



Melissa's Story

Melissa started out in a supportive home, but when her parents became disabled things changed. From her childhood, Melissa was always taking care of everything. As a teenager, she was dealing with depression and mental health issues. The people she would have normally gone to support for needed her to support them, "I wasn't really being taken care of." She started to take the bus, to anywhere and everywhere, just to get out of her home, "When I noticed that no one really noticed or cared at my house, it kinda progressed."

Melissa went through waves of homelessness. After the initial time of floating around people's houses and staying on the streets, she began to get things together, "I was able to buy a house, I was in a good relationship, I had a job and a car. Then I got really sick and lost everything." When she didn't have anywhere to go, she found a group of people who accepted her. At the time she didn't realize that it was gang, "What I thought was a relationship ended up me being involved in a gang and prostitution and drug dealing before I knew it." It wasn't until meeting with a case manager at the Orion Center did she begin to realize the gravity of the situation that she was in.

They began to work with Melissa on getting into transitional housing, graduating high school, and with life skills. Things began to look up for Melissa again, but another bump in the road came up when she lost her job. That's when she met Kate from Street Youth Ministries, "I hadn't had an official case manager before. It was really nice because we worked on a lot of things. We talked a lot about goals and then achieved them. I got a lot of support and encouragement to keep going." From there, Melissa was encouraged to form a wrap around group – a team of people she knew from different areas in her life that would work on helping her achieve bigger goals, "We would all brainstorm together, each person within the team would help with different specific tasks. So if all the sudden I'm struggling with something, now I had the support team of each of them to come help me and meet me where I'm at."

Having a support system was new to Melissa, but was just what she needed and SYM was able to provide that. "Everyone there was so open and supportive. Sometimes when you're going to services you feel really judged or you feel like just another person in this system and it's really hard to get anyone to listen to you or help you realize goals. It was like that at SYM." Through the help of SYM and Melissa's wrap around team, she was able to become stable, "Now I'm doing really well. I'm more balanced than I was." Melissa is currently working on becoming a peer recovery coach with dreams of going back to school for a social work degree, "I want to be a case manager and health counselor and work with at risk and homeless youth." She has a stable relationship with her own place and job.

When asked what she's most proud of, Melissa tells us, "I'm proud of not giving up and being able to learn to ask for help."