

She's 16 years old and the second daughter of divorced parents. She lives with her sister and mother and is in 10th grade. She'd been in the Second Chance Program in 2006 for fighting and stealing. At that time, she was in the midst of turmoil at home with her parents' divorce, and she claimed she would fight and steal to get attention. She was referred to the program again in 2009 for truancy. Prior to her attendance this time, she had spent a year in a girls' home in Columbia and admitted to using drugs and alcohol. At the residential facility, she met often with a therapist and psychiatrist, attended school, had to keep her "barracks" clean, ran on a regular basis, and completed general community service.

Prior to the spring of 2009, she had already been through a lot in her 16 years. She'd been arrested for fighting, used plenty of cocaine, marijuana and alcohol, experienced chronic stress headaches, social anxiety, and had been witness to her mother's abuse by her father. It seemed obvious to the program's facilitators that, in many ways, she had been forced to become an adult before it was her time. She had witnessed so much abuse and dysfunction, it greatly impacted her decision-making.

Once in the program, it became clear that the Second Chance classes were helping her. As the staff worked with her, she tearfully admitted that she and her family had weaknesses that needed to be addressed; when brought to light, these weaknesses were heartbreaking. She was nervous around big groups of people which may have been the reason she missed so much school. The medicine prescribed for her social anxiety had yet to work, but she pushed on. She wanted to prove herself to her parents, her extended family, and her school. She finally stated that the proverbial "light bulb went on." In addition, she remarked that, "The classes helped me so much more this time around. I wasn't interested in learning the material before." Her mother also came to realize that her relationship with her daughter needed strengthening. Talking more and communicating better had become imperative. Her mother committed herself to the family's progress, and she too completed the eight workshops most enthusiastically. There was finally hope for her child and improving her own competency as a parent.

This young girl successfully graduated from Second Chance. She learned stress and anger management skills, conflict resolution, listening and communication, and taking responsibility for her actions.

Over the last several months, she has reaped the benefits of having participated in the program. Because of her determination and astounding turnaround, she was hand-picked to speak to the Director of the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice at the statewide press conference for "DJJ Community Service

Day” on September 12th in Columbia. The Coordinator of Second Chance collaborated with her school’s Attendance Officer and Assistant Principal(s) to exchange praises about her work and remarkable progress. Her mother now comments, “What a wonderful young lady she’s become! We communicate with each other now like we should have all along.”

She would tell you today that she’s feeling better about herself and has a “new lease on life.” She’s regularly attending school and has told the Second Chance facilitators that she wants to one day pursue a career in mental health.