

Kimberly, a young mother finds the help and support she needs to regain her inner strength and sense of self worth and overcome the fears and stigma of her situation.

I have been asked to write this account of my experiences with our local grassroots organizations: The North Kingston Community Health Centre (NKCHC) and Better Beginnings for Kingston Children (BBKC). I'm feeling slightly pressured to get it organized by tomorrow's deadline. My house is a disaster area. My children, as if I expected different at a time like this, are acting like hooligans - hence, the disaster area. As my patience wanes and my frustration mounts, I yell; "Enough! Time to change the scenery."

Amazing, what a dance in the rain does to rejuvenate the spirit.

So now, I am writing this, creating a large, messy puddle on my kitchen floor that I will need to clean up soon. Matters not. My mood is serene. Thoughts more focussed. Far cry from four years ago. Rarely did I feel in control then. I didn't even know when or how to pull myself up like I do today. It was horrid. There were times when I came close to giving in to the battle going on within me. Days when I was afraid to go near my then infant son, Jeremy, because I experienced such an incredible, unexplainable inner rage.

Had someone asked me then to write anything, never mind a feature story, I would have run - fast. I could think of nothing else but escaping our isolated asylum.

"I didn't want people to see the madwoman I was desperately trying to conquer"

I didn't want people to see me. They'd see the madwoman I was desperately trying to conquer. They'd see I was a "no good welfare mom/prisoner's wife", call CAS and steal my baby. Paranoia? Depends on how you look at it - where you've been in life. I was stressed, depressed, dealing with my past ghosts while struggling to be the "perfect mother" the books I read said I could be, dealing with baby who did not (could not) do what they said he would do - with no family, friends, breastfeeding or other basic parenting support. Our relationship-by-telephone with complimentary six hour visits on weekends with his father, could hardly be considered supportive, especially at that time.

That was our life for Jeremy's first nine months. Then we ventured into St. Patrick's School for a BBKC's playgroup. Stepping through those doors was the beginning of a transformation that still, to this day, amazes me and makes me very proud.

What helped us break out of our cocoon was BBKC's emporium of information and connection with the NKCHC. The unconditional acceptance and warmth, I received from these organizations, were a breath of fresh air and what kept us coming back over forty months ago. Through their connection with Kingston Literacy's Read Write 2 centre, I participated in - and later facilitated - a writers' group. This gave me confidence and led to future editorials, articles and public-speeches.

Through the numerous committees I volunteered on, I learned new skills, improved old ones, recognized a passion for and understanding of research, nutrition and child-development. These experiences led me to reflect on my own childhood and, how much of

Birth Of A Butterfly

what I have experienced in life (those awful inner rages, low self-esteem, etc) were a result of that. Giving me the determination to break that negative cycle by educating myself on these topics and seeking out more support.

Through BBKC's Family Visiting Program, I found a friend. Sue encouraged my positive parenting, helped me face my negatives. She listened to my fears, rantings (and there were many) and gave me excellent insight and information. She introduced me to other strong, like-minded women, who collectively gave me, with my radical parenting ways, an even deeper sense of belonging. Sue was my foundation during the trials and joys of my second son, Garrett's, birth.

Because of the Community Health Centre and Better Beginning's unique, empowering connection, Sue was able to refer me to a wonderful social worker, who helped me learn to deal with my depression and marital woes. Connecting with other parents and staff in parent support groups like the playgroup, Breastfeeding Friendly Club and Nobody's Perfect, helped me to feel more comfortable parenting the way that was best for my family. Listening to other parent's share anecdotes and remedies that might work for this or that or a myriad of other topics gave me more insight and hope - Whew! I'm not the only one.

"I've regained my inner strength and I'm soaring like a butterfly because we have a network of support, jobs and opportunities"

By finally being active and appreciated my confidence and self-respect soared and led to, well...a happier household for one. (Because if moms' sane...) It also led me to help initiate and develop numerous worthy endeavours; A Parent Relief Co-Op, The South Eastern Ontario's Breastfeeding Coalition, The Good Food Box Program, my Infant-Feeding Survey, car seats in Taxis and Joyceville Institution's Visitors' Committee.

The NKCHC and BBKC also offered Childcare and Peer Co-Facilitator training, which led to casual employment as a Childcare Provider and volunteer co-facilitator of the parenting groups I benefited from. This, in turn, led to a full-time, six-month contract position as one of Better Beginning's Childcare Assistants.

Over the years my sons and I forged many friendships. They now have different age playmates, other positive adult relationships and trips to places we wouldn't normally have been able to visit. All we have done with the Community Health Centre and Better Beginnings, the many resources available and finally being able to depend on people, be heard and valued, helped me to realize I am a Good Person. I am a Good Parent. Despite being incarcerated, all this helped my husband face his own ghosts and negatives. His sense of self, our marriage and parenting skills have also greatly improved.

So, I'm still parenting with no family and, as I explained earlier, I still have my down days, but I've regained my inner strength and I'm soaring like a butterfly because we have a network of support, a job, and opportunities.

We would not have reached this point so soon, maybe at all, without the Community Health Centre and Better Beginnings paving our way.