HomeStory

Stories from the California Home Visiting Program

Shannon's Story: Home Visiting Inspires Higher Achievement

Shannon chokes up when she delves into her past: a family legacy of drug and alcohol abuse, a victim of domestic violence, a husband in jail, three young children and no income or home, and then losing custody of her kids.

She spiraled into a drug-fueled abyss that was worlds away from the Shannon of today—a summa cum laude college graduate and home visiting advocate.

"It's hard to look back on who I was during that period," Shannon says.

She'd hit her rock bottom and entered treatment, which stuck this time. She started a new life in a new city, began the process to get her children back and met a new man, also in recovery. When Shannon became pregnant with her fourth child, she says she "was at a point in my life where I really needed all the support I could get."

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 health and social services. The goal is to assist participants in having a healthy pregnancy and delivery, and in becoming knowledgeable and responsible parents. The program gives children a solid start, and also strengthens families and communities.

Shannon enrolled in Nevada County's Foothills/Truckee Healthy Babies, which is a California Home Visiting Program that follows the Healthy Families America model—and then she met Jan, her home visitor.

A Friend and Mentor

"What started initially as a kind of awkward getting to know each other… turned into this amazing opportunity," Shannon explains. "Jan became a friend, a mentor and really helped build my confidence as I was restarting my life."

Jan MacDonald, Shannon's home visitor and now program supervisor, recalls first meeting Shannon: "I remember walking in and meeting a quiet, subdued and kind of sad young woman who was pregnant and didn't have her three kids in her custody."

"Jan did wonders in repairing my confidence, getting me to a point where I believed in myself enough that I could return to college and get a degree."

Realizing Potential

Jan recalls how Shannon attended custody court sessions, committed to 12-step meetings and did everything in her power to put her life on track.

During the home visits, Jan talked to Shannon about goals, and the young mom said she needed to find a job after her baby was born. But Jan saw great potential in this smart and driven young mother.

Home visitor Jan MacDonald, left, takes a selfie with Shannon.

"I encouraged her to go back to school," Jan says, "so she would have opportunities way beyond where she would be in two years if she got a minimum-wage job after the baby was born."

Shannon's response: "Do you really think I could do that?"

"I know you can," Jan told her. "You're so determined; look at the direction you're going."

Jan helped Shannon identify programs that could help, such as financial aid and CalWORKs.

Shannon gave birth to a baby boy and then regained custody of her first three children. She was doing well, her young son was flourishing—and she began college.

Joining the CAB

The home visits with Jan continued, and a couple years later, a baby girl joined the blended family. Shannon stayed clean, determined and still in school. She finished the home visiting program and at Jan's request joined Nevada County's Home Visiting Community Advisory Board (CAB), providing valuable ideas and insights.

"She brought the perspective as a parent, and in being someone who had been in the program," Jan says. "Also, the professionals who volunteer on our CAB can make a connection as to why they're doing this when they meet one of the parents whose life was impacted. It's really powerful."

Changed Trajectory

It's hard to imagine this confident 38-year-old mother—who lined up an accounting position months before graduating—a homeless drug addict who believed her children would be better off without her.

"In terms of how I've gotten here today, most definitely the home visiting program helped," Shannon says. "Jan did wonders in repairing my confidence, getting me to a point where I believed in myself enough that I could return to college and get a degree."

"When I think of Shannon, I see not only how she turned her life around, but also the course of generations to come," Jan says. "It's not just her life that's changing, it's her children's lives too, and hopefully breaking those negative cycles of the past. I can't express enough how amazed I am at Shannon; she's an exceptional person, a great mom and I feel so honored to have been a part of her story, her journey."

Clearly an inspiration for those who meet her, Shannon is now a role model for her children, giving them a parent whose love, fortitude and potential are truly limitless.

Shannon graduated from Chico State summa cum laude in May 2016 . Photos courtesy of Jan MacDonald, Shannon and CHVP.

CDPH California Department of PublicHealth

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