

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Samuel's Story

Written by Karah Van Kammen



By Doreen Davison

"So many times I wanted to run away, but I couldn't leave my mom, brother and sisters with that man I'm supposed to call dad. There were five of us children. He entered my life when I was three and a half years old. I'm thirteen now and adults say I am old for my age.

My mom was in denial, but I didn't know what that meant back then. She always seemed grateful that my stepdad put food on the table, picked us kids up from school, took us to our games and watched us while she was at work – if you could call it watching us. He often left us alone for periods of time but she didn't know that.

When my mom wasn't around, he either ignored or yelled at us kids. I think he was the hardest on me. His idea of attention was rough housing with me. But he always played too hard. When I was younger, I would cry and then he would call me cry baby and a sissy in front of everyone. He would crack our knuckles whenever he walked by us kids – even my sisters. We would cry but we never told my mom. She had enough reasons to be upset.

I would hear them at night when they thought I was asleep. I became good at eavesdropping and not very good at sleeping. He would yell and she would cry. They would fight about my stepdad losing another job and taking the money my mom made. My mom would defend us kids. She'd tell him how hard he was on us. She'd tell him he was hurting us by always breaking his promises.

She would threaten to leave and he would say, "Where are you going to go with five kids?" Then he would warn her about what he would do to her if she tried to leave. So she didn't – until a few months ago. Things really got worse. I never saw him do it, but I know he was hitting her.

I told my grandmother what was going on. She explained a lot to me about the cycle of abuse and why it is so hard for some women to leave. Then she talked to my mom about A New Leaf and this time my mom listened. My mom made arrangements for us to leave. My grandma is helping me write all this down. She says it's good therapy.

It was scary leaving everything behind to go to a strange place. But I saw my mom change when she found people who understood exactly how she felt and what she was going through. After a few weeks, my mom stopped crying. My sisters aren't acting out so much anymore. We actually laugh and have fun doing family things. The staff helped my mom with her job search so she is working now and saving money for us to get our own place. She's also taking Phlebotomy Classes to find a better job. My sisters are excited to be in the After-School-Program.

My mom and I talk a lot. She blames herself for taking so long to realize that she could walk away and that there was someplace she could go for help. She has friends now at A New Leaf and I do too. I don't feel as sad anymore and I'm not as worried about my mom. I know we'll be ok.

We are learning so much about how a family should be – no more anger, yelling or fear. Coming to A New Leaf is the best thing that could have happened to us."

Samuel's family has come a long way since they entered A New Leaf's doors. They were a loving group led by a thoughtful mother. When she recognized what she could have and what they could become, she grabbed onto the resources your support provided with both arms and moved full speed ahead.

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-dimentional 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.

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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.