

FACES OF FAMILY CENTERS

Michelle Rodriguez



Michelle Rodriguez fights to hold back tears every time she recounts the way her life spiraled out of control three years ago. As a working mother raising her baby boy, Joey, Michelle struggled to make ends meet. She regularly put in 15-hour days at two jobs just to afford her basic living expenses, and was always running on minimal sleep. To make matters worse,

Michelle was involved in an abusive relationship that left her physically beaten and emotionally drained. Overwhelmed and exhausted, Michelle began experimenting with illegal substances in an effort to continue this torrid schedule.

For a while, Michelle seemed to keep everything in check – she made it to work on time and tended to Joey’s every need. But inevitably, the Department of Children and Families caught wind of her growing addiction and the ongoing violence at home. With Joey’s safety in mind, the State placed him in a foster home until Michelle was able to kick her habit and improve her living situation.

Determined to get her baby back, Michelle enrolled in an intensive drug counseling program to deal with her addiction issues. She also ended her abusive relationship and began looking for a new place to live. In the meantime, she began working with Family Centers’ Reconnecting Families program to prepare for Joey’s eventual return home. Together

with her case manager, Michelle focused on making her new apartment in Stamford the ideal place to raise a toddler. Proper furnishings were purchased and baby-proofing items were installed to ensure comfort and safety. Michelle was also offered the support and counseling she needed to beat her drug addiction and become a better mother.

Once it was determined that Michelle had gotten her life back on track and could adequately care for Joey, Family Centers helped ensure the reunification process went smoothly. Supervised visits slowly turned into one-on-one outings for Michelle and Joey. As Michelle proved her progress as a responsible parent, Joey was permitted to spend the night alone in his mother’s new home. After nearly a year and a half of hard work, Michelle was finally reunited with her little boy.

“Now that Joey’s home, I’m complete,” said Michelle. “This whole process left me heartbroken, but Family Centers was there every step of the way. There was a time when I thought my parental rights would be revoked, but they pushed me in the right direction. I’m very grateful for everything they’ve done.”

As Michelle can attest to, a mother’s love can overcome many obstacles. Today, Michelle is happier than ever. She’s been clean for almost two years now and is back to working full-time. Joey is a talkative four-year-old who loves Spider-Man and playing with his friends at preschool. But when asked about his favorite part of the day, Joey gives a smile and says, “When Mommy comes to get me.”