



Zandra, baby Zandra  
and Debbie (background)

# Off the streets, off drugs, and on with life— thanks to you!

*“Without the Nest,  
I’d probably be back  
on the street.”*

Like many graduates of Cherry Street’s Ready for Life program, Zandra has quite a story to tell. By the time she was in her mid-30s, she had been a crack addict for 20 years and spent the last three living on the dangerous streets of downtown Detroit.

“Then I got pregnant,” she recalled. “I promised God that I’d leave Detroit and turn my life around if I had the money,” she said. “I was able to trade a food card for cash and bought a bus ticket to Toledo because it was the cheapest ticket available.”

Once in Toledo, she attempted to kick her habit, but with no success. When she gave birth on February 2, 2008, her daughter tested positive for crack. Although the baby was not addicted, the law required that she be placed in foster care. Devastated, Zandra was determined to beat her habit so she could get her baby back. She achieved sobriety with the help of Covenant House and COMPASS, then came to the Sparrow’s Nest in April 2008 in hopes of maintaining it.

“I got into the Ready for Life program right away,” Zandra recalled. “My relationship with the Lord grew much stronger at the Nest. I came to rely on Him for everything. Classes like *Celebrate Recovery* and *Thinking for a Change* helped a lot. I also found classes on parenting and nutrition very helpful.”

Zandra saw her baby—also named Zandra—during foster mom Debbie’s regular visits to the Nest. In the process, Debbie and mom Zandra grew close. “I’ve never done that with a mom before,” explained Debbie, who has fostered children for over a decade. “Most are angry because I have their child, but I didn’t see that in Zandra. Instead, I saw a lot of growth: taking responsibility, wanting to do what she needed to do to achieve her goals.”

Celeste Smith, program coordinator of St. Vincent Mercy Medical Center’s Healthy Connections, was equally impressed with Zandra. In fact, Zandra did so well in a St. V’s program for parents of substance-exposed newborns that Celeste invited her to share her story at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration’s 17th Annual Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect in Atlanta this month.

Now living independently, Zandra has regained custody of her daughter and is busy building her new life. “Faith is the thing you have to have to survive,” she stated. “It made a world of difference in staying clean.

“Without the Nest, I’d probably be back on the street, trying to get off drugs.”