

## Chantelle's Story

*Things don't get bad overnight, and unfortunately, they don't get better overnight either, as Chantelle will tell you.*

"The past four years of my life have been very difficult and interesting. When I was growing up I thought that no one loved me in my family so I went to look for friends that I thought would love me like I was family. I hated when anyone told me what to do so I always blew people off. I started to run away from home and be disrespectful to my mother and not follow her house rules. My first day of high school I met with my friend and we thought it would be cool so I skipped my first day of high school. Later on in the school year I would skip school probably three times a week. My mother got sick of my actions and filed a CHINS but I still didn't listen. I was placed into detention at least four to five times. The judge also got sick of seeing me and called DSS. For the next 8 months I lived in a trailer with a foster mother and her daughter. I went to school, came home and stayed in my room. I had to go to a new high school. The kids were so different from me, I felt like I didn't belong there. During that summer I got to go home. I was excited. I behaved for a few months and then it started to go downhill again. I met this boy I was crazy about him. I never wanted to go home but he always made me go. But, also that same summer I started hanging out with some of my old friends.

Here's where I hit bottom. One day I had \$70 and I wanted to buy a half of Mary Jane nut. I was with my sister and two friends. We smoked while my sister drank. After we were done I was really sick, so I went outside to get some fresh air. Something was very wrong. I couldn't feel my face or my body. My friend had to carry me to her house, and the whole way there I am thinking that I am just going to die. I could feel my body getting really cold and weak and my heart slowing down. My sister didn't want to call my mother because she didn't want to get into trouble. But my friend's mom got home and saw me. She called my mom in like 2 seconds. My mom got there and called an ambulance and they rushed me to the hospital. I knew deep down I would have died if they never called my mom. I remember thinking that tonight is going to be the last day I live on this earth without having the chance to say how much I love my mom. After, I had a lot of time to think about things since I couldn't go anywhere. I knew from the start when I was almost dead that I had to find new friends because a real friend cares about you when you get hurt; they **will** call your parents. My own sister didn't call my mother. They were just going to let me die just to save their own butts.

Because of my actions, the judge committed me to DYS and I went into detention. I never thought I was going to get out of that place. I was incarcerated for five months. I told myself when I get out don't worry about friends, worry about yourself for now and when I am ready to have friends that's when I can work on it. I also told myself I am going back to school to make something of myself. I wanted to be only one in my family to graduate high school and accomplish many goals in my life. I got to go home and show my mother I can be responsible and loyal and follow her rules.

A month after I got out I was reunited with my boyfriend. We were still crazy about each other. Two months after I got out I found out I was PREGNANT! I didn't know what I was going to do with my life. I was so scared and I had no support system. Everyone was very disappointed and upset at us. But I still kept my head up high, I didn't care what anyone said. I came back to school in September. Nine months later I had a beautiful baby girl, named Victoria.

Here's where things changed. This is when I started working with Family Continuity and met my counselor, Amy, and we started working things out. During my pregnancy I didn't think it was going to be hard, having a baby so young and it didn't hit me until she came out and they put her on my stomach. I thought it was going to be like a piece of cake. Absolutely not!!!! It is so hard to be a teen parent. Once I saw her in the hospital I knew I had a lot of responsibilities and I couldn't act like a child anymore. I realized I couldn't act out and leave my baby home by herself. It was so weird that this little baby is going to be a part of my life and I have to support her for the next 18 years of her life. She is my first priority before anyone. I also realized I gave up my life like no hanging with my friends on a Friday night, leaving when I want to. I have a new life, a life that is going to motivate me to do good and stay out of trouble. Once in a while I tell my teacher Mr. B that I am a child at school but a mother at home.

Now I'm a senior!!!! My senior year is so special to me because no one in my family thought I was going to make it, especially because I had a baby at the age of 16 years old. To be honest I had doubts that I was not going to make it, but as long as you put your mind to it you can do anything you want. I am so proud of myself I made it this far. I am going to grow up and be successful so I can give my child everything that I didn't have. I also wanted to graduate so I can be a great role model for my child and I can be the person that taught her everything.

When she turned 18 in February of this year, Chantelle signed on voluntarily with DYS in large part because she wanted to make sure she could continue to work with Amy because of the progress she has made while working with Amy and feels she needs the continued support.

**Amy sees it like this.** *"I've seen great progress in Chantelle working on her relationship with her mother and how to improve her communication skills. When she became pregnant she realized she wanted to be a different parent than her mother had been and recognized that part of her ability to be successful would depend on changing her relationship with her mother as well as working on the issues she struggles with. She has graduated high school, is looking at colleges, and is living with her boyfriend and her daughter in her own apartment. She works and has a budget that she works very hard to stick to and is very proud of her growth and ability to be independent. Her goals now are around self-esteem, parenting, transition to adulthood, and family communication. Its been over two years since she has abused substances or violated probation."*

**Here's how Chantelle now sees it.** *“From my experience I learned not to be a follower but to be a leader, don't do things just because you want to look cool, looking cool is not going to get you nowhere. So be yourself, put your education before parties. Put your families before anything”*

**To find out more about the services that Family Continuity provides in your community to youths like Chantelle, or how you can help, contact us at (866) 219-3320, or on our website at [www.familycontinuity.org](http://www.familycontinuity.org).**