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Early Head Start important part of changing life

My name is Ashley, and I'm a recovering addict.

I came from a broken home, raised by my mom who is an alcoholic and a father who left me at the age of 2. I was reintroduced to him when I was 8. He was a crack head who didn't really want me. All he cared about was his next high. When I was 10 years old a really close family friend touched inappropriately and the cops did nothing.

That day I lost myself; I started blaming myself for this man's actions. Then at the age of 13 I was violated by a step-family member. When I told my dad he didn't believe me and told me to keep my mouth shut. That was my breaking point. I started to drink at 13, and then I progressed to taking pills. I was trying so hard to forget about my pain, but nothing worked.

At 16 I was with a guy who pinned me down and put a needle in my arm and shot me up with heroin. I was so scared, but for the first time I was numb. I actually felt at ease with myself. That day I found what I needed. Heroin became my best friend. It helped me cover up all my pain. I didn't feel alone anymore. Little did I know that heroin would also be my worst enemy. I lied, cheated and stole just to get my fix.

I overdosed for the first time when I was 24. My son was a year old and his father and I just got a divorce. I was in a really dark place at that time. Instead of getting better, I turned to what made me numb. As soon as I was released from the hospital I went straight to the dope man's house.

Crazy, right? That's the power of addiction. In and out of jail for petty things, I never got in trouble for heroin. I tried so many times to stop, but I just couldn't do it. I would tell myself just one more time, it won't hurt ya. I always talked myself right in to it.

At the age of 28— still using daily and raising two kids with a guy who was also an addict — my luck ran out. On October 2, 2014, I overdosed again, but this time they didn't think I was gonna make it. And if I did, they said most likely I'd be brain dead. I don't remember that day at all.

I do remember waking up in the hospital with a tube down my throat and a preacher by my bed. I had been out of it for more than 24 hours. I saw my mom, and I'll never forget the hurt and worry in her eyes. Then I found out my children were taken from me.

That's when I knew I needed to change. My babies are my world. They are my reason to breathe. A lot of people look at a mother with a drug problem and assume she is picking the drugs over her children. That's not how we see it; we need that fix to feel normal because we've become so dependent. The power of addiction is hard to understand unless you have lived it.

I went into an outpatient treatment program, and that was the beginning of my amazing transformation. I began Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and they helped to give me the strength to change. Being around others who were struggling with the same things I was and seeing them doing so well is what gave me hope. I looked up to them, especially my sponsor who is 27 years in recovery!

I also began the Early Head Start Program of Carey Services. This program helped me to get my confidence back to be a better mother to my children and provided the help I needed. Being a family company, they really do care about others.

I realized the pain I caused my children even though they were only 4 and 1. It took me six months of drug screens and classes before I got my babies back. I never gave up. I left the guy I was with and got my life back all by myself. I sit here today with a little over 2 years sober. I'm grateful to have been given another chance at life and motherhood. I have two wonderful healthy boys and a husband who truly loves me.

Change is scary but possible if you really want it. I am proof there is hope after dope.