

LET'S START

a support process for families impacted by female incarceration



Meet Rachel - A Participant's Story



Rachel understands the cycle of incarceration and trauma far too well. The chaos began early in her childhood. Rachel was constantly running away from home because she was molested by her mother's boyfriend's son. She was eventually assigned a Deputy Juvenile Officer (DJO) but was returned home, only to have her mother kick her out. She was 9 years old.

From her mother's house, she went to live with her father and his family. This began a long, tumultuous relationship with drugs and criminal behavior. At her father's home, drug dealing was the family business. Rachel recalls that from the ages of 9-12 she stole cars. At age 12, she started dealing drugs. In 7th grade, she would go to school in the morning (driving a stolen car), leave when her pager went off and make a drug deal, and then return to school once the transaction was done. Rachel stopped attending school after the 7th grade. At age 13, her brother introduced her to heroin.

At age 16, Rachel went to Federal prison. She was part of a large ring indictment and was offered 20 years. Her grandfather paid for legal counsel, which dropped Rachel's sentence to 3 years. Of those three years, she served a year and a half.

Rachel's life continued to revolve around drug deals and getting high. But all the while, she always held another job in the fast food industry or housekeeping. Her sisters instilled the value of work in her, and this has always been a point of pride that she was not only making her money through selling drugs.

After serving additional time in the Women's Eastern Reception and Diagnostic Correctional Center in Vandalia, MO, Rachel was released to a halfway house May 14, 2010. The very next day she was out on a job search and was raped and beaten. Rachel became impregnated by her rapist. Her daughter was born in 2011. Her youngest child, a son, was born in 2012. Through all of this, Rachel remained involved in selling drugs and getting high. Ten days after the birth of her son, she caught a distribution case. For the next year she went back and forth to court. Her distribution case caught her 5 years on papers with a 22-year backup. She was also required to enter the Choices program for treatment. In treatment, she realized that if she didn't stop using she was going to lose her life and her children were going to lose their mother. She decided it was time to make a change.

Rachel was first introduced to Let's Start when she was 17. She met Cynthia Stevenson-Johnson, who was facilitating support groups in the City Workhouse and the St. Louis County Jail. Rachel tearfully tells of Cynthia saying, "I have hope for you. You're going to be okay." With Rachel's release from jail in 2015, she returned to Let's Start on Tuesday nights. She says "I've been welcomed back with open arms. [...] That's why I have hope in this program."

Today Rachel says she's trying to grow. She describes herself as strong-willed and her biggest priority now is to be a mother to her children. When she was getting high she used to let her family eat dinner in front of the TV so she could be left alone, but today they eat dinner as a family and talk about their days. No phones, no tablets, and no games are allowed at these family dinners. She admittedly knows her struggle isn't over. As she says, she's "living life on life's terms." This is why her mantra of living one minute at a time is what's gotten her through cravings, the stresses of parenting, her job search, and caring for her fiancé, who suffers from PTSD.

Rachel's advice to anyone struggling is to turn to a higher power-no matter what or who that higher power is to that individual. She says everyone has to decide that enough is enough. Finally, change the people, places, and things around, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone.

Quick Links

www.letsstart.org

[Donate Now](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Facebook](#)

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

March 8 - 11:00 am Forest Park Community College Presentation on The Impact of Incarceration on Families

March 20 - Bus trip to Vandalia prison

April 16 - 10:00 am 2nd Annual Gospel Brunch



Tickets are now on sale for the 2nd Annual Gospel Brunch featuring the Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis Choir.

For more information, visit our website www.letsstart.org.

Let's Start would like to extend a special thanks to Lecia J. Rives and her friends for hosting an awesome Valentine's Day celebration for our participants.

Special guest Jackie Joyner-Kersey was a wonderful surprise. Our women certainly felt the LOVE!

What you are supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. Don't complain.

- Maya Angelou

To request a newsletter by mail, write:
Let's Start

1408 South 10th Street
St. Louis, MO 63104

To request a newsletter by email, write:
letsstartstlouis@gmail.com