HopeFULL

THE CENTER FOR GREAT EXPECTATIONS NEWSLETTER

The Center for Great Expectations is a safe place, safe presence and a safe path for pregnant and parenting women and their children, and men, seeking treatment for substance use and mental health disorders.

Have you ever been curious whether donations to CGE have really changed the lives of the women and children in our care? In this edition of our newsletter, we decided to highlight clients' stories from each program in our continuum of care, so you can see the positive results that your generosity has helped produce. These aren't just our stories. They're your stories. *Enjoy.*

An early chapter in a CGE story that started in Somerville.

CGE has evolved to become a leading expert in treating pregnant and parenting women with complex trauma. This is an extraordinary story from our first years in Somerville.

In 1998, a scared, pregnant, 17-year-old young woman reached out to CGE for help. Recently, this same young woman reached out to us again. This time to tell us that her baby, born while she was at CGE, had just graduated from college.

Here's her story in her own words:

"My life isn't all that extraordinary." This former client begins, "I didn't have a history of substance use. I wasn't a victim of domestic violence. I wasn't raped at such a young age that I had no clue what was happening to my body — like the young girl I shared a room with."

She continues, "I can't even begin to imagine their struggles. And I don't want to pretend like I know what it's like, because I don't."

She was just a scared, pregnant 17-year-old with no place to go.

"What I do know is what it's like to feel alone and to be fearful of trusting a group of strangers with your well-being," She then added with a smile, "And how rewarding it can be when you learn how to accept that help."

Even after all she went through, she never felt any ill-will toward her parents. "Being a parent is tough." She explains, "They were just as scared as I was and didn't know how to handle the situation I found myself in." At the end of the day, her parents took her back as soon as they laid eyes on their grandson. Their love and support continues to this day.

She ended her story with this last comment, **"CGE is a place where the very best of humanity is exercised. Where hope is personified."**

A side note to her story: At the graduation, she recognized another client from her time at CGE. Her child was also graduating that day.

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Our **continuum of care** isn't guided by a calendar.

"This is a story about a mom and young child who have been in our Permanent Supportive Housing program since 2015," says Angela Reina, Program Manager and Early Relational Health Clinician. Angela adds, "During that time, she's been working with our housing staff and mental health counselors at Roots to Recovery, to learn to establish healthy boundaries with family members and her daughter's father."

"The support I receive from the housing team and from counseling, has allowed me to gain insight into my need to process the trauma I experienced during my childhood, while homeless, and experiencing partner violence." The mom continues, "I get a feeling of relief, diving into my past, and I'm gaining clarity to improve my future."

Mom is also learning how to implement positive discipline and activities to strengthen her bond with her daughter — a relationship that has demonstrated significant growth over a short period of time. According to the client, "There's better communication, appropriate boundaries and just a better sense of stability in our lives now."

"The Permanent Supportive Housing program also provides transportation for appointments and access to food and other donations whenever they're needed." Angela continues, "Recently, we started working with her to develop a plan to re-enroll in cosmetology school.

Beaming with pride, Angela then states, "Everyone at CGE is very proud of her motivation towards self-growth."

"This is my safe space." The mom explains, **"I do not have to worry about a man putting my daughter and me out."**

The **future just became brighter** for two Adolescent House clients.

The girls in our Adolescent Residential program have already experienced trauma no one ever should — from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, to homelessness.

Program manager Leigh Rasmussen, explains, **"We assess the person as a whole. We want to see where they came from. Where they're going, their hopes, their dreams."**

"Earning a high school diploma is always one goal." Assistant Program Manager Cathy Victor adds, "It's a great accomplishment for them."

In June, two CGE clients achieved this educational milestone.

Our first graduate's big day was June 24th. What made it especially noteworthy for her was the fact that she was only the second person in her family to earn a high school diploma.

Our second graduate, homeless before she arrived, told us that she wanted to change her life, herself and her trajectory. On June 29th, she took a big step in that direction by earning her GED.

Studying for school, attending therapy and caring for their children all at the same time, just shows how determined they both were to create a better future for themselves and their family.

Cathy adds proudly, "It's a beautiful transformation. We see it over and over again."

Even at their young ages, many of the children at **Katy's Place** have already experienced trauma in their lives.

"I often think of two infants who were slow to thrive." Childcare Provider Paula Beisser recalls, "Serious and often unhappy, one little one suddenly began to smile when he arrived in the morning and saw the consistent smiling faces of the caregivers."

Paula continues, "The other seemed to dislike very much, putting any pressure on her legs. After daily massages and encouragement, she stood up on her caregiver's lap one day and started bouncing up and down and smiling. She looked so proud."

In addition to providing a safe, nurturing environment, our staff is also trained in trauma-informed interventions for young children.

Program Supervisor Briana Higgins states, "I love watching the toddlers enjoy themselves as they explore and interact, especially while knowing some of the trauma in their backgrounds." She then adds with a smile, **"It is heartwarming to see our children flourish in the safe, happy environment we provide."**

"These may seem like normal occurrences in childcare settings," Program Manager Mary Jean DiRoberto interjects. "But for our population they reflect great moments. We, at Katy's Place, witness many of these 'great moments' and we celebrate each one of them."

Besides reading and playing and napping, sometimes the kids at Katy's Place also do some very important work — like making bird feeders for their feathered friends, so they can watch from the window when they stop by to eat.

Support. Guidance. Being fully heard. In our START program, we play a lot of different roles.

Clients' rights and life-saving advocacy are at the core of Doula work. ***This story is a perfect example.*** Erica Pulliam, site manager of our Newark START office shared, "When a recent client birthed her baby, I was excited to learn that one of our doulas, Jewell Garcia, had the opportunity to guide her on her birthing journey. But my excitement quickly turned to shock after learning that she was released just 13 hours after her c-section."

Once at home, this new mom started having problems and noticed a large red mark on her stomach. After talking to her doctor, she felt she wasn't being taken seriously. So, she called Jewell, who listened to her and validated her concerns, urging her to go to the emergency room.

She had a blood infection. Without Jewell's intervention, this could have been a tragedy. Later, this client gave more details, and her birth story didn't get much better.

"I was not offered skin-to-skin contact with my baby," the mother said through her tears. "I even inquired if dad could do skin-to-skin, but my request went unheard. When it comes to Black mothers, they do not listen to us."

There was also a lack of postnatal care and an abundance of stigma. And when she complained of pain, our client explained angrily, "They just assumed I was looking to get high off the pain medication."

Jewell explained, "Due to Covid-19, I wasn't able to be there, in person, to support this mother during delivery. True access to doula care would have definitely changed the birth experience and outcome for her. But even without me there, she still applied what she learned in the START program and advocated for herself and her newborn."

Jewell added, **"Since giving birth, this mom has successfully graduated from our START program. This reassures me that my work has an impact on the families I am honored to support and serve."**

Our Stone Ceremony. A **deeply moving and powerful moment** for CGE's graduating residents.

This special celebration is held whenever someone leaves our adult residential program. The clinical staff, the graduating resident, her peers, family members, sponsor and anyone else in the graduate's circle of support is invited to be there.

Marissa, a program graduate, talks about what this ceremony meant to her.

"I walked into a lot of love that day." Marissa says with a smile, "Complete strangers 6 months earlier, were now crying at the thought of me leaving."

Before the ceremony starts, CGE's clinical staff selects a stone. "The stones have different things on them, like courage, faith, trust," Marissa explains. "They sit down as a team and pick the stone that they believe fits us."

"And you know why they can do that?" Marissa continues, "Because they actually pay attention to us. They pay attention to our growth."

As each person is handed the stone, they share stories, talk about the graduate's time in the program, and offer their thoughts on why this stone's message connects to the graduate.

"Everyone at the ceremony said something about me and about the next chapter in my life that CGE helped me find." Marissa adds, "It's a mix of happy, sad, proud emotions. It's such a beautiful ceremony for us."

Our Stone Ceremony marks a new beginning. It proves to each graduate that they're ready to continue a life in recovery. And build a better future for themselves and their children.

"To hear how far I've come and how much I've grown, it touched my heart so much... It was beautiful." Marissa then adds with a laugh, "And I got Dunkin Donuts."

Although the stone ceremony marks the end of a client's stay in the Adult Residential program, it does not mean she's cut her ties to us. Marissa and other clients continue to stay in touch with CGE due to the deep connections she and other clients make during their treatment stay.

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Great Expectations

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Some of the CGE stories that you helped us write.

We treat every client like a human being. Because they are.

"I was referred to Roots to Recovery by Middlesex County Recovery Court," this client begins her story. "Although I was mandated, after the first month I realized that the staff was genuinely trying to help me get my life back."

At Roots to Recovery, we offer clients substance use and mental health treatment in a safe, judgement-free environment.

"I've been to other outpatient programs, and I felt like I was just another addict to them." She continues, "Here I feel like they take time to understand me and what my needs are as an individual; the goals I have and how they can help me reach them."

Guided by a trauma-informed, patient-centered lens, we tailor our care to the specific needs of each person served.

"I've been clean for 6 months," she says proudly. "I know I've done the work, but without the groups, guidance of my counselor and meetings, I would not have one day.

Summing up her experience, she says, **"They cared when I didn't. Now I care because they taught me how."**

Mark your calendar. **On September 15th, we'll be holding another reception and tour at CGE.**

To register contact **Veronica Finlay, 732-247-7003 Ext. 356** or **vfinlay@CGE-nj.org**.

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How can you help ensure that stories like these will continue?

These are our costs ***per client per day*** for each of our programs. Your generous donations supporting our continuum of care will make it possible for more stories, like those in this newsletter, to continue to be written.

- Adult Residential — $400
- Adolescent Residential — $650
- Roots to Recovery Outpatient Treatment — $175
- Permanent Supportive Housing — $100
- START Community-Based Services — $250
- Katy's Place Child Development Center — $100

The 2022 Hope Lives Here Gala is on October 14th. Join us for a very special night of dining and dancing as we celebrate the impact your support made possible.

This is CGE's most important event of the year. Hosted by Emmy Award-winning former ABC News Anchor, Scott Clark, this year's Gala will be held on Friday, October 14th at the Hyatt New Brunswick. Black tie optional.

To purchase tickets or become a sponsor, visit **cge-nj.org/events/annual-gala**. Or contact Laurie Lachs at **llachs@cge-nj.org**.