

Shelly's Story of Success

Shelly is a former addict who struggled with crack/cocaine off and on for ten years. After using narcotics for so long, Shelly found the help she needed from the Prince of Peace center (P.O.P.) in Sharon, PA. Now that Shelly is sober, the United Way of Mercer County is helping share her story and the success she had in Prince of Peace center's following programs: Family Supportive Services (F.S.S.), Project Ruth, and Hope Advocacy.

Shelly's story begins with her as a young adult. She was married to a man who used crack cocaine. Shelly never used crack with her husband, but her husband ended up leaving her and their daughter for someone who also used crack. Shelly later began dating another man who used crack, during which relationship she began experimenting with cocaine "*here and there*" and thought of it as "*nothing big.*" Eventually, Shelly tried crack for the first time, and she ended up using it with her boyfriend on a more regular basis. Not too long after the two split up, Shelly met the father of her second daughter, who also used crack. He ended up dying of an accidental overdose. Instead of going to receive counseling or treatment, Shelly began to use crack more heavily. "*It was the only thing that took the pain away of him being gone...*" she explained, and as a result Shelly had her daughters taken away by Children Youth Services (CYS).

Shelly fought with the courts to regain custody of her children, all while she was in and out of rehabilitation programs. Shelly had also been sent to jail "*a few times*", for periods of ten to forty days each, due to both retail theft and testing positive to drug screens. After these periods of on-and-off drug use, and a few trips to jail, Shelly was placed on probation. Months after being placed on probation Shelly was given an eviction notice by her land lord. It seemed as if she could not catch a break no matter which way she turned and she continued to make bad choices.

One fateful night Shelly went to the Dollar General in Farrell, PA, with a friend. Shelly had seen a shirt she liked in the store and decided to steal it. That night she was arrested and taken to the Farrell jail. The next morning Shelly was arraigned, given a five thousand dollar bond, and had a

detainer placed on her due to the violation of her probation. Normally, Shelly could have been bailed out, but due to the detainer placed on her she would have to wait for trial while in jail. Later that day Shelly awoke to another surprise, although it was a much happier one. Shelly's probation officer (PO) had been changed, and, without ever meeting Shelly, her new PO had her released from jail. She contacted him that day and he told her to come up to his office, promising her *"we will not put you in jail"* if she went. Shelly was given an *"electronic ankle box"* and was allowed to stay on probation.

Shelly, still worrying about where she was going to live, received a phone call that would change her life. Natalie from the P.O.P. center called her and told her to come in for an interview to join the F.S.S. program. Now Shelly faced a difficult choice. She could tell the entire truth, or lie about her criminal charges. *"I had to tell them the truth, prior to my interview I had been caught for retail theft and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. That was the hardest thing I ever had to say to these people, I figured I blew my whole chance of getting into this program."* Shelly had good reason to doubt. At that point in time Shelly was on probation, had five retail thefts, and three felonies. Shelly remembered her thoughts before the interview. *"I pondered, maybe I shouldn't tell them"*, she explained. Ultimately, she made the decision to tell the whole truth about her situation, and left the interview thinking there was no way she would be accepted. To her surprise Natalie called and told her she had been accepted into the program. This turned out to be the best thing to happen to Shelly, and at the end of our interview with Shelly she explained *"I have not once thought that I wasn't going to get something out of this and I have been true ever since. Honestly it's the best decision I ever made. It truly is."*

Shelly has been sober now for sixteen months and counting. Now she works hard to take care of herself, her mother, and her youngest daughter. Thanks to the P.O.P. center, the United Way of Mercer County, and a whole lot of determination Shelly was able to beat her addiction and finally live a normal, healthy life.