

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Opal

Written by Karah Van Kammen

Tuesday, 01 March 2016 14:57 - Last Updated Thursday, 31 March 2016 11:16



by *Candy Thompson*

"Did you know I came from prison?" asked Opal.

She sits on the edge of her bed at [A New Leaf's](#) East Valley Women's Shelter gazing confidently ahead. There is no more talk about the bleakness of prison. She has been clean for years. Her poor decision making is behind her and she is moving forward with a brand new outlook on life.

Opal has come a long way. After leaving prison, she moved into a half-way house, a consequence of her prison sentence. The mandatory 5-day a week meeting schedule made it almost impossible for her to find time to get a job but she finally did and immediately started paying the \$500 monthly rent. To add to Opal's challenges, her car now needed repairs, demanding a greater share of her pay check. Reliable transportation was essential for her to pursue better employment opportunities. She couldn't manage all of the expenses. Always one to have a plan, Opal made her way to an interview for Rapid Re-Housing and was temporarily directed to the East Valley Women's Shelter. That is where she got her life back on track while waiting for more permanent, independent housing.

The shelter definitely felt like a home with its quaint kitchen, spacious living room, bedrooms and lovely tree-lined back yard. Opal felt the staff's warmth and camaraderie as they explained house rules and shared donations for her personal needs and meals. She was finally safe and felt a great sense of relief now that she had time to address her future. Working with her Case Manager was like meeting with a mentor and friend who treated her with respect and honor.

Goal setting was next on Opal's agenda. Having access to computers, resume workshops and online applications helped streamline her job search efforts for a better paying position. Within three days, a very elated Opal got the job she was looking for and knew she could count on receiving raises to help reach her financial goals.

Since she no longer had to pay rent, Opal was able to save for those much needed car repairs that would eventually lead her to that better paying job she was searching for. Now it was a matter of saving as much as she could while she waited for Rapid Re-Housing to become available. Her one step at a time approach continued to lead to her independent living goal.

In a reflective moment, Opal talks about the heartfelt support, even friendship she feels from the shelter staff. Some people in her circumstances feel a devastating sense of loneliness. She doesn't feel that way at all. The most helpful aspect of the program for her is in knowing that someone sincerely cares when she becomes overwhelmed and might want to give up.

Opal shares that you have to be serious to be in this program. It is a hand up, not a hand out. If you have the right mindset and take advantage of the resources available, you can find your way to success at the East Valley Women's Shelter. With A New Leaf, Opal feels she is well on her way to that success. She is grateful to be working her way back into society with a newfound sense of dignity and self-respect that is priceless.

For more information about A New Leaf programs including tours and how you can help, please contact 480-464-4648 or visit us at www.TurnaNewLeaf.org.

Arizona Foothills Magazine and Azfoothills.com have partnered with the comprehensive, non-profit, and human service agency, [A New Leaf](#), for an incredibly special series; one that is very near and dear to our organization's heart. "**Telling Untold Stories**" will illustrate multi-dimensional and raw stories of real men, women, and families within our communities who have been dealt a tricky hand of cards. These stories are ones of despair - ones of defeat - and, ones of fear. However, these stories become ones of faith - ones of determination - and, ones of hope.

When someone is in an abusive relationship or homeless, they often find themselves struggling to find help, not aware of the community resources available to them. A New Leaf is one of those critical resources. The agency has been a beacon of hope, supporting women and men who experience domestic violence and homelessness.

The mission of A New Leaf is Helping Families . . . Changing Lives. A New Leaf inspires and supports individuals and families in their journey to lifelong independence. The agency operates Autumn House, a domestic violence facility in the East Valley, as well as Faith House, a domestic violence shelter and transitional housing resource in the West Valley as well as a number of homeless shelters for those in crisis.

Last year, A New Leaf served nearly 21,943 individuals with resources, from immediate shelter, transitional housing, basic needs, job assistance, counseling and after school programs. Victims of domestic violence are able to start a new life due to the care and support of A New Leaf's staff and volunteers. Founded in 1971, A New Leaf is dedicated to making lives better and fighting against domestic violence and homelessness in our state.