

New Life

BY: ANNA DELLINGER



Like most toddlers, Stetson plays outside, makes people laugh at his silliness, and snuggles his mom when she's sad. But what isn't typical is that Stetson changed his mom's life forever.

Kayla Jeffers struggled with addiction for over 10 years. What started as experimentation with alcohol and marijuana as a young teen led to alcoholism, opiates, and pills – and then to shooting heroin.

“Addiction runs in my family, so I was probably destined to go down that route,” Kayla said.

At age 24, she found out she was pregnant; Kayla was devastated. She was addicted to heroin, in the process of being evicted, and had warrants for her arrest.

“I knew I always wanted to be a mom, but not like this,” Kayla said.

After a referral, Kayla ended up at the STAR Prenatal Clinic, which provides specialized care for pregnant mothers with substance use disorders. She stayed sober for the remainder of her pregnancy; however, she wasn't sure she could stay clean. She made the heartbreaking decision to put her son up for adoption. When Stetson was born, though, she changed her mind.

“What I love about being a mom is the purpose it has given me. I can't explain the joy my heart feels when my son is laughing,” Kayla said. “When I think about relapsing, I don't want to put my kid through that.”



Not long after Stetson's birth, Kayla became a victim of domestic violence – left with no money, no job, and nowhere to go. She and her son desperately needed a fresh start.

When a friend told her about the Center for Social Innovation (CFSI), Kayla was intrigued. CFSI is an OSU-OKC program that provides educational pathways – through tuition stipends, personal and professional development, and other resources – to individuals experiencing social barriers.

“Going to school never crossed my mind. I never thought I would be good at it or capable of it,” Kayla said.

At first, the idea of writing essays and answering multiple choice questions seemed impractical, because Kayla and Stetson still needed a safe place to live. However, Kayla took the leap and applied for the program anyway. CFSI referred Kayla to Hope House, and she began taking classes at OSU-OKC and living at Hope House simultaneously.

“A lot of people coming out of addiction don't have professional experience, or it's been a long time since they were in the workforce,” Kayla explained. “Without this program, I probably would've gone back to waiting tables. Nothing is wrong with being a server – I made a lot of money, but it's not what I wanted to do forever.”



So, instead of hustling from table to table, Kayla encountered a whirlwind of training, certifications, college classes, and an internship – all while learning how to be a single mom. Kayla graduated from CFSI in May 2023 with no regrets.

And the support from CFSI didn't end at graduation. Only weeks after she completed her work at CFSI, Kayla got into a car accident and her car was totaled – an extreme financial setback for anyone, but especially damaging to a single mom still early in her sobriety journey. As soon as they heard about the need, CFSI partnered with a local nonprofit to help Kayla get into a new vehicle.

“CFSI changes people's lives like mine. I have a life to lose now.”

Today, Kayla is three-and-a-half years sober. Because of an internship at Neighborhood Services Organization (NSO) during her time in the CFSI program, she has now worked there full time since June 2023. With this steady job comes financial independence – Kayla has health insurance and a 401K, and she no longer qualifies for food stamps, Medicaid, or childcare assistance.

She's even on a patient advisory board for STAR Clinic, pouring back into a program that impacted her and Stetson's lives. The two have a strong support system including family, the Hope House staff, church, and CFSI graduates.

“I have incredible people rooting for me,” Kayla said. “I never in a million years would've seen myself having a respectable job or having impact where I'm helping people. I never would've thought I would be capable of something like that until I went to CFSI.”

