



HomeStory

Stories from the California Home Visiting Program

Carmel's Story: Determined to Achieve a Better Life

Carmel was on her high school soccer team and dance teams, and by all outward appearances, was a thriving teenager with supportive parents and two younger siblings. But things aren't always as they seem.

"We were homeless the majority of the time," she says. "Sleeping in the car or with whoever we could, or staying in motels. My mom would still take us to school, but when we had to go home, that was the hard part."

Even during periods when they did have a place to call home, Carmel had a tumultuous relationship with her mother, who questioned the value of her daughter's extracurricular activities. Nonetheless, the teen stayed focused on school, explaining that "it was going to get me out of the life I knew."

Her parents fought—a lot— and when police were called one night, the three children were placed into the foster care system, in an unemotional, unsupportive and detached environment. Carmel talks about that time in her life, and how despite the circumstances, she feels fortunate to have been with her siblings. "Everything has a purpose and going into the foster system, we were able to stay together. That was great; we had each other," she says.

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, coaching and access to prenatal care and other health and social services. Home visiting is a preventive intervention focused on promoting positive parenting and child development, with the ultimate goal of strengthening families and communities.



Growing up, Carmel, right, was homeless and in foster care. She was determined to have a more stable environment for her daughter, Meila, and worked with her home visitor Angelica, to identify goals and gain confidence in her ability to succeed—and be a great mom.

During this time, Carmel met Gary, and the two began dating. Like her mother, Carmel got pregnant at age 18. But unlike her mother, she sought information and resources, and at 10 weeks along, enrolled in the California Home Visiting Program's Nurse-Family Partnership in Sacramento County.



During home visits, Angelica, left, helped Carmel identify goals and steps to achieve them. Carmel's daughter Meila and sometimes Meila's father, Gary, joined in.

"I really would like to give back because I know people's stories, and I know their struggles. I can really relate. I want to share what I received." —Carmel

"Carmel from the beginning knew that she didn't want the life she was living for her child," says her home visiting nurse Angelica. "She was very passionate about verbalizing that she wanted something better, that she knew she could do better than where she was in her life."

Together, client and home visiting nurse set goals and identified steps toward achieving them. All the while, Angelica monitored Carmel's health, ensuring a healthy pregnancy. When baby girl Meila was born, the home visits included the nurse checking the baby's physical, emotional and developmental progress, while also supporting Carmel and Gary's growth as new parents, and encouraging Carmel to pursue her goals.

"She was my number one supporter, and the person I could talk to about anything and with no judgment," Carmel says of Angelica. "I talked to her probably more than anybody else, even my closest, best friends."

Carmel did change course along the way. At one point, she tried college, but with a new baby, no transportation and unstable finances, the timing wasn't right. Through it all, Angelica offered reassurance and positivity that Carmel could do whatever she set her mind to.

And that's just what Carmel did when she set her sights on working at Costco, where she could have a benefits package and good income to get back on financial track. It is not easy to land a Costco position, but Carmel persisted with in-person inquiries and was hired in record time. She also graduated from the home visiting program when Meila turned 2 years old.



To gain financial stability for her family, Carmel set her sights on working for Costco — and was hired during her interview.



"Carmel has so much potential and I think someone just needed to tell her that. I think that motivated her to be the best that she can be," Angelica says, adding that she is "so proud" of Carmel's accomplishments as a new mom and in landing the job she wanted.

Says Carmel, "It really helped me having somebody there for me when I didn't have anybody. I'm blessed that there

is a program for people like me going through situations and needing support. I'm just so happy that I had Angelica."

Carmel knows furthering her education is a means to the life she ultimately wants for her daughter and family. "I do eventually want to go back to school. That's still one of my goals," Carmel says. "And I really would like to give back because I know people's stories, and I know their struggles. I can really relate. I want to share what I received."

Homeless Children in California

- ◇ California had 20,482 families with children experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2016, which accounts for 17 percent of the state's homeless family population.¹
- ◇ California reported the largest numbers of unaccompanied homeless children and youth on a single night in January 2016, at 11,222 people or 31 percent of the national total. California also had the second highest rate of unsheltered homeless children at 77.5 percent (8,691 were unsheltered).¹
- ◇ In 2012-2013, more than 500,000 children in California were homeless.²

1. 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. November 2016.
2. America's Youngest Outcasts. American Institutes for Research. The National Center on Family Homelessness. November 2014.