



# THE WOMEN'S CENTER





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“Founded in 1979, The Women’s Center’s mission is to inspire and empower women, men, and children to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty. It is a place of hope, opportunity, and better futures for families of Tarrant County.”





## Editor's Note

We would like to start our chapbook with a content warning. There will be mentions of sexual assault, sexual violence, and suicide attempts. Please make sure to take care of yourself before, during, and after reading.

This is the 4th edition of The Women's Center Chapbook, and we are extremely honored to have talked with survivors who have sought out help from The Women's Center.

To Ana, Charla, Caro, Octavia, Shivon, Tabitha, and Valerie, we can never thank you enough for sharing your stories with us. Your strength, vulnerability, and hope have changed each member of the chapbook staff.

The motto of The Women's Center is "Hope Starts Here," and through each interaction, we had with staff and survivors, we have seen how true this statement is. The Women's Center will continue to bring hope into the lives of so many more people, and in this chapbook, you will read the testimonies of seven women who have found their hope here.

Thank you to Dr. Chantel L. Carlson who led us with so much compassion, to Katharine Collier Esser who made sure to stress the importance of self-care, and to our staff who handled the content with phenomenal care and empathy. And once again, thank you to the incredible survivors who you will hear from in this chapbook.

We also want to thank you for reading, and we wish that you will find a similar hope by reading their stories.

Thank you so much.

Maggie McLaughlin and Zachary Mills  
Editors-in-Chief, Spring 2022





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# PARTICIPANTS

SHIVON

VALERIE

OCTAVIA

CARO

ANA

TABITHA

CHARLA

THERAPIST

INTERVIEWER





*In general in Tarrant County, 1 in 3 women will experience domestic violence according to SafeHaven of Tarrant County.*

*Nationally, this is 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.*

*According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 1 in 5 women in the United States have experienced attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.*

*Terri Poore, Policy Director of the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, stated that almost 40% of the rape crisis centers the group surveyed had increased demand for services during the COVID-19 outbreak.*

*However, some hospitals are performing fewer sexual assault forensic exams than this time last year. The reason for this is multi-faceted, but it is believed that fear of going to the hospital is likely a contributing factor.*







## Personal Stories

### SHIVON

For me, [speaking to you today] was a huge opportunity to bridge the gap between my fears and my new success story. And I'd like to share a poem with you guys if that's okay. It's really deep. I speak an analogy a lot. So when I say it's deep, I don't know how everyone else feels it, but for me, it's deep...I do wanna point out real quick, just before I start the poem, the power of three.





3:33AM – again  
January 9, 2022

I can't sleep, I can't even truly think.  
All the words inside my head are jumbled, like passengers on a  
ship about to sink.  
Sink. Dishes. Damn.  
Another day, another undone.  
I wish I felt anything, but numb.  
I want to feel so that I may begin to heal.  
I'm trapped, the walls are closing in, I can't really breathe but I  
vaguely recall how to swim.  
Good. I won't drown.  
Maybe.  
Please, save me!!!!  
I don't know who I can count on, I can count pretty high but  
each one I thought I could count  
on, now lives in the sky.  
I am so afraid. Afraid of leaving scars like my own. I don't want  
that to be the seeds I sow!  
I want out of my head, I'm so afraid I'll wind up dead.  
Before I can escape, I don't need a superhero with a cape, I need  
a will and a way to get past all  
the rape.  
Not the way you think. Well, some of what you think, too.  
You see these intrusive thoughts did not receive my consent, it  
was NEVER my intent, to allow  
these things to keep playing on a loop.  
I lost myself. I'm somewhere inside. Inside my own mind.  
Occupying places I don't belong in.  
Rent so late I'll forever be fined.  
I am so SORRY!!! To the ones I've loved and done wrong, to  
myself for not letting go  
for so long.





## VALERIE

When I first came in [to The Women's Center], I had been molested several times throughout the years starting at a very young age. That had messed me up real bad, but I kept that all, I kept it all inside of me, kept it all inside of me. I remember at the age of 13, my mom, she believed my stepdad over me and wanted to put me out. So that caused a lot of trauma, because I was like, how can my mom believe this guy and put me out just that fast? Like I was nothing, you know, that's how it made me feel. And so it grew to where I had a lot of resentment towards my sisters and my mom. There's a time I can remember my mom telling me she hated me because I looked like my dad, and that caused a lot of trauma, but seriously, she looked at me dead in my eyes and told me that. And it really, that really was like one of the main things that just really messed me up overall.

## OCTAVIA

In 2020, I was having a lot of nightmares, a lot of panic attacks out in public, and generally I am pretty social. And so having the panic attacks was a very big impact on me cuz it made me not want to like leave the house. I didn't feel safe anywhere and things like that, but, you know, continuing my therapy, I was able to work through that, and I haven't had any nightmares, any panic attacks, and now I'm really free to go where I please. But at that time, you know, and it was for a while, so at that time without having therapy, I probably just would've stayed in the house.

## CARO

I grew up in a family...I grew up in a family where incest and rape and domestic violence were the normal. And so just having that reality shift and re-seeing my relationships with not only men that I had known when I was an adult,





but men I had known when I was a child, that was a pivotal moment for me. And that is also one of the reasons why I continued coming to therapy. Maya Angelou says that, when you know better, you do better. And I discovered that I didn't know a whole lot that I thought I knew, and I really wanted to do better and be better and live recovery for my kids, because they had seen the mess, and I wanted them to see something different.

#### VALERIE

And I ended up working the streets and stuff and just more trauma and more trauma kept coming on. And instead of trying to deal with it, or figuring out how to deal with it, I just kept sticking it further and further and further inside of me. And that's not the way to do it, because I was a hot mess when I finally did come in here. And I didn't have a voice, I didn't have nothing. I was like, I was scared of everybody, I didn't trust nobody, I didn't believe in nobody, and I didn't care. And so I was a work of art. I'm sure I was. But yeah, it's just that The Women's Center, my therapist was the best. I swear, she's just the best.

#### ANA

I learned a lot of things. My ex-husband had committed a few crimes, and even at that time, you know, my therapist can attest that I struggled to even realize that I had been abused, because it wasn't the, you know, typical physical abuse that we're brought up to really know, so, I knew I had a lot of mixed feelings and a lot of anxiety and stress from the things that had happened in our marriage, but I couldn't really identify what that was until I came here and had worked through it. So that was a big thing to say, this has happened to me.





And then just, you know, managing being a single mom and the difficult relationship, or lack thereof, with my ex-husband and their father. And so, I think that's probably the big thing.

### TABITHA

It can take a lot longer to get over trauma. And that can go for children or adults. So I don't think that we give people, children or adults, grace when it comes to when they're trying to deal with traumatic things that happened in their past. It might be that it didn't affect...cuz like I said, we have four boys. So the same thing happened to two of 'em that happened, you know, like it's, it's very similar. So one of 'em could take it and just be like, okay. And he did the play therapy and everything, and he seems fine, like he's like, I'm okay. And then the other kid is still like, I don't understand why didn't my birth mom choose me and why is she still...and he just, he's struggling more than the other one, when the other one just kind of accepted it, like this is the way that it is, okay, and then we have another one who just does not accept it. And so the truth is, trauma is trauma, and it's your own personal story and journey, no matter how long it takes you to get over it, or never get over it...how to cope with it is the right words to say. Cause you might never get over it. You just learn to live with it. And I don't, I don't think that even myself, I don't think that I give enough grace to people, because I'm like get over it.





## CHARLA

Just talking about what happened, which was very, very hard for me, cuz I had never told anyone until my husband about a year ago, and then I just knew that I needed to get help cuz I was just getting more and more depressed and upset and anxious and just having a really, really hard time, and I knew I had to do something.

## SHIVON

Whenever I feared getting help, it was because I didn't wanna give up control of the one thing that I have control of, which was, well, what I thought I had control of, y'all, just being honest, which is my emotions. Y'all, I have no control of my emotions at all. Thank goodness for therapy. And a misconception that I would hope to clear up, is that, that freedom that you feel from what you think is gonna hurt you, is what heals you.





## Let's Take a Breath

THERAPIST

Breath, deep breath.

CARO

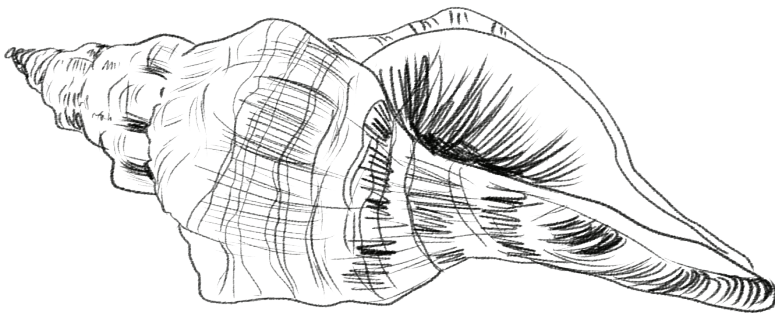
Sorry.

INTERVIEWER

You don't need to apologize.

THERAPIST

You're doing good.





## Why The Women's Center

OCTAVIA

In the beginning, it took a long time to get help. [I] knew I needed help and things like that but didn't know any resources, especially in my community. Things that happen to you that are very impactful like this, they aren't talked about. And so, I have always wanted to be able to at least, you know, if it's just one person like through things that I learned, obviously I needed help for myself, but, if I could help the next person just to, you know, even just information is helpful and they can make their own decision.

CARO

In January of 2015 or December of 2015, I had attempted suicide a couple of times and I was in crisis...So I was in crisis and I was an alcoholic still, still I'm an alcoholic today, a recovering alcoholic. And I had gotten to the place where I had figured out that I knew nothing about the way life really worked, but I didn't know how to change that. And so I called the crisis hotline that The Women's Center has. And they interviewed me over the phone, and because of the







state that I was in and I was coming out of a psychotic break, they bumped me and I got a therapist. And so that's why I decided to come, because I was at the end of everything that I understood.

#### VALERIE

And you know, it's a safe place to go to. It's a secure place, and you don't have to worry about nobody talking about you or putting your business out there really. And you can just open up and just, just be you and just get it out. And that's what I really liked about coming here, because it didn't matter what I was going through.

#### TABITHA

And so the first phrasing we learned, you know, was like calm yourself by yourself. And I'm like, that's just a joke because my son's just gonna scream and keep throwing things, but okay, we'll do it. And like the first time we did it, we just kept saying it, you don't say anything else, that's all you say. And then he just stops and looks at me and he's like, what? I'm like, you have to calm yourself by yourself. And he's like, oh, and I was like, I don't know how that worked. Or the first time we gave options, would you like to walk up the stairs by yourself, or would you like me to hold your hand? And every time before bed, he would scream for like 30 minutes trying to drag him up the stairs. And the first time we did this, and he's like, I'll hold your hand. And then he just went up the stairs. We literally were looking at each other. We were like, I can't believe this is working. But if you don't do the steps, it's not gonna work. Cause I have friends that have adopted children, same issue, you know, backstory, and she's





like, I just, I can't control them. I can't do this. It's just insane. I'm like, cuz if you don't do the steps, then it's not gonna work. So do the steps, whether it's for yourself or for your children, you know what I mean? If you're at The Women's Center needing healing, or you're at The Women's Center because your children need healing, do the steps that they say.

#### VALERIE

My therapist would say, let's try to do it this way, let's try to do it this way, you know. And that's what I really liked about it, because it's not like I was being told to do anything. They're like, let me help you.

#### ANA

[The Women's Center has] really helped me see things differently. I was really stressed and anxious when I came, and my therapist has really helped me, I guess, talk through the things that I feel, and it offers different perspectives of things that I probably didn't see before. So I just feel really welcomed here, and I feel like I've made a lot of progress, so I will definitely keep coming back...I've already just recommended people to the general counseling here. Just, you know, everyone here seems very helpful, knowledgeable. My son also comes here and sees a different therapist, and I mean, both of us just love coming for every session that we have. So, I would definitely recommend them to come just, just to be able to talk to someone and to work through life struggles, even if they're not a victim, but especially if they are. I mean, you know, there's, there are a lot of emotions that come with that, that skilled professionals can help you with.





### CHARLA

I finally realized that I need to start speaking about my story, cause I, I never told anybody, like I said, until a year ago, my husband, and then I've only told like two other people since before I started coming here, and I know I need to. I need to start sharing my story more.

### CARO

So we have this saying in Alcoholics Anonymous that you must be willing to do whatever it takes to go to any length. And part of going to any length for me was getting therapy. I wanted to stay sober, and so that's why I kept coming back.

### VALERIE

Give The Women's Center a chance. At the end of the day, you might start thinking, gosh, maybe this is a good place for me. Maybe I do have hope after all. Maybe I can go out and I can be somebody now, you know, just, I mean, that's just how I feel. It gives you that hope every day. Every time you go to counseling gives you a little bit more hope every day that, well, I might be able to actually accomplish this today, as to where yesterday I couldn't have done it.

### OCTAVIA

If somebody was looking to join or look into [The Women's Center] service, I would just tell them to do it.

### VALERIE

It's for everybody. It's for men, it's for children, and it's for women, and it's not just a place like a shelter like people think it might be. It's a place where you can go to get the help that you need and get the guidance and the direction





in your life that you need and hoped, so you have that hope  
so you can have that hope of light at the end of the tunnel.

### SHIVON

What keeps me coming back to The Women's Center?  
Hope.





## The Journey

CHARLA

I guess the biggest misconception is, through counseling, I'm starting to realize that it wasn't my fault. That I've always thought it was my fault, even though I have no idea why I thought that, but I'm finally beginning to realize that it wasn't.

ANA

Life is hard for everyone. So having someone there to support you, even outside of your family, cuz everyone usually kind of has the same beliefs in your family, and to have a different perspective and different, you know, knowledge set to be able to help you see things differently, to navigate through what you're dealing with.

CARO

I took a class called the Incest Survivors Workshop. So the very first thing that I learned was what the definition of what consent was. Up until that point, you know, I was taught what most girls were taught, from my family of origin, from the culture that I grew





up in, that your body doesn't belong to you if you're married. And two, that it was okay if someone had sex with you when you were drunk or whatever, whatever, whatever. And I found out that wasn't true.

### OCTAVIA

I learned a lot of different things that I knew that there were areas by myself that I could work on to prevent different things or, you know, to be more self-aware of the different things. And so, that's one of the big things that we're working on currently, and another reason why I'm so eager, for me to continue my therapy.

### VALERIE

So by having, you know, by having my trauma therapist, I was really happy to have her in my life at that time, because I really don't know which direction I would've took because I just ... I don't know. I don't know how I would've, you know, the way it would've turned out, because it just really took a big toll on me with my mom and everything.

### CARO

So that is the kind of thing that people with PTSD, that we deal with, because it comes from a trigger that you may not know is there. And so sounds, smells, words, songs...anything can trigger you. And like with people with regular PTSD, they, for the most part, from my understanding, is they went to war, they had a car accident, they had a hurricane, they know where it's coming from. And a lot of times we don't, because we're victims of something that





we don't remember, or we were too young, or we don't even know that it was trauma to start with. So that has dramatically improved. I have a much greater tolerance for stress triggers or emotional pain. So what would happen is I have this thing called dissociation. And so my emotions shut off, and I used to live with my emotions shut off. And then, every once in a while, I might feel a thing or two.

#### TABITHA

I was really hard on myself at the beginning. And so now I think I give a little bit more grace to them and to me, and I did not compromise ever, like it was my way or no way. And so I learned that I don't have to be in control. That's not what raising kids is about. It's not about being in control. It's about learning to work together.

#### VALERIE

As far as the misconceptions, I've heard a lot of people, and I can vouch for myself as one, whenever I've heard of The Women's Center or I've heard about therapy, when I even come about this, I'm like, no, I'm not gonna go to therapy. No, that's for crazy people. You know, I'm not crazy type of thing, you know. But when I did learn about The Women's Center and they really talked to me about it to let me know, you know, this is what you needed. And I kind of started realizing I do need therapy. There's something going on inside of me, and I need to get help. And in order to get that help to resolve these issues that's going on inside of me, maybe I will give The Women's Center a chance, and I will give therapy a chance. And it was probably the best move I ever made.





## ANA

I mean, prior to, you know, those crimes, I'm not sure that I even knew that this building was here. You know, and then learning from my therapist all of the different things that this place provides, like, information about trauma and financial services, and I think they've even offered, like, when I had a lot of legal issues at first, they can look over those things. So just, just that it's here and it's a resource for women and children, especially you know, if you've been in a situation where you are the victim of something, it's always nice to know what your resources are...I know there were times when I first came here before that, that I, I couldn't see the light at the end. I felt like I was drowning or struggling or on my knees, but it, if you just keep pushing, it'll get better, and you'll be able to look back and see that whatever that huge struggle was wasn't as big or isn't as big anymore as it was at the time. If you just keep moving forward and, and have an open mind, you know, to help yourself get out of whatever difficult situation that you're in.

## CARO

What drew me to talk to you guys today is that...I speak in churches, I speak in women's groups, or I've spoken to people that've just gotten out of prison, or at AA, but it's always inside my personal social circle. People who, somebody there knows me already. So just to get the opportunity to share a wider message is...I felt like that was an important opportunity.







## CHARLA

[My hope is] just to give other women and children hope. To know that whatever happened to you is not your fault, that you're stronger than you think you are, and there is hope.

## SHIVON

You have been a light in your own darkness, or you wouldn't be a survivor, you would be a victim. Remember when you cover a flame, it smothers. Let nothing, nothing smother yours. Be a light, and together we can light up the world.



## Let's Take a Breath

### THERAPIST

One of the things I teach is, when you breathe in, you get a deeper breath. If you bring it in through your nose and exhale with an open mouth, and if your exhale is longer than your inhale, you find a deeper sense of rest. So maybe we can just do a few inhales with your nose. 1, 2, 3... exhale. We're gonna open up. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. One more time. And through your nose 1, 2, 3, exhale with an open mouth 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. And then maybe just one more thing. Just kind of tap on your breast plate and that'll take away any other anxiety you might have, at least until it comes back, and then you do it again.



## Self-Care

### SHIVON

Previously, I did not understand self-care. When I say that, y'all, I literally had no idea. I enjoy painting. I enjoy photography. I enjoy outdoors, but none of that healed me. None of that made me feel like I was releasing enough of me to feel me again, if that makes any sense to anybody other than me. So recently, and most helpful on my journey of self-discovery and healing, I study the Bible and the meaning of its scriptures for my life.

### TABITHA

I'm a very, go, go, go person. And I normally, I coach my kids' baseball team and I teach at their Sunday school and so I'm just very involved in everything. And this year I'm having to step back for some personal reasons, cuz I can't do the things anymore right now. And so I started reading again 'cuz I got nothing else to do. So I read, like, four books this year, which is very impressive for me. I used to love to read, but I never got to do it...so I guess that's what I do for self-care myself, personally.





## CARO

I look in my body and find where I feel stress. Most of the time it's on the skin in my back, it'll start prickling, or sometimes my throat hurts; every once in a while, I'll get a stomach ache, but that's when it's really bad. So if I can, I try to maybe identify [what] the trigger was if I can. And if I can't, which happens, I learned about this stuff called bilateral stimulation, and I thought it was kind of dumb when I first heard about it. But if you go on YouTube and you look at what it is, it's a scientific thing. And it basically is noise or sounds at different frequencies going from the left side, right side of your brain. And it works. I don't know how, I don't know how to explain it, but it does. And I have headphones that have flat panels on 'em, and if I put that on, I fall asleep within minutes; it's almost like I took an Ambien or something. And for someone who has trouble sleeping, that's pretty fantastic. So I listen to that. I have this thing, it's a spot right here [points to sternum]. And I don't know, [my therapist] can tell you the science of it, I can't, but if I look at that spot, it kind of helps me calm down and sort of come into touch with where I'm at and keep myself from disassociating.

## CHARLA

I do the deep breathing. I do a lot of counting, like 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, and then, my therapist has also taught me the five senses.

## OCTAVIA

So if I'm stressed out or anything like that, I like to watch cleaning TikTok. I don't know, the sound of it, to me, it's relaxing. So I do that while I'll have a face





mask on or washing my hair, you know, different things like that around the house. Cleaning, for me, a house, if I'm not obsessively cleaning, but if I'm just cleaning to like, you know, just pick up around the house or to just clear my space and things like that, then that's very therapeutic to me. So I was, through therapy, I was able to differentiate the difference between I'm stressed out and I'm doing this and it's not very helpful, or I'm doing it to maintain self-care.

### VALERIE

I like to go home and cook, maybe something to eat after I get off work, relax, watch TV, and get myself ready, you know, for work the next day. And as far as my free time, if I'm stressing or whatever, I just, I sometimes I do some self-talk, and sometimes I'll like play a tape back...Or sometimes, if it's that bad, or I can't figure out what I need to do, I'll get on the phone, and I still have people that I can call today if it's that serious, and I feel like I just need somebody to talk to if I can't deal with this, I just pick up the phone. I mean, I can call my trauma counselor at any given time. And, not at night, of course, cuz she's not there, but as soon as she gets there, I can call her. And I know that I have other people that I can call, too, so I have a lot of support. So that helps a lot.

### TABITHA

The kids have a box that has a lot of fidget toys, a lot of sensory toys. We have a calm down area in our house where you can sit. One of my children carries a stuffed animal everywhere, even at 10, because it helps him regulate. It helps him calm.





They're learning coping skills, I think. And so they like to be outside. They like to color. They love to ride their bikes or jump on the trampoline.

#### ANA

I organize a lot. I tried coloring, like over the winter, right before the winter break, cuz people say that's really helpful with stressful times, but it stressed me out even more. And I organized all of the crayons in the box by color. So organizing things, like in my house I've redone like the pantry, so I think basically things I focus on things I can control. So, that's probably how I handle stressful times. Focusing on smaller things that I can control.

#### TABITHA

I'm a huge advocate for TBRI (Trust-Based Relational Intervention). I think it works, and I think it works for, not necessarily just trauma kids, it could work for any kid, it can work for any adult, like it's just a great way to learn how to cope with life and how to handle things. And I also think that sometimes foster kids, or kids adopted from foster care, get a bad rap about the way that they behave...and I admit that even I feel this, like, it happened when you were 3 and now you're 11, why are we still dealing with this? And so I know that I need to raise awareness for myself and for other people that trauma isn't necessarily like a time constraint; it's not like after three years I should be done. You should be better, get over it. It can take a lot longer to get over trauma.





## Finding Healing

OCTAVIA

If I could offer [survivors] hope...It's hard, but it gets better. It doesn't completely erase your experience and things like that. But you...when you're going through, you know, your situation, it seems, like, real dark, but once you're able to talk about it, get it out and things like that, it gets better. It used to be really, really overwhelming for me. Like, like almost crippling, and now I'm just like, you know, as easy as I can freely talk, talk right now, just a few years ago, even just two years ago, I couldn't do that. And so, the hope would just be, you know, that it gets better.

CARO

If what happened to you didn't kill you, this won't either. Like I had a friend, and she had a broken ankle and she didn't go to the doctor and her ankle healed, broken. So in order for them to fix that, she was in so much pain, they had to re-break her ankle. So it's like having something that healed wrong, and you have to go through the pain of breaking it. But the benefits of that are so much greater than the pain you go through





with the re-breaking and the pain you live in if you don't do the work...So for my first couple of years, I really just worked on your basic life coping skills and how to deal with, you know, how to deal with life. And like I said, cognitive stuff. And then I started doing trauma therapy a year and two months ago. So trauma therapy is completely different than cognitive. And so, although I did make progress before, I didn't have significant healing. I made progress in how I function in life, but I didn't have significant healing from the past trauma... It is very frightening to consider adding more pain, but the benefits far outweigh the discomfort.

#### SHIVON

I learned my purpose in life; I learned that, or the changes that I've seen in myself, is that now I believe the following statement: That in all of my own, what I thought to be hopeless times, I did have hope, and that's how I survived. And I believe that statement so much now that I can follow the path that was meant for me. Praise God.

#### CARO

The things that I've been sharing with you today, a year ago, two years ago, I could have sat here and told you my whole life story and not shed a tear. So it is painful on some level, but to have things back that I never thought were possible has been amazing. And advice? You get out of yourself what you're willing to put in. And a lot of what happens to us, a lot, is that we love our kids or we love our friends or we love our parents, but we don't love ourselves, because things have told us that we're not lovable. And so, loving yourself enough to give yourself this is really important. And







that you do, you get out so much more than you put in. And even just having a sacred space where, you know that nothing you say, within reason...is not gonna be repeated. It's the safeness of a voice and an ear and someone that you know is unbiased and wanting to help you. If you've never had that, it's life changing.

#### CHARLA

[I've learned] that I'm a lot stronger than I thought I was...and that I have more power than I thought I ever would have, and I'm feeling a lot better.

#### VALERIE

Well, if y'all, would've been asking me these questions probably about six months ago, I probably would've been like, you know, I can't do this. I can't do it. I can't. I still couldn't have done it six months ago. I mean, it took me a while, a long time, but, I still have my moments, but nothing compared...I can sleep at night now. Before I had a hard time sleeping, and I had real bad nightmares about some of the things that men did to me. My daughter had to live through some things. She had nightmares about some of the things that men had did to me. So it put a toll on my daughter as well. So six months ago, I probably couldn't have done what I'm doing right now. Being able to be in here talking to y'all like I am and be okay with it without crying, without breaking down or anything like that. So I know with a fact that The Women's Center is the best place or the best thing that ever could happened to me in my life. Honestly it is. And I would recommend The Women's Center to anybody: men, children, women, it doesn't matter. Cuz they're there for you...I learned how to set healthy boundaries. I learned that





I do have a voice and that I'm able to speak up for myself without feeling some type of way, that I can say no. And it's okay today to do that. And I've seen a big change in myself today, a drastic change, because like I said a minute ago, when I first came here, I was broken completely. And today it's...if it wasn't for my therapist, I don't even think I would be where I'm at right now. Honestly, they, The Women's Center, they try to figure out what's going on with you so they can help you and work through what avenues they need to work through with you. And that's what I love about The Women's Center, because they do care and they are there for you.

#### ANA

I think I'm more patient; I'm more willing to see things through. And I know I definitely try and continually work on staying calm, like in those stressful situations that don't occur quite as much as they did when I was first coming here, but I think I've definitely made some progress in that. And probably my confidence in saying that I can take on those situations and come out successfully. So those are two big things I learned.

#### TABITHA

If you survive the trauma event, you can survive, you know what I mean? You can do it. You can make it through hard things. I literally told my son today that you can do hard things. I know for the four that live in our house, they are tough. You know, they...they've experienced more trauma in life than many adults. You know, many adults just grew up, and they're like, I have no idea. My kids were homeless and there was drug abuse and there was all these things and there





was physical abuse and there was like all this stuff. And then they lost their first families. They lost siblings, they lost parents and grandparents, and it was just, and it's just gone. Like it's, it's never coming back. And yet here they are. And they're making good grades in school, and we have one that dances, and so he was in The Nutcracker this Christmas, and we have one that is in a play, and he's gonna be Gaston in Beauty in the Beast. And we have kids that play basketball and baseball and they go to church and they know about Jesus and they survived, you know, these horrific things. I mean, some of them were burnt with cigarettes, and they still have scars on their bodies to prove it. I mean like bad things happened, and they survived and they're here and they're trying, too. They're going through the therapy, and they're going through the hard things. And they're working through these things at 10, 11, you know, and even though most adults don't wanna talk about it, they're sitting down and they're talking about it, and they're trying to work through it. So like if a 9-year-old can do it, anybody can do it. You know what I mean? If an 11-year-old can talk about what it felt like to be homeless, then anyone can get through their trauma and make a better future for themselves.

## CHARLA

I guess I just keep going back to, you know, that you are stronger than you think you are, cuz that's a big one for me, and that it's not your fault, no matter what anybody says.





## SHIVON

Someone loved my soul enough to give me therapy and love the parts of me, or show me love. Love isn't always what we just know as a, a relation. You know, it's just not. And when we have love surrounding us all the time, even if we don't feel it around us, if we give it, it's over-empowering...You guys have no idea what you just did for my life by letting me share [my story]. I see that that touched you. And I hope that everything that I say today, you find some sort of healing or want to heal or faith in healing from it. Because healing is so real and so powerful.









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