

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, A Whole New World

Written by Karah Van Kammen

Wednesday, 31 August 2016 10:13 -



by Candy Thompson

Sitting in her two-bedroom apartment at La Mesita Campus' affordable housing, raven-haired Olivia speaks matter-of-factly. This military veteran is living her life to the best of her capabilities while slowly making dreams come true for herself and her 8-year-old daughter, Kate.

Being raised by "normal" parents in a local, high-end suburb might lead one to believe that life could only be perfect. But that was proven wrong time and again. Nearly ten years of poor decision making and on and off drug use eventually took its toll. After one exceptionally bad episode, binging on drugs and alcohol, she woke up in a strange place and had no idea how she got there. She started living in fear, became more withdrawn and finally came to the realization that it was time to make a change. She joined the military. It was a wise decision.

Structure was new to Olivia and helped her to get back on her feet. It felt good. She was working a job she never dreamed existed and had broadened her horizons. After many years of dedicated service and an honorable discharge, Olivia felt she was ready to make a go of it on her own.

Newly pregnant, she was looking for housing and a government job that would allow her to build on her benefits and retirement. She couldn't find a job that paid enough and ended up back in her old neighborhood. Once baby Kate was born, life became more complicated but Olivia made a promise to herself that she would make everything work without falling back into old habits. She knew she needed some assistance and just had to figure out how and where to get it.

Then she found A New Leaf Affordable Apartments. Olivia and Kate were among the first residents to move in. The benefit of valuable on-site services for both of them made this opportunity worthwhile, as well as the furnished, two-story townhome style apartment. The La Mesita Community Campus is a place where people can find a new start.

Olivia was able to take advantage of many of the services within La Mesita's Financial Opportunity Center, including one-on-one financial coaching and work force development to rebuild her resume and find a better job. One of the most life-changing services Olivia received was her personal education coaching. She is currently one class away from having two Associate's degrees and would like to work toward a degree in family life education. Always thinking ahead, she and her Workforce Coach are planning on a better job for her through the Veteran's Administration.

Since her daughter Kate began attending La Mesita's After School program, everything started to fall into place. The Support Case Manager who works closely with the children noticed that Kate wasn't interacting with others as expected and referred Kate to a local autism service provider where life-changing work ensued. Olivia is grateful for the referral and the knowledge she herself has gained about the world of autism.

Today, Olivia has hopes and dreams for herself and her daughter. She and her La Mesita Workforce Coach are making plans for her to get that VA job she yearns for. Olivia has made the supportive services work to her family's best advantage. The world continues to be an open book for Olivia and there are many more positive chapters to be written by both mother and daughter. It's a whole new world.

At the request of our resident family, names have been changed to protect their 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

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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.