HomeStory

Stories from the California Home Visiting Program

Caprice's Story: Former Participant is Empathetic Home Visitor

Home visiting helps many families and sometimes inspires mothers to pursue careers in nursing, home health or home visiting. The latter was the case for Caprice, who became a home visitor after being served by a home visiting program.

Caprice reflects back to when she got pregnant in college, graduated and then moved back across the country to be near family. Even with their support, she was overwhelmed with hopelessness and didn't recognize it as depression—even though she now realizes she has dealt with bouts of depression for many years.

"I was really tired of feeling low. I just wanted my life back. I wanted that feeling that I had when I was in college and I could go anywhere, that freedom," she says, adding that hers was a high-risk pregnancy and anxiety inducing from the beginning.

Almost one in five women suffers from depression at some point in her lifetime, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. And that percentage goes up in stressful situations, like pregnancy and being a mother with young children.

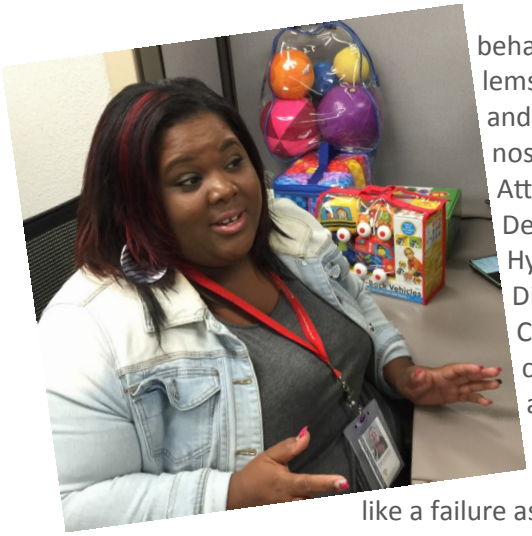
Caprice sought help during her pregnancy and qualified for a program that aimed to reduce black infant mortality rates. It included home visits and peer support groups. Over time, the new mom emerged from the depression that had encircled her during pregnancy and postpartum. She even started her own maternal mental health peer support group, which sustained itself for five years.

Also during that time Caprice found her calling as a home visitor: "I love home visiting because I see the power of it. It's much more than child development. It's so much greater."

After applying and getting the training she needed, Caprice started her career as a home visitor. Unfortunately, she also faced two significant events: She was sexually assaulted and later, her son began having

What is Home Visiting?

Home visiting is a voluntary program that pairs pregnant and newly parenting women with a nurse or trained professional who makes regular visits in the participant's home to provide guidance, support and access to prenatal care and other health and social services. It is a preventive intervention focused on promoting positive parenting and child development, with the ultimate goal of strengthening families and communities.



behavior problems in school and was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Caprice became scared, anxious, hypervigilant and feeling like a failure as a parent, especially since she was teaching curriculum on raising healthy families. A familiar feeling overtook her, and Caprice hit another severe wall of depression.

"I hadn't had a really big depression episode in a long time, but I also hadn't dealt with my issues," she says. "I found myself overachieving and with the peer support group, focusing on other people's feelings and not my own. It was hard to be doing such awesome things and then be hit like that."

Caprice credits her home visiting supervisor and the program's structure for helping her find her way back. Home visiting supervisors play a pivotal role in their local programs, offering reflective supervision, ways to deal with secondary trauma and attention to self-care.

"I love how home visiting is designed for us (home visitors) to have that self-care component to get that professional advice on what direction to go with each client. Also, for us to make sure that we're not being triggered by any of the trauma that we may experience on the job and if so, how we're reacting and dealing with it."

Caprice adds that her supervisor provided words of encouragement, and Caprice implemented coping skills for her depression to "basically practice what I was preaching."

A move to California didn't change Caprice's career path. She called the supervisor at Yolo County Children's Alliance, a California Home Visiting Program site that uses the Healthy Families America model, and transitioned her life and life's work to the Northern California region near Sacramento.

"What I value most as a home visitor is going from having these services to now being honored and privileged to provide those services to give somebody a greater experience than I've had," she says. "Even from the greatest experience that I can give, I'm going to still strive to give somebody an even greater experience."

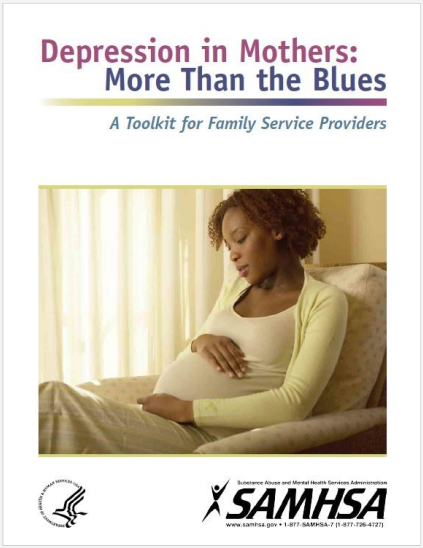
As part of that, Caprice openly shares her past with her participants. "I'm not afraid to be vulnerable and to allow my clients to know that I've been on the other side. I know what it's like to devote years to depression, but with hard work, there is hope.

"I love home visiting because I see the power of it. It's much more than child development. It's so much greater."

"Depression does not have to rule me or anyone else. I now look at the bad experiences and say that I survived and gained some endurance, a lot of strength and wisdom. I've learned the dance of life."

Free Depression Resource for Home Visitors

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration offers a downloadable toolkit, *Depression in Mothers: More Than the Blues*, for all family service providers, including home visitors, who serve on the frontline in identifying and assisting new moms and moms-to-be who may be suffering from depression.



California Department of PublicHealth

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