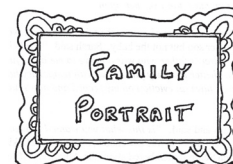


“A FAMILY PORTRAIT”

Sarah's Story

She paused for a second and took a deep breath. *“In fact I never thought about my children because of my drug abuse,”* she said. *“I never really had a childhood. Maybe that’s why I never took my parenting too seriously but for twenty years I took my drugs serious.”*

Sarah has one of her eight children living with her, a six-year-old son. When Sarah talks about her son you can see her beam with joy. I asked Sarah how she heard about the Alliance for Excellence. Sarah said she was visiting a friend who has younger children and there was a lady from a program called Early Connections who was helping her friend sign her children up for Head Start. The woman also gave her some food for the holidays. Sarah asked if she could receive some of the services that her friend was getting. Since Early Connections was primarily for families with children birth to five years of age, Sarah was referred to the Families and Schools Together (F.A.S.T.) program. Sarah commented *“I know it might sound strange to ask someone you just met for help but I learned to let people know when I need help. I’ve also learned to let people know how I am feeling because when I keep things inside or try to work things out, I make poor choices. That’s why I have been using drugs on and off for the last twenty years, but Jam determined to stay clean this time. I know it’s going to take ongoing support because I have been a drug abuser twenty of my thirty-six years of life.”* Sarah said *“My families don’t even believe that I have been drug free for two years. I know they have reasons to doubt me but, this is the longest I ever been drug free. I have a twenty-four year old son, in fact I’m a grandmother. All my children were placed with my family members. I even have a four year old little girl who I never brought from the hospital because I had drugs in my system. When she was born, Child Protective Services (CPS) placed her with my sister. I can see her whenever I want to, but I don’t see her often.”*



I asked Sarah why CPS did not remove her son, she said because she went into inpatient drug treatment were she could bring her son but not the baby. Sarah said *“I only had one relapse when I got caught up with one of children’s father who was abusive to me but, I just could not go down that road again so, I went to a shelter and they placed me with temporary housing I can’t really get a place on my own because I have an eviction on my record and don’t have enough money for a deposit.”*

Sarah took a deep breath and said, *“Is this what you wanted to hear?”* After talking for about five more minutes about her new drug free life choice, Sarah started talking about her son how well he is doing in school. Then Sarah remembered about the Alliance. *“After they referred me to the F.A.S.T program, I went to a teacher conference and she said she wanted to know if I was interested in the F.A.S.T program. I told her yes and that this lady from the Alliance was going refer me also. Next, a lady from the F.A.S.T program came by to meet with me and asked me many personal questions.”*

Sarah started naming all the benefits she received in F.A.S.T. *“I got to meet my neighbor and make new friends. And, we had a safe place to talk about our concerns around parenting.*

“I was not sure what she was going to do with all that information. I was thinking about not going, but my son’s teacher told my son ‘tell your mother not to forget the F.A.S.T meeting tonight’ and he was so excited that I didn’t want to disappoint him. It also gave us something to do because that is one of the hardest things, now that I am drug free and have very little money, is to find activities. I really enjoyed F.A.S.T.! To my surprise, maybe more than my son,” she smiled.

Sarah

Because of my age, people really listened to me and would ask me for advice. My neighbor had the same fears I had because when you are in recovery you have a hard time making friends. In the past all my friends did drugs and that was the basis of the friendship. Because of F.A.S.T I was feeling more comfortable at my son’s school. The principal even came to the meetings and my son’s teacher would ask me if I liked F.A.S.T. But, the best part for me was the special time with my son that helped me a lot just learning how to play and talk with my son. Yes, that’s what I loved the best!”

Sarah plans to continue to participate in the FASTWORKS program, a two year follow-up for families participating in F.A.S.T. Sarah’s plan for the future is to find out how she can clear up her credit. She would like to move into a house but plans to stay in this area. She likes the school and her new friends. “The best part of having my own house (is that) I will call all my children over and take a family portrait with all eight of my children in the room at the same time. I will have my family portrait.”

