

This will be the first real Christmas that I'm able to give my little girl.

Now that I'm in recovery and sober, she gets a real mom, which is all she's ever wanted. I wasn't expecting to be living in our own place for Christmas, but my oldest daughter and I have just moved from the Outreach Center's Lighthouse shelter into our own apartment that my case manager helped find.

I've always been a shy person, but I hope to help someone out there by sharing my story.

When I came to the Outreach Center on March 27, 2007, for my alcohol addiction, I had no self-esteem, no self-worth and, not to mention, none of my children. If I had continued on my self-destructive path, it's no exaggeration to say that I would have been dead on the side of the road somewhere.

The Outreach Center has given me back my life and my self-worth. My peers in the center's recovery program are like my brothers and sisters. Even though we all come from different backgrounds, we were all powerless over life from our addiction.

The Outreach Center taught me that I'll never have to go back to my old life. Job-readiness classes, counseling and life lessons taught by my house mother helped me achieve sobriety and my own life.

While I've been at the center, I've expressed myself through art. I can't express myself very well in words, but I can paint it out. Art helps me open up to people.

The center's "Voices of Recovery" Choir is another activity that keeps me out of myself and overcoming my shyness. I can't really sing, but I make a joyful noise.

Today I feel like all things are possible. My mother can trust me again, and she's not worried about me anymore. I've maintained my job as a deli manager, and my work life is peaceful.

When I graduate from my program at the center, I want to volunteer doing art therapy workshops and sponsoring clients to help them out the same way others did for me.

I know, because of this center, that I have help whenever I need it and that they are here for me and my family if they should ever walk the path that I've walked.

I'd lost hope in other programs and didn't think recovery would be possible, but I got help, and it's awesome. I want people to know there is help that can work for you.

The Acadiana Outreach Center serves the needy with food, clothing, transitional shelter, case management and counseling for substance abuse, mental health issues and life skills.

Rachel Pareti

Guest columnist



Outreach Center helps a woman rebuild a family