

## EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

### BETTER TOGETHER: HEALING THROUGH CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

#### A Mother's Story

I am a single mom of a beautiful son who just turned 16. We have a great life together, but that has not always been the case. When my son was 9, I was very depressed and drinking way too much. I had just left a very abusive relationship, and my mom had passed away. My mom was my biggest supporter, and I was lost without her guidance. I became overwhelmed with everything and gave up on life. I didn't know what to do, so I told my doctor how I was feeling and he put me on a variety of antidepressants. The medications made me much worse, and I ended up trying to take my life on several occasions. My best friend was so worried about me and my son that she called the Division for Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) in our State (New Hampshire) and told them I was trying to hurt myself. That call was the beginning of my journey with the New Hampshire child welfare system. My son was removed from my care immediately and was placed in several different foster homes over the course of the next 2 years. I was in and out of jail and rehab during that time, trying to get myself back together. I was able to see my son for visits and actually liked one of the foster families he was placed with. They were so nice and treated my son and me like family. I will never forget their kindness and support.



I was released from jail on July 14, 2011, and DCYF returned my son to me permanently on August 26, 2011. He was able to start fifth grade at home where he belonged. It was very difficult at first because we both needed time to heal from all the hurt I had caused. Shortly after my case was officially closed, I was told about the New Hampshire Parent Partner Program and the Better Together workshops. I couldn't believe that parents were actually invited back to share their experiences working with DCYF. I was very intrigued, so I jumped at the chance and went to the workshop. I was completely blown away by the safe environment the workshop created for participants to share their stories, feel valued, connect with others, and begin the healing process. After that experience, I couldn't get enough of it. I went to as many workshops as I could. It was totally amazing because I saw parents come in broken from shame and guilt and leave with hope, support, and more understanding of the system. It didn't take long to see the healing that was taking place in these workshops, so we started thinking of others that could benefit from this experience. We first thought of our foster parents and how they need support from others as well. Not long after that discussion, we had our first Better Together With Birth and Foster Parents pilot workshop, and it was a big hit! Before my eyes, I could see fears diminish and negative perceptions change in just 2 days! This journey has been transforming for so many people. The biggest gift is when staff, birth parents, and foster parents leave the workshop with the realization that we are all the same, we're just people, and that we need to have compassion for one another so we can work together to make things better!

I continued with my Better Together journey for the next couple of years. I always kept in mind the end goal that hopefully, someday, I would get the chance to work for the program in some capacity. My chance came in 2014 when the parent consultant contract became available. My dream came true when I was awarded the contract. I have been the parent consultant for New Hampshire DCYF since. My duties include recruitment and facilitation of the Better Together workshops, being a trusted advisor for DCYF administration and staff, supporting birth and foster parents in program activities, and spreading the word to all who will listen to me about this wonderful program we have in New Hampshire!

To learn more about the various family-centered services provided by the Division for Children, Youth and Families, New Hampshire visit, <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/>.



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