

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, A Simple Pair of Shoes

Written by Karah Van Kammen

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by Candy Thompson

It was a heart wrenching moment when Bella looked up with tears in her eyes and a shy little smile. She was holding a Converse shoebox on her lap. "This is the first new pair of shoes I have ever had," she said quietly.

Bella is a 15-years-old star basketball player on her high school team. None of her teammates know that recently Bella and family were homeless. She had been living in a small house with her step-dad, mom, and 2 younger brothers, but when the landlord informed them that he had sold the house and they had two weeks to be out, they discovered they had few options.

Both her parents worked, making modest incomes, but her dad had a felony record that haunted him from 12 years ago. When her parents went looking for an apartment, they were told that they wouldn't be approved if he was on the lease and she didn't make enough money on her own. They were forced to move into a motel while they frantically searched for someplace to live. After two weeks at the motel, their meager savings were running out. Her parents were terrified that they would be out on the streets. They were afraid that a homeless shelter would be unsafe, or that they would be forced to separate, or even worse, that their children could be taken away.

They called a crisis hotline and all their fears were alleviated when they were referred to A New Leaf's La Mesita Campus. There, they were provided a clean, private apartment, in a safe environment. The children could start school like they were supposed to, her parents could continue going to work, and they all had somewhere to come home to, where they could eat dinner as a family.

Bella's parents spent time with La Mesita's onsite Employment Specialist to work toward increasing their income; they participated in budget counseling at the Financial Opportunity Center to learn how to better manage their finances and to build a safety net; and they worked with their Case Manager on finding safe, appropriate housing. Approved for Affordable Housing on the Campus, the family was well on their way to turning their circumstances around. They would continue to have access to the onsite support services, including after-school care for Bella's two younger brothers.

Before school started this year, some of our wonderful volunteers took Bella and 41 other kids from La Mesita to JC Penney for a back-to-school shopping spree. They each had \$100 to spend on clothing, shoes, and school supplies, which is more than most of them have ever had to spend. It was reported that Bella searched those shoe racks high and low, looking for the wisest choices available to further her gift of money. In the van heading back to La Mesita, staff and volunteers noticed Bella's quiet demeanor. One of the volunteers asked if she was OK. Bella looked up with tears in her eyes and a shy little smile. She was holding a Converse shoebox on her lap. "This is the first new pair of shoes I have ever had," she said quietly.

Bella and her brothers are back in school, wearing clothing they can be proud of. They are no longer worried about being separated from their families or where they will lay their heads each night. Bella's parents no longer carry day-to-day fear and anxiety about their immediate future. For Bella and her parents, hope may have begun with a simple pair of shoes. Today, they carry hope in their hearts for a better future – not just an immediate fix. It has provided life-changing opportunities for a family to overcome circumstances that could have held them captive in the overwhelming cycle of homelessness.

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.

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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.ANewLeaf.org.