together soon, living without the mental and physical abuse, helped them get through the three months they lived apart.

Thanks to her case worker at the YWCA, Nikki was referred to the St. Vincent Supportive Housing Program in June of 2007. She was somewhat familiar with the program from someone she befriended at the Y who participated in the program.

After completing the required 3 week interviewing process, Nikki moved into the apartment provided by St. Vincent's Supportive Housing as part of their program. She said: "the happiest day of my life was when my son, Vincent, walked through the door." Once she had her family back, and a place to live, she was now ready to work the program that would help her regain her personal independence.

As she began to work the program her first impression was surprise. "I was surprised that people were willing to help me and my kids." After years of physical but mostly mental abuse, her first goal was to build back the self-esteem that was nearly beat to non-existence. When she arrived she felt worthless. The counseling her case manager helped her find was a life saver. Making the transition from being completely controlled to taking personally responsible for her decisions was difficult at first. Counseling, together with the support of her case manager allowed her to work at her own pace in a safe environment.

In the beginning Nikki was uncomfortable with some of the rules associated with the program guidelines. It took awhile for her to realize guidelines were in place to keep her focused on actively making progress toward her self-sufficiency plan.

After eight months in the program, Nikki is excited about moving into permanent housing with her two sons. Thanks to the program she will leave with everything she needs for her new apartment. She is much stronger today, confident she is capable of making it on her own. Her current goals are to continue getting her youngest son, who suffers from asthma and other health issues associated with his premature birth, as healthy as possible. To continue to work on self-esteem and to be the best

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mom she can be for her sons. She hopes one day to find a good man. She feels lonely for male companionship, but is confident, when it's time, the Man upstairs will let her know and she will find someone who is not mean and abusive.

Written by Dolores Antunes
Volunteer