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Childhaven Celebration Luncheon
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I gave up crack cocaine once and for all on January 10th, 2010.

My baby girl was born the next day.

Having the chance to be a real father for my daughter – body, mind and soul – was what I needed to finally kick a drug habit that I'd had for decades.

It was a life changing moment for me.

But becoming clean and sober wasn't enough to make me a good father. That took Childhaven. //

A lot of the parents at Childhaven were abused or neglected themselves when they were kids. But I grew up in Seattle with a loving family and a stable home.

My own bad choices are responsible for me getting involved with drugs and dropping out of school in the eleventh grade.

For a lot of years, I hit the lowest points you can imagine. I went to prison for doing drugs. Then I would get out and turn right back to my old habits.

I found the Salvation Army in 2003 and it really was the first step to salvation for me. It showed me that there was a higher power I could lean on. I might fail myself, but God would not fail me.

Things started to get better and I did pretty well for three years... but my addiction was stronger than my faith, stronger than my desire to change. So I went back to crack.

During all this time, my mother would often take me in when my drug use was so bad that I could not hold a job. But both my mother and my sister died in 2009, and my loneliness and depression pushed me even further off the edge.

I became homeless. That's right. I was one of those guys you see sleeping under a bridge or on a park bench with all his belongings in a black plastic bag. It was awful.

I was still doing drugs and so was my girlfriend when she got pregnant. I was already in my 40's by then... but I was so excited about becoming a father.

My faith and my strong will to be the father my baby deserved finally, finally made the difference for me. The day before she was born was the last day I touched crack. One day at a time, with the grace of God, I am still clean and sober. //

When Daleionia was born, she was addicted to crack just like her mother. Knowing what drugs had done to that tiny little baby – my own child, who never asked to be brought into this world – it made my heart break. I knew that I would do anything to protect her from being hurt again. //

The state stepped in and Daleionia went into foster care with my girlfriend's brother. When Child Protective Services finally allowed me to see my daughter six weeks after she was born... she was so beautiful! There were still a lot of roadblocks ahead for us... but I was determined that, one day, we would be a family.

Daleionia went into Childhaven as an infant. They have a special program that cares for babies when they are born to drug or alcohol addicts.

I had to walk a couple miles and ride the bus for three hours round trip... but I visited the infant room to see Daleionia every single day.

I could not believe how my little girl took off at Childhaven! The teachers were so loving. Just watching them helped me learn how to take care of Daleionia.

And even though she was not living with me, Childhaven knew that it was important for the two of us to bond... so they helped us develop a relationship.

I loved spending time with Daleionia at Childhaven. But then I had to go back to jail on an old charge from my days of doing drugs. This time, I stayed clean.

And one year later when I got out, I went straight to Childhaven to see my little girl.

But, of course, she didn't know me. She ran away from me, and again, I thought my heart would break. But Childhaven knew exactly what to do and how to help us mend our relationship. Three weeks later, my daughter was calling me Daddy. //

I'm sorry to say that being a mother didn't change my girlfriend. She has never been a big part of Daleionia's life. I was able to prove to the court that all the support and education I got at Childhaven had made me a good father. I was awarded full custody, of Daleionia... and we finally became the family that I always dreamed of. //

That was three years ago. Since then, Childhaven has taught me how to be even more responsible as a father. I know how to teach Daleionia right from wrong... how to reward all her good behaviors... and how to be regular and gentle when she needs discipline.

Childhaven did such a terrific job that I am now working in King County's Parent-to-Parent program... helping other moms and dads learn how to navigate the child welfare system so they can get their kids back, too. //

I have always loved volunteering in Daleionia's classroom at Childhaven. I still do that. And even though I know that I am an awesome father, I understand that you never

graduate from parenting school. I am still learning by watching Daleionia with her amazing teachers.

You see, I loved my baby from the day she was born... but Childhaven taught me how to love her in all the right ways. //

Daleionia just turned four, and she is beautiful inside and out. She is smart and funny and unselfish. This is her last year at Childhaven before she goes into preschool in the fall. We will miss everyone at Childhaven who has become like family to us.

But as Daleionia is able to succeed in school thanks to the strong foundation of care and love and early learning that she got at Childhaven... as she grows into a strong and self-reliant young woman... as she starts her own family and makes me a grandfather one day... I know that I will have Childhaven to thank for both our happy lives – and for all the happy lives that come after us.

Without Childhaven – without your support – none of this would have been possible. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.