



Testimonial

I will never forget the day or the look on either of the women's faces as they walked through the front door of the Hope House. One was homeless, and one was an advocate.

The homeless woman I quickly found out was a mother who lost everything, including her children (three beautiful girls), a home, a car, a relationship, and more. The advocate I would learn was beating down doors and ripping at barriers because no one else would, and because she believed in this family with every fiber in her being.

This mom's journey to homelessness didn't start by happenstance. Her and her children's father were living with her parents, and helping take care of her dying mother. In fact, that is where I believe the most profound trauma occurred. She found her mother dead in the bathroom. You see this wasn't the way it was supposed to be. Her mother should have quietly slipped away in a hospital bed in the adjoining room, but that didn't happen. Fate had different plans.

Our courageous client worked through the pain to the best of her ability, but never really grieved, and never really faced the trauma. She believed that it was her role to become the strong female.

The pair moved out and began to dabble in recreational drugs. Things like marijuana and spice. They held jobs, they took care of a home and they had three absolutely beautiful girls together. Right before the birth of the third child, the father moved out, got more involved in drugs and went to prison. The now single mother was forced to do it on her own, but couldn't.

She lost her home. The family of four (mom and three girls) lived in their car until that couldn't even be maintained, and the girls were removed. The girls went to live with their father's grandmother. Mom was given zero resources and expected to jump through every hoop the Department of Child Services (DCS) asked.

Weeks went by where things got worse before they got better. Her car was stolen, and she lost the last bit of anything she had left. She had nowhere left to turn. Her support system was basically non-existent and she was desperate to get her girls back.

She entered shelter. She found a great job and she secured transportation. Things were getting better, but they still weren't great. She spent 60 days at Hope House with zero completed referrals by DCS, but was expected to start services to progress her case. Things like substance abuse assessments, counseling, and parenting classes. It also turns out that the home the girls were placed in was abusing them. One approximately five incidents, there were calls made to the DCS hotline by multiple people because the girls did not have food, and/or unexplained marks. One time, the middle daughter said that a teenager also living in the home picked her up by her hair and threw her into the wall (she had the marks to prove it).

The fearless advocate moved half way around the world with her husband, which was a devastating blow to the support system. It seemed like there were mountains to move, and time was ticking. Things needed to happen, but they couldn't happen without the right referrals.

The momma filed in court to argue that the environment in which the girls were living was actually worse than what they were removed from. The judge granted the girls be placed back into the care of their mother on a trial home visit the same day as the hearing.

The girls were reunited with mom two weeks before the end of school, and unexpectedly, more barriers. The girls had to stay in school per DCS, but how were we going to get them from Greenfield to Southport (Marion County) with no car? We worked as quickly as possible to implement McKinney-Vento, but that wasn't possible with the distance and the time we had left. Luckily, grandpa saved the day. He drove the girls to and from school every day, and we got them after school care with a partnership at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Hancock County.

The girls were frustrated. They acted out non-stop, and their mom was struggling. She yelled and screamed. It was heart breaking. It was heartbreaking to see a mom failing because she wasn't given the basic resources to succeed.

Another resident called DCS and made several allegations of abuse. There were minor things, and to this day I believe that there were some faults of the department. The girls were removed once again.

The caseworker was less than helpful. The girls were placed in 4 different homes and separated before making into more long-term foster homes. With every move there were frantic calls from the caseworker and new challenges that presented themselves. The baby was eventually placed in Fishers with a wonderful family and the two oldest girls were placed in Gary.

The momma's attitude became impossible to work with. She was angry. She was tired. She lashed out at anyone and everyone that was safe. It eventually came to the point where, we asked her to leave. She needed to try it on her own for 30 days. She could come back, but we had to "break up".

She stayed in touch and we continued to help her, but she needed to try on her own. She returned almost exactly 30 days later with a whole new attitude. She was no longer in place of pity and no longer blaming everyone else for what was happening. She was willing to take ownership and action.

We connected her to landlord in Chesterton close to her work. We went to several family team meetings with DCS and advocated on her behalf. We got supervisors involved until we found answers, and we fought alongside her. We worked hard, and in just about 6 weeks she was ready to move out into her very own apartment, and continue her journey.

Where are things now?

The foster family in Fishers became one of her greatest advocates. She has had the same job for over year. She sees her girls on a regular basis. The big girls have been moved yet again, but are much closer so she is able to see them more often. She should have her own vehicle any day. We couldn't be more proud of how hard she continues to fight for herself and her family.

This has been an incredibly long road. These long-term solutions take a whole lot of time sometimes. But, we learn and grow with every person we encounter, and we feel privileged to be a part of his or her fight.

Last, in her words...

"Moving into the Hope House was one of the best decisions I've ever made that sent my life in the right direction. The opportunities to help and the friendly staff members who offer encouragement sure make a difference. There's always an open door and listening ear for those in need. Living there gave me the opportunity to save money for a place to live. I was finally able to achieve that goal. I was also give the most support I've ever had from a great team of people who actually care about their residents. It really turned my life around and made me feel good about myself and my achievements".