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I want my kid to be more mentally healthy than I was. I want her to know that she can have a different life and I am now making that happen by learning how to change generational patterns and living that way.

Ashlee



I had my first alcohol drink when I was 17. I smoked my first bowl when I was 18. I was given an OC 80 for my 19th birthday by a friend of mine. That's how it started. It was a social thing at first and then it wasn't.

I remember the day I realized that I was addicted. I was standing in the galley at work and I was dope sick. It was 6 o'clock in the morning because I worked breakfast and I just shook my head and thought well, this is it then! Alright, what do I do now? Then I just went right into thinking where I could find more.

Opioids kind of teetered out as they got harder to get, and then other things took their place before I knew it, I was using heroin.

I relapsed 8 times through 10 years of use and then I was trying to quit again because I had just lost my job and I needed to get sober. I was staying at my sister's house and it was 5 adults and a child in a 1 bedroom, and they were so sick of me crying about being dope sick that they gave me a bottle of whiskey and I didn't put the bottle down for 3 years.

The year I got pregnant with my daughter, I went to Valley Vista. It was the first residential treatment program I had ever done. I made it through, and I stayed sober for about a month after I got out and then I started drinking again.

I should tell you that prior to this, in 2007, I was told that I wouldn't be able to have kids and I was fine with that. Kids were never on my agenda. So, when I found out I couldn't have them, I thought that's great I can use forever now.

My baby's daddy and I never dated, we just slept together when I was drunk and then I got pregnant. Because I didn't think I could get pregnant, I didn't know it until I was 5 and a half months.



I had slipped and fell at my mom's work and I went to get an x-ray. They called back to say that they couldn't do x-rays on pregnant women and I said you've got the wrong person.

I can't get pregnant. They set up an appointment with an OB and sure enough, I was pregnant. I was really hoping that it was early enough to terminate. I was really clear, I can't take care of a baby, I can't even take care of myself. I was homeless and jobless; I didn't have anything.

It turns out I was 5 and a half months along. Turns out, what they said in 2007 was I couldn't carry a baby to term. What I heard was, "You can't get pregnant."

A month after I found out I was pregnant, I went into labor and had my daughter.

She was born 10 weeks premature and was 3lbs 11oz. She was immediately diagnosed with an esophageal tracheal fistula and needed immediate surgery. She had two surgeries before she came home with a mini button and was on the feeding tube for 18 hours a day. Because I didn't breastfeed due to her being on a feeding tube, I wasn't using on a daily basis, I thought using sometimes would be ok.

I was in the community care program at Lund and because they are not really supervising you, I could get away with it. At one point, I used a lot and blacked out for 3 days. I didn't know who was taking care of my baby; it turns out I had left her with a good friend of mine and she was safe but I realized, I can't do this. I called my clinician at Lund that day and said, "I can't do this by myself, I have to move in." That was July 26, 2016 and I moved in October 13, 2016. It took a while for them to get me a bed. I lived there for a year, got sober and made 2 of the best friends I've ever had. They are like sisters.



When I was at Lund, for the first time, I was there for me. I knew that I needed to learn a different way. I wanted to be with my daughter and get treatment. That could happen at Lund. The program was set up for parents to be with their children.

I didn't have a lot of support after I left, and it was very difficult. I had access to clinical groups because that is what insurance will pay for, but general lifestyle groups like how to manage a bank account, how to go grocery shopping without spending thousands of dollars at once, you know, adult @#\$% wasn't available. It's really hard balancing money living on Reach Up. Every month I would have to decide which bills I can pay.

When I was at Lund, my daughter was in day care but because I didn't have a car, I couldn't get her back and forth so I had to pull her out. We were on a wait list for 10 months before I could get her into the head start program near our apartment.

It was really hard and very lonely, but I made it through and didn't relapse at all. I thought if I can make it through this, I can make it through anything. A few months later one of the best friends I made at Lund, died of an overdose and it was the first real loss that I had ever experienced. I had lost a lot of people in my life, but I had always been using so I never really felt it.

I realize now that a lot of my mental health stems from not being allowed to feel things when I was young. There was a lot that we were allowed to talk about.

Now I'm a very go with the flow kind of person. Life's too short to be sad.

