

Grant Program: Second Chance Act

Grant Type: Adult Mentoring

State: Texas

Grantee: Family Pathfinders of Tarrant County

Program Name: Reentry Mentoring Program

Kim, a 32-year-old mother of five, recently spent three months in Tarrant County Jail for violating her probation. She had screened positive for illegal substances—her second drug-related arrest in two years. She was unemployed, and her addiction to hydrocodone now threatened her relationship with the only one of her children in her custody. (She maintains contact with two who live out of state with their father; she has no contact with her two oldest children. She shares custody of the youngest child, who is nine, with the boy's father.)

Assessed as presenting a high risk of recidivating, Kim was sentenced to the county's Intensive Day Treatment program, which includes 90 days of jail-based treatment and six months of post-release aftercare treatment. Realizing this may present a last opportunity to turn things around, Kim also signed up for the Second Chance Act-funded mentorship program coordinated by Family Pathfinders of Tarrant County, which works exclusively with female offenders before and after release. Family Pathfinders partners with Ft. Worth-based Texas Reentry Services (TXRS), Parents and Partners of Prisoners, and the Tarrant County Community Supervision and Correction Department.

Kim's most immediate concern after her release was the prospect of homelessness; she needed a place to live before reconnecting with her son. Her mentors and TXRS helped her apply for Shelter Plus Care, a HUD housing assistance program for people with mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders. As part of the Shelter Plus Care application, Kim had to demonstrate sobriety. With the support of her mentors, she continues to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings—and has passed every court-mandated urinary screen since her August 2011 release. With a Shelter Plus Care voucher, she now rents a two-bedroom apartment near her son and his father, allowing her to focus on her recovery while also sharing custody of the young boy.

Her mentors have helped Kim focus on improving her parenting. The young man has significant behavioral problems, which her mentors are helping Kim better manage. With their encouragement, she attends life skills classes. She now regularly attends his parent-teacher conferences. Though she's estranged from this son's father, she wants the group to enroll in family counseling (at present, he's not interested). Her highest priority is to provide a good role model for her son: "I just don't want him to go down the same road as me," she said.

She wants to make a better life for the boy. Towards that end, her mentors encouraged her to enroll in higher education. She's studying business full time. Her mentors helped her get books and apply for student loans—which first required addressing old defaulted student loans from her previous undergraduate studies. The process took considerable effort and patience, but they helped Kim through the experience. While working to complete her studies, she is seeking part-time employment to help pay her probation fees.

She's close with her mentors; they talk on the phone frequently and text daily. As she nears the end of her term of probation, she continues to make progress with their assistance. "Thank you for matching me with my mentors and for helping me to keep going and registering for college classes," she recently wrote in a letter to Family Pathfinders. "I would have given up without your encouragement!"

All names and other identifying details have been concealed to preserve individuals' privacy.