



### **SUSANNA'S SUCCESS STORY**

From a very young age, Susanna was exposed to domestic violence in her home. Her father struggled with addiction and would leave the family for days at a time with little money. By the age of 13, her parents separated. She was left mostly to herself and began smoking marijuana, then experimenting with alcohol and LSD. Her behavior became reckless in many ways, but at the age of sixteen she was able to test out of high school and begin taking classes at a community college. With no solid support system however, this new positive path didn't last long. Following a move across country with her father, who died a year later, she entered the sex industry and became addicted to cocaine and then crack. She was constantly in and out of jail and unable to function in society due to her addiction. At the age of 28 she was involved in a car crash that left her severely injured and could have taken her life. As a result, she moved back to the Bay Area with her mother, but soon after found herself in the same destructive pattern of addiction and life on the street. When she became pregnant with her daughter by her boyfriend/pimp, the idea of motherhood caused something in her to shift and, although she had no care for her own life at that point, she valued her child's life so highly that she stopped using drugs immediately. The death of a family member to gun violence caused her to move to Clearlake in her second trimester. She quickly connected with a local church, got involved with Celebrate Recovery and enrolled in Yuba College. When her daughter was a year old, she became pregnant again but her children's father was sent to prison before their son was born. As a newly single mother of an infant and toddler, Susanna began to take control of her life. She researched her options and the resources available to help her give her children a better life than she'd had. She shared a low income apartment with her brother so that they could afford rent, enrolled her children in WIC and Early Head Start (through Lake Family Resource Center), attended Mother-Wise support groups, and signed up for the CalWORKs and CalFresh programs (through Lake County Department of Social Services). In time and with the help of these and other supports she was able to obtain her Associates degree from Yuba College (Now the Lake County Campus of Woodland Community College) followed by her Bachelor's degree in Social Work from Humboldt State University. Those accomplishments paved the way for additional successes – an internship with Hospice of Lake County, a job as mental health clinician working with children at Lake County Department of Behavioral Health, becoming a licensed drug counselor, completion of an online Master's degree program in social work with a focus on trauma and families, and the purchase of a home of her own.

#### **In Susanna's Own Words:**

**What would you tell other people in Lake County about what is most important to your success? How would you encourage them?** I humbled myself and gratefully used every resource I could find to pull

myself up. Don't consider yourself above using welfare, subsidized child care, food stamps, scholarships, recovery programs, or church support. These things are there to help you improve your situation. Don't be afraid to ask for help! Be your own advocate if you want your life to change.

**What kept you from giving up when things were hard?** My children. I need to create a bright future for them and that desire became a drive within me that keeps me going. I also spend time with other sober people who encourage me and don't drag me down. I pursue a relationship with God and I live a life filled with prayer and faith. I trained for and ran a half marathon a few years ago and even though I didn't think I could do it I finished that race and now I have that experience to look back on and I remember how I didn't quit even though it hurt and my body wanted to stop, I wouldn't. I remember that and I know how strong I am.

**What are you most looking forward to, now that your life is on a different path and what makes you feel most equipped to keep moving in a positive direction?** I am looking forward to the simple things that make up a beautiful life. I love that my kids are in sports and taking piano lessons. I want to see them go to college one day. I love that I have been paying a mortgage on my own home now for three years. I want to keep pursuing my career and become a licensed clinical social worker providing therapy services to children and teenagers. I want to have some money in the bank, and the ability to show my kids different parts of the country and the world. Those things are finally within my reach and if my story can help even one other person who is in a dark place to find the hope I have, then I am so happy to share it.