



Dear New Potential Leaders,

In 2009, I sat where you now sit. My kids were 4, 3, and 14 months old. I was so tired. My husband and I moved from Martinsville to Bloomington to a little 2BR apartment in 2007. I finished college at IU in 2008, with a newborn baby strapped to my chest. My husband was washing dishes at a restaurant around the corner from us. After I graduated, I went on a string of job interviews, none of which resulted in a job. I was depressed, and my husband was coping in some unhealthy ways. We loved each other, but our relationship wasn't healthy either.

Joining Thriving Connections (which was known as Circles at the time) was the best decision I could have made. The worst part of our situation was how lonely and exhausted I felt all of the time. TC solved that when I stepped in the door. Here I was surrounded by people with similar problems and I was in a place where we could talk openly about them. I wasn't lonely anymore. And I had a time and space each week to think about the future. For the past 5 years or so, I had only been thinking in terms of "for now". Like "This is good enough for now. This is all we can do for now. We'll deal with this for now." But 'for now' turned into 5 years really fast and I couldn't figure out anything that would get us out of that. Having time each Thursday to think about the future and problem solve with other people who knew or had other resources, gave me hope.

Thriving Connections connected me to Catholic Charities, too. I had always thought that counseling was for crazies. I had had a bad experience with a counselor and really hadn't ever given it a thought about going back and trying it again. But because I had supportive friends around me, I tried it again. I even took my husband with me and we tried it together. It changed our relationship, it gave us tools to deal with our individual past ghosts and also with the recent damage we had done to each other. Taking care of ourselves in that way helped us each to have the strength to continue fighting to get our family ahead. I didn't know it then, but those things had to be dealt with before we could ever achieve stability. Otherwise, maybe I would've gotten a really great job, but I wouldn't have lasted there because sooner or later he and I would have had a blow out and I would've no-call/no-showed again or he would've gotten into another fight with a co-worker, and it wouldn't have lasted anyways.

So if there's any advice I can give you from the perspective of someone looking back, it's to take care of yourself first. You've learned to cope with things because you have to, but be honest with yourself - you can't go on like that forever and no change you make will last unless you've taken care of yourself. Going back to school, getting a new job, meeting new people, getting off of assistance -- all of those things are stressful enough. But if you're taking care of yourself, you'll be strong enough to push through that stress and come out stronger on the other end.

Throughout all of it, the ups and the downs, my allies were right beside me. They introduced me to different ways of thinking about things, and made me feel accepted and loved. They never told me what to do, but they brainstormed with me and reflected with me. They offered whatever support I needed to move towards my goals. I don't even call them my allies anymore. They are just my good friends, or like extended family.

Know that all of us are here for you. We're here to listen, to share our experiences if you want us to, and just cheer you on in general. Even if not all of us are here every Thursday for a meeting, you know that we're on your side and we're rooting for you to grow and learn and have a happier family. You'll have setbacks, it'll take longer than you expect, and we're here for you then, too.

Good luck!!

Katie Rodriguez    Leader from GA2