

Joanne's Story:

This narrative is a retelling of a personal story, with modifications made to names and details to protect the individual's identity.

I found out I was pregnant at a very difficult time in my life. I was struggling with my addiction, and I was in a new relationship. I went into labor a week early. The hospital contacted DCF because there was cocaine present in my baby's system. The day after I gave birth, I woke up to my sister crying and telling me that she was taking my baby home with her because DCF was going to put him into foster care if she did not. I was also told that I could not return to my mother's house where I had been living and caring for my two older children. I had let my kids down again. In addition to not being able to bring their baby brother home, I could not come home to them. My baby's father and I sat on the ground outside the hospital doors. We were heartbroken and did not know what to do.

While recovering from childbirth, without my baby to nurse or to hold, we slept on an air mattress in the living room of my cousin's one-bedroom apartment. We were grateful for the warm place to stay, but it was difficult living in such a small space with my cousin who was so angry and disappointed that I had lost my baby. As soon as we could, we met with DCF and made a treatment plan. We started doing parenting classes and visiting our baby as much as possible. Our DCF worker told us about a program, hosted by Bay State Community Services, where we could be connected with a Parent Aide. I gladly accepted and I am so grateful that I did!

During the four-month long DCF investigation, our Parent Aide (PA) visited us once a week, helped us work through disagreements between me and my baby's father, and between me and my cousin. She supported us through our anger and frustration at not being able to spend much time with my older children, she helped my sister to see the importance of letting us visit with our baby, and she advised us on how to not let our emotions take over. I called and texted our PA constantly. She was always there to help.

Four, long, sober months later, the court granted us custody of our baby boy! We were so happy, fulfilled, and proud. We were also a bit scared as it had been so long since we had cared for a baby. Once again, our PA saved us. Every step of the way she was there offering support, guidance and resources.

Thanks to our PA's guidance, I received a Section 8 voucher and found an appropriate house to rent. Our PA was so happy for us. Moving into our first home together was awesome, but also a bit scary. Our PA helped us to connect to the nearby food pantry, and she helped us with budget sheets, making schedules, and setting priorities. She even provided mini couples therapy sessions. Whatever we needed, she was always there with an answer, a resource, or advice.



Today we are doing better than ever! We are working hard on our recovery – drug free for more than 10 months – and we are doing great in our home. We have learned so much about working with our baby to help him to learn and grow. He is doing amazingly! Every day I find myself applying things I learned from our PA.

I am forever grateful for the skills I've learned and the life I have today. I am proud of myself, I am proud of my partner, and I am forever grateful for this second chance in life. I know for a fact that we would not have been as successful without the foundation, support, knowledge, understanding, and advice that our PA provided.