

ANGELA'S STORY



What if you were able to rewrite the ending of a story? Or rather, what if you were able to rewrite the beginning of the next chapter of a story? With your support, you can.

Domestic violence is one of the most serious issues facing Calgarians today. Imagine being homeless at 14 years of age. Imagine believing that a life on the streets would be a better alternative to staying at home; a home in which both parents are addicted to drugs and alcohol. And if that wasn't enough, domestic violence was very often, the order of the day.

Sadly, that was the case for Angela, who, through no fault of her own, found herself caught up in the chaos of a dysfunctional family. For many years, she, like many children and youth, was an innocent bystander to the abuse and violence taking place in her family. It is a well-known fact that when children are exposed to abuse, it is if they have experienced it themselves. They are not spared the harmful effects of abuse and if untreated, they grow up unaware of what a healthy relationship looks like.

We know that in homes where domestic violence is present, there is a great chance that teens will become homeless. When Angela left her home, she had nowhere to go so she ended up on the streets. She found herself in the company of people whose lives resembled her own. She found another family made up of people who, like her, used drugs and alcohol as a means to cope with their situation. She got from them what she did not get from her family. In the years that followed, Angela was placed in different programs to help get her off the streets. They did not work.

When Angela was 19, she was living in a homeless shelter and it was there that she met the man who would send her down a path she knew only too well. He was an active drug dealer with a criminal past, had spent time in prison, and he had a hold on her. It didn't take long before Angela was pregnant, and their relationship started to turn violent. Risk Factor – Certain women are more likely to be abused during pregnancy than others. Women who have been abused before getting pregnant are at higher risk of violence during pregnancy.

When the Angela's baby daughter was born, it was clear that she was not in a position to look after her, so the baby was placed into a temporary Guardianship Order by Child Welfare. In order to win her daughter back, Angela had to clean up her act. She had to fulfill the requirements set out by Child Welfare. She needed to be in a safe and stable home, and she needed to be dry and sober. Fearing for her life, Angela entered into an emergency shelter. From there, she was referred to our Community Housing Program where she would be housed first, and then supported to work on achieving her goals.

We know that the most dangerous time for a woman who is being abused is when she tries to leave. It is no surprise therefore, to know that Angela's partner found her while she was living in two separate homes in the community. Angela was not safe to be in the community, so she came to stay at our safe and secure facility.

Angela has been a client of Discovery House for a year and a half. She has seen more in her 23 years than most of us will ever see. She grew up in a dysfunctional family that robbed her of her childhood. She experienced much more than a child should before finding herself on the streets. She has lost friends to suicide. She has had friends lose their lives as a result of their immersion in the drug culture. Her best friend was murdered by an intimate partner.

That Angela is, and has been, sober for 11 months is a testament to her strength. That she has been reunited with her three year old daughter shows how desperately she wants to regain control over her life and be the mother she never had. She wants to make sure her daughter doesn't get to experience what she did. She knows that Child Welfare let her down. They weren't there for her when she needed them, but they were there for her daughter. And today, Angela is there for her daughter. In fact, this is the first year that Angela and her daughter will be spending Christmas together. The first of many years where they can spend time together to create traditions and share memories.

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It's baby steps for Angela. The success she has seen is in large part due to dedication of a team of counselors who have supported her every step of the way. But she knows she still has a long way to go. The work we do is never easy but with your support, the load is lessened. We are grateful to you for Together, we can make a difference.

As for Angela, all we ask is that she continues to take small steps towards achieving her goals. And as long as she keeps moving forward, she will have rewritten the first chapter of the rest of her life.

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