

Jan. NTSP Newsletter
Interview with Annette Blair
By Y. Hope Osborn
Cynda Alexander
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Annette Blair was an addict, homeless person, and single mother. But in December Annette graduated from UALR with honors.

Your history is only as good as what you do with it in the present. Annette Blair models this idea.

2007 saw Annette without a job, home, daughter, or family support; chemically dependent; and pregnant. The state revoked Annette's nursing license because she picked up a possession charge. Without a job, she couldn't pay her mortgage and didn't have money to live anywhere else. Without a job and home and being chemically dependent, she couldn't take care of her 5-year old daughter. Annette's lifestyle caused her family to turn away from her.



Annette said she was “tired of living the way I was living. I had just gotten so disgusted with life and existing I couldn't work. I couldn't focus on anything productive, and I couldn't stop using. And the people around me were ... a negative influence. My family had turned their back on me and I literally lost everything.”

“My thing was to try to get a grip,” says Annette.

So get a grip Annette did. Annette realized she needed help. She “wanted help so bad” she went to the hospital and told them she wanted to kill herself, though she didn't really. That got her the required 72 hour hold that she needed to start to figure out how to get help with her chemical dependency and life.

Annette bounced around from treatment center to treatment center for three months as she continued her old behavior, but when Annette became pregnant, it made her “want to do something... I didn't mind being out by myself, but I didn't want my newborn baby in the winter cold ... living in the street. I knew those streets [weren't] nice ... girls died while I was [homeless]—girls I knew, used to hang out with, used to do the same stuff they would do, with some of the same people they did it with.”

Annette finally settled into a long-term facility that took in pregnant women, and she really dug into the program.

Annette says of rehabilitation, “It was hell ... I had to go through what I went through because I needed to be there. It was a necessary evil.” Annette realized she needed to take advantage of the opportunity.

At the end of the six months, when her baby boy was born, Annette needed a home. She was given a grant to pay for a home and within a couple of weeks of giving birth, a home miraculously came her way despite her not being able to look for one while recovering from giving birth.

Annette and baby Brian moved into their apartment with “no more furniture nowhere. It was just carpet and walls. No tv or nothing” except for one bed, says Annette.

Mid-2008, Annette spent some of her time before organizations and congregations to “educate them on addiction and homelessness.”

What motivated Annette to return to school? Annette says, “I went back to school because I worked at Sonic all of about a month, and I said, ‘\$7.25, that won’t even pay my daycare.’ ... And I wasn’t getting [any] hours ... my back was hurting me. I said, ‘Uh, uh. I need to go back to school.’”

From there Annette took off. She completed a dental assistant program. She earned an associate’s degree in allied health. When she still didn’t find a job, she took her schooling a step further by attending the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. She majored in mass media and minored in human resources. She was on the Dean’s List, and the honor society for non-traditional students, Alpha Sigma Lambda, inducted Annette. She was also chosen to be leader of a public relations campaign for a capstone class.

Annette graduated in December. She is looking for a job, taking care of her 8-year old son, and trying to rebuild a relationship with her now 20-year old daughter. She has her hands full.

Annette says of her experience, “It was just one day at a time. I couldn’t look at next week or next term. I just had to make every day count as that day came.” Non-traditional student, Annette Blair, is not hung up by her history. She is building it by living in the present.