

Keisha Dunson



Keisha's story is one of resolve and survival. Just a few years ago, while living in the Bronx, Keisha's boyfriend and father of her two-year old son shot her in both legs with a 357 caliber gun. At the time of the shooting, her two-year old was in her arms and her other four children were just outside the door, fearful of what was happening.

Keisha explained that her then 42-year old husband had been diagnosed as a manic depressive schizophrenic when he was a young adult, but he had not had a psychotic episode since he was 20 years old.

While she was hospitalized, Keisha's husband was incarcerated and sentenced to 17 months in prison. Keisha's children went to live with her mother in upstate New York. After her discharge from the hospital, Keisha was in a wheel chair. She required extensive therapy, and was facing more surgeries so she would be able to walk again. Her mother's tiny apartment upstate was too small for Keisha, her wheel chair and her five children, so Keisha left the children in the care of her mother and took temporary refuge in a domestic violence shelter in Hudson, N.Y. Keisha said, "I couldn't take care of myself. How could I take care of my children in this condition? They needed to stay with my mother."

The next chapter in Keisha's life was a very depressing time for her. "I felt like I had lost everything." Keisha said, "My husband was released from prison and somehow managed to obtain custody of his son. I was still receiving medical treatment and recovering from surgeries. I was still in a wheel chair and became addicted to my pain medication." Keisha made some attempts to return to work, but with everything that was going on in her life, this was not successful.

Since she was not able to obtain the assistance and support she needed to pull her life together in New York, Keisha moved to Georgia where she had friends who could help. In Georgia, Keisha discovered she was eligible for Veterans' benefits. This is where her life began to turn around. She went to the VA hospital where she was detoxed from her pain medications, received the physical therapy she needed to walk again, set up with appropriate housing, and was reunited with four of her children.

Eventually, Keisha returned to Hudson, N.Y. so she could be near family. She relapsed, but quickly got help and entered a treatment program. Upon completion of treatment, she ended up in transitional housing in Schenectady, N.Y. Keisha said, "I was scared to death most of the time. I felt stuck in the house. Safety was a big thing for me then." Keisha learned about SCAP's Displaced Homemaker Program from a brochure and decided this might be the lift she needed to take the next step.

"Registering for this program was best thing I could have done for me and my family. It wet my appetite for more education. I attended ITT-Technical Institute, but that didn't work out because I didn't have transportation. Now I'm enrolled in SCCC and will get my degree soon."

"I think I am a good role model for my children. Because of my success with SCAP, my twins attended SCAP's Certified Nurses Assistance (CNA) program and now they can take care of themselves."

"I'm not sure what I will do next," said Keisha, "but I want to be helpful."

June, 2013