

LET'S START

a support process for families impacted by female incarceration



Meet Barbara - A Participant's Story



Barbara, or Bobbie as she is known to her relatives and friends, speaks highly of her family who she says has always supported and loved her. Having grown up with a large and loving family, she credits her mother with instilling strong values, respect, and manners in her.

As Bobbie neared teenage years she found herself surrounded by what she calls the wrong associations. When Bobbie was 17, she used marijuana for the first time. By age 22, Bobbie was going out to clubs where she was introduced to a lifestyle that overtook her. She recalls using drugs with no awareness of how deadly the drugs were to her and her friends. Bobbie describes her use as a sport, with the amount and the potency of substances increasing. When she was in her early 30's, her addiction advanced to IV heroin use. Shortly thereafter she began stealing to pay for her addiction.

In 1973, Bobbie went to prison for the first time. She says incarceration didn't deter her lifestyle because she was surrounded by people caught in the same cycle and she was able to remain in her addiction. Her family endured this with her and helped bail her out when they could. Bobbie would continue this cycle, and over time she realized the physical and emotional toll her addiction was taking. At times, she felt she didn't want to use anymore, but she was too dependent to stop on her own. At this point in her addiction, Bobbie was going to the penitentiary every 4 years. Looking back, she felt this was her only reprieve from her lifestyle despite still having access to drugs in prison.

But a reprieve didn't mean that Bobbie was able to escape reality. In 1980, while incarcerated, Bobbie's only son died in a car accident on his way to Florida with family. He died one day before his 17th birthday. His death cast a shadow over not only Bobbie, but over her entire family. For her, those feelings of loss would remain suppressed for years to come.

Bobbie's last return to prison occurred in 1995 when she said she "felt the defeat of my addiction." She had received a 10-year sentence and was mandated to complete 85%. Bobbie described this sentence as a time she was waiting for death to take her. She had hit her wall and didn't want to continue this lifestyle any longer. While incarcerated, she went into treatment, started her sobriety, and it was here she got her awakening. She began attending church in the Clayton jail, going to anger management groups, and any other meeting to fill the emptiness inside her. She educated herself in order to better understand her addiction and began to experience a hope she hadn't known before.

In 2003 as she was finally nearing the end of her 10-year sentence, Bobbie found herself sober in prison and with a renewed hope to maintain that sobriety no matter what life held ahead of her. In May of that year, Bobbie was notified that there had been a car accident and that her mother had died on her way to the jail for a family visit. Bobbie came home the following October. Upon release, she started attending recovery meetings and was contacted by Patty, a woman who was attending Let's Start meetings. Bobbie began attending them too. Bobbie defined the support group as "full of givers and receivers; a place where women could start again." Bobbie began participating in Stories of Hope and started sharing her story with the community in the hope she could help others.

In June 2016, Bobbie will celebrate 21 years in recovery. In that time she has been the caregiver to ailing relatives, and she has worked for 13 years at an adult daycare for men and women diagnosed with Alzheimer's, a job she loves and takes pride in. As she reflects on her road to recovery, Bobbie is grateful for the support she has received over the years from Let's Start for her and for her family. Her hope for any newcomer will be that she will encounter the same support in Let's Start that she found early in her recovery.

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Mission

Let's Start aims to break the cycle of incarceration in families by working with formerly incarcerated women and their children to support reentry and recovery, mitigate the impact of parental imprisonment, educate the public and inform policy.

Save the Date

May 6 - City Coffee & Creperie Day

May 22 - Bus trip to Vandalia prison

September 22 - Let's Start the Music

Join us for breakfast or lunch on Friday, May 6, 2016 at City Coffee & Creperie at 36 North Brentwood Blvd. in Clayton

50% of the proceeds from this day will be donated to Let's Start!



I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.
- Anne Lamott

To request a newsletter by mail, write:
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