

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Rachel

Written by Christina Tetreault

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Abused, A Single Mom, and Fighting for Her Kids

Rachel* speaks quietly, often times with tears in her eyes. Her little daughters, Jesse, 3-years-old and Megan, 4, sit nearby, smiling and chatting while they play with their toys. The girls never seem to notice their mother's tears as they ask her to clasp their toy jewelry or give them a drink.

Rachel has a troubled past, checkered with domestic violence from childhood onward.

At the young age of 13, she was left alone at night while her mother worked. She started a relationship with a boyfriend who was physically and emotionally abusive.

Working was very important to Rachel as her mother was never allowed to work regular jobs. Within a few years, Rachel held two jobs, including one as an assistant store manager. She was able to rent an apartment, bought a used car, and then became pregnant.

With her abusive boyfriend in and out of prison and dealing with her own drug abuse, Rachel lost both jobs. She was sleeping in her broken down car with her young daughters for a week. Their only belongings were in the trunk, along with some peanut butter and a loaf of bread. Homeless for the first time ever, she was very afraid. Even more so, she was determined to break the cycle of abuse on behalf of her daughters.

A determined young woman, Rachel made her way with the girls to the Family Housing Hub in Phoenix thinking they would recommend her to a shelter. After careful evaluation of her circumstances and potential, they instead recommended her for the Rapid Re-Housing program for those who are homeless but have previously lived independently. All of that hard work over the years paid off as Rachel and the girls came to La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter while waiting for a Rapid Re-Housing apartment to open up. They were finally safe.

At La Mesita, Rachel met with her Case Manager immediately and had focus meetings on a regular basis to ensure success during her four month stay in a brand new one bedroom apartment. She gratefully received some food, bus passes and basic living necessities while learning about benefits available to her. With the assistance of the Workforce Coordinator, she was able to secure a new job and have her girls enter a day care program.

"This is a blessing. La Mesita is a safe place. I have structure, stability and know what I should do to be safe. It took me away from the hell I was in," said Rachel, "The staff helped me to calm down and pushed me to do better. I am healing myself."

"My 4 year old Megan has opened up. She had become very quiet but now she is friends with the staff here. La Mesita has changed our lives. I am a better mom, doing what I should do. I ended up homeless and coming to La Mesita is the best thing that happened to me. I have found strength, encouragement and courage by being here. The staff became our family, they don't leave anyone behind.

"I work in a Call Center now and I am looking for a better job. My goal is to get my GED and become a phlebotomist so I can make good money

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and have stability for my girls."

Rachel and her family have recently moved onward and upward into a Rapid Re-Housing apartment of their own.

"I can't thank the staff at La Mesita enough," Rachel passionately says, "I care about La Mesita and want to get to a place where I can give back."

**Names have been changed to protect the family's identity.*

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 15,000 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.