

An New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Keely's Story

Written by Karah Van Kammen



by Candy Thompson

They call her Momma Bear. “They” are the women residents at A New Leaf’s East Valley Women’s Shelter (EVWS). “Momma Bear,” otherwise known as Keely, is also a resident at the shelter. She speaks softly and with great passion early one morning under a big, red umbrella at the back yard table. She calls out to every woman by name as they head off to work, giving them words of encouragement for the day. A strong feeling of mutual admiration and respect is shared, and another day begins at the women’s shelter.

Can one act of violence strip a strong, intelligent woman’s life completely?

Keely spent 18 years in the military as a Combat Medic and moved on to become a police officer in Tennessee - an obvious result of her strength of character and motivation to make a difference.

Then it happened – the unthinkable. Keely suffered the trauma of a sexual assault, not by an expected perpetrator, but by one of her own comrades. This unexpected violation from someone she was trained to trust was wrought at a severe cost. It led to her to a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Symptoms of fear, flashbacks, distrust, insomnia and hyper vigilance consumed her. To survive, Keely was becoming emotionally detached but due to her education and training, she recognized what was happening to her. Keely was not going to move forward as a victim. Never one to push aside life’s circumstances, she started therapy and came to understand the importance of being with family through the healing process. She decided to make a new beginning in Arizona, where her family resided.

Then another disappointment. While driving cross country, Keely received a call that the family living arrangements she had been counting on fell through. The anxiety began to build again. With no other Arizona resources, she pressed on and found several temporary solutions. As a last and desperate resort – Keely found herself at the doors of a mass shelter in Phoenix.

Keely’s immediate needs were medical. She needed her PTSD medicine. However, since she was not allowed to bring her own medication into the shelter, it took quite a while to obtain it. Taking matters into her own hands for her job search, Keely’s strong will and intense searching quickly paid off with a part-time job.

Living with so many people with such diverse hardships and personalities was not an environment Keely could thrive in while going through the mental healing process from her assault. Highly motivated to move forward, Keely found her way to the East Valley Women’s Shelter, a smaller, more intimate setting where she felt a new sense of hope and belonging. It was the answer to her many, heartfelt prayers.

The East Valley Women’s Shelter’s Case Management services and a huge dose of sensitivity were exactly what Keely needed. She found a wealth of resources and information right at her fingertips. She was starting to feel hopeful again. She just had to choose what to do and follow-through herself. She was quickly hired for a second part time job and began to lose the feeling of worthlessness that had crept up on her over the months.

Living at the women’s shelter gave Keely the opportunity to heal and change her life for the better. She applied herself to the available services within the program. Even doing house chores made her appreciate a sense of community. One of Keely’s favorite activities is being able to share her southern cooking. Knowing that someone loves your cooking is a heartfelt gift. Loving to serve and take care of people is at Keely’s core; that feeling has returned once again.

Today, Keely is preparing to move into her own place. She wisely sums up her life changing circumstances by saying she has seen two extreme sides of life and survived. Always on the fast track, she is already setting her sights on giving back to the youngsters in A New Leaf shelters by sharing her prowess in basketball. Knowing Keely, it will probably also involve food.

Keely is a perfect example of a woman who refuses to remain a victim by taking advantage of the help and resources your support provides to A New Leaf residents. Thank you for your kindness and continued support.

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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-dimentaional 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.

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.