

Laura Cantrel



P.O. Box 2285, Lehigh Valley PA 18001-2285 (215) 433-6709

David W. Houseknecht, Director of Support Services  
(215) 433-6710

Hi, I'm Laura, I am thirty-two years old, and the mother of four children.

I was twenty-four years old living in New York City, it was a depressing time of my life. I just split up with my children's father and lost my apartment. I ended up moving in to a small room about the size of a bathroom, a building where ninety per cent of the people were I.V. drug users. I soon became one of them, this lasted about three months. During that time I met a man who took me away from that way of life. We moved to Far Rockaway on Long Island. I was six-months pregnant then had a son. At a year-old he developed pneumonia after that he was always sick and no one knew what was wrong with him. Doctors came from the Bronx and tested him positive for the AIDS virus. At this point, I was already pregnant with another son. The baby's father and I were tested. I tested positive, his test was negative. When my son was two months old he and I were both having problems with diarrhea and had trouble keeping food down we were both running fevers. He was admitted to the hospital, he almost died that same night. He was transferred to a hospital in the Bronx. Meanwhile, I started getting rashes on my face, and my other son started running high fevers, and had constant diarrhea he was admitted to the same hospital. They shared the same room their cribs were next to each other. They went through hell, some good days, and some bad days. They had I.V.'s everywhere. They both died at the age of three within one year apart from each other.

After the death of my two sons, I started to do drugs and alcohol heavily. I didn't want to deal with all of this. The drugs and the alcohol must of suppressed my immune system even more. I soon developed Herpes Zoster in my left eye shortly after that it was Bell's Palsy, Hepatitis than Herpes Zoster again this time on my right side. I got Bell's Palsy a second time, it affected my whole right instead of just my face. After that I developed pneumonia, and had bronchial problems.

I haven't been hospitalized in the last two years. I spent a month in jail due to my problems with drugs. After that I started losing weight. I lost twenty pounds and my hair started falling out. My T cell count dropped. I was having problems eating, and problems with thrush. I was taking AZT for a year and a half, and then stopped taking it for six-months. I started taking it again, but the second time I took two every six hours instead of two every four hours. My body tolerated it much better my hair stopped falling out and my stomach problems disappeared.

After jail I met some wonderful people, people that helped me with my drug problems and I stopped drinking. My life was changing. I started going to AIDS support groups, I am a volunteer at the AIDS Services Center, I went to AIDS Buddy Trainings. I've learned I was living with AIDS, not dying from AIDS! I believe that changing my attitude and changing my life style is keeping me alive. I will not give in to AIDS, I will survive! I plan on being a grandmother! It was hell for me and my children getting kicked out of everywhere no one wanted to deal with people with AIDS. We still have a long way to go. I am happy to see people are coming around!