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# Turning Lives Around - One Mother at a Time

By Aleta Taylor

I have always been a skeptic of drug and alcohol addiction. My concept was that, once an addict, always an addict. This is true to an extent, but there was one part of it that I didn't fully understand. An addict *can* turn away from drugs forever, and be able to look back at their past without the temptation of relapse. Many women have found this possible through rehabilitation with the **Drug Abuse Alternative Center (DAAC) Perinatal Day Treatment, Helping Mothers - Saving Babies Program.**

DAAC's primary goal is to rehabilitate pregnant and parenting mothers who suffer from drug or alcohol addiction. This is done through an intensive program lasting anywhere from 9 months to a year. Group classes are held daily that focus on drug education, relapse prevention, anger management, communication and recovery skills.

Women are most often referred to DAAC through their probation officers, drug court, **Sonoma Works, Child Protective Services, or First 5,** many of whom are required by law to complete the program.

They are required to write in a journal every day about their struggles and triumphs with addiction, and take turns reading their journal entries aloud to their group. This process of verbal self-examination is a huge part of recovery, giving them the opportunity to look within themselves and face the often painful memories.

While visiting DAAC, I met two women whose stories of triumph in recovery are remarkable, as is their yearning to become better parents and contribute to society.

My first interview was with Aldona, a mother of three who has been sober for 8 years. For a long time, addiction consumed her life, resulting in 18 arrests and a felony charge. She was forced to make very painful decisions, such as giving her first son up for adoption, and granting custody of her second son to his father. It wasn't until she missed her son's first birthday, because she was in jail, that she decided it was time for change.

She was referred to DAAC through drug court in 2002, the same year that she gave birth to her third son. Their intense perinatal program and outpatient rehab gave her the tools and the strength to prevent another relapse and stay sober for good.

Aldona has since earned an Associates degree from the SRJC, expunged her felony from her record, become a volunteer and employee at DAAC, and now also has a 4-year-old daughter. Her relationship with her three children is healthy and full of love. She is grateful to have had a second chance and is determined to be the best mother she can.

My second interview was with Amanda, a 24 year old with three young children. She began using at a young age and later became involved in an abusive relationship that fed her addiction. She had two children, who she handed over to her parents, no longer wanted them to be exposed to her lifestyle. She later had a third child who she has maintained custody of. After being convicted of robbery, she was faced with 10 years in prison. She realized that she may not get to see her children grow up. She spent 4 months in jail, earning her GED while incarcerated, then went straight into the DAAC program upon her release.

DAAC has taught her how to show her love for her children, control her anger and anxiety, and other valuable parenting skills. She is getting her real estate certification from SRJC and hopes to enroll in the nursing program at UCSF. By this summer, she will regain full custody of all three children and will enroll them in a new school. She has been sober for 18 months and will be graduating from the DAAC program in a few weeks.

Hearing the stories of these two women drastically changed my perspective on addiction, parenting, and the meaning of will power. What impacted me the most was realizing that I have absolutely no right to judge these women for what they have done in their past, because they are making up for it three fold now. I could only hope to someday become as strong and ambitious as they are today. They had to learn the hard way, go through things most of us couldn't imagine, and yet they are truly better for it.

If you would like to learn more about DAAC, please attend one of their **monthly tours.** Upcoming tour dates are: March 8<sup>th</sup>, April 12<sup>th</sup>, May 10<sup>th</sup>, and June 14<sup>th</sup> from 11:30am-12:30pm. Tours are held at the **Perinatal Program** at 2400 County Center Dr, Ste B in Santa Rosa. Contact Susan Anderson at 707-571-2233x311 or email sanderson@daacmail.org to RSVP.