

MEET CHERYL.

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Cheryl and her infant daughter, Skyla, moved to the La Crosse area when Cheryl was 22. Cheryl had packed up her life to escape domestic abuse, just as her own mother had done when Cheryl and her siblings were little.

Cheryl enrolled at Western Technical College but struggled. She was a full-time student, full-time mom, and was working two jobs to make ends meet. She knew no one in the area and found it difficult to connect with her peers. Cheryl had been using alcohol as a coping mechanism since she was a teen, and that behavior continued.

Cheryl was referred to Family & Children's Center's Healthy Families program during her second year of college. She resisted at first, not wanting to invite someone in who would, she thought, only criticize her parenting. Cheryl warmed up to the idea once she met her case worker, Deb.

Deb helped Cheryl with a variety of things: Skyla's doctor visits, her post-graduation plans, and finding a new place to live when she no longer qualified for low-income housing. Deb remained in Cheryl and Skyla's lives until they aged out

of the program when Skyla started kindergarten. The connections Deb helped Cheryl make – including many to other United Way-funded programs – helped Cheryl gain confidence in herself and her parenting.

Now, 25 years later, Cheryl is married to a wonderful man who chose to legally adopt Skyla when she was 11. Together, they have another child – a son, Isaac. Cheryl has been sober for several years and recently started her own business, Changing Lanes Fitness & Nutrition, where she helps clients overcome obstacles, including childhood trauma, to achieve their health and wellness goals.

Cycles of poverty, abuse, and addiction can take generations to break, and like Cheryl, Skyla has overcome her share of challenges. As a Prevention Educator at United Way-certified partner Coulee Council on Addictions, Skyla empowered kids to make better decisions than she did when she was their age. Skyla recently earned a master's degree in public health and hopes to continue helping people.

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Nine.

Every 9 seconds, a woman in the U.S. is beaten. Girls who grow up in abusive homes are 6x more likely to experience abuse as adults.



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