

FELIPA'S STORY

Felipa knows it's possible to change. She was raised in a family of addiction. At 10 years old, she smoked marijuana for the first time. By 12, she was using harder drugs and being sent by family members to get and offer drugs. At 18, she found out she was pregnant – eight months along.

"I had no stomach," Felipa said. "I couldn't believe it. I had done drugs most of my entire pregnancy because I didn't know I was pregnant. It destroyed me on the inside, wondering if my son was sick."

After birth, Jason, Felipa's son, tested positive for opiates. CPS separated him from her. For the next two years, Felipa struggled on the streets, trying to keep herself clean. Finding Casa Mia helped her stay on her feet for the first time since losing Jason.

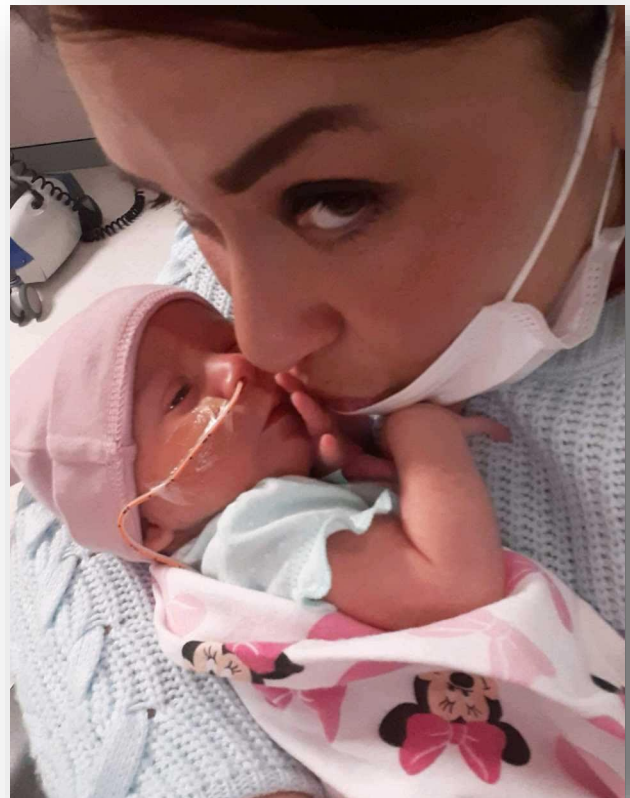
"Casa Mia was all I needed," Felipa said. "A place where I could go to find myself and keep fighting for my son, and one day I would be able to reunite with him."

Her stay at Casa Mia showed Felipa that people outside of her family can be a great support.

"Seeing other women in there in the same spot I had been in made me realize things could get better." Referring to her current support system, Felipa said, "I know I could just get my phone and text somebody and they'll be right there. I feel safe and I feel loved."

With that support, Felipa built herself back up. Through parenting classes and therapy programs, she found the motivation to do the things to bring herself back and, eventually, bring Jason back.

"My kids are everything to me," Felipa said. "I feel proud every day just waking up sober, seeing my kids. I cry almost every day because I almost lost all of this. Now, I have my kids by my side. That's what makes me strong, every day. I'm about to get my



GED and then go to college."

Felipa wishes more women like her knew resources are available if you reach out for help.

"I'm very grateful for a second chance," Felipa said. "It is possible to change. We just have to let more women know there's help out there. I'm going to do the best I can for my kids. I see myself being a good, successful mom."



JULIE'S STORY

All Julie ever wanted was to be a mom. But when she relapsed into opiate use a few short weeks after her son, Lincoln, came home from the hospital, CPS placed him in foster care.

"I think people assume if someone's struggling with addiction or drug abuse, they shouldn't have their kids or their kids aren't safe," Julie said. "But if the mom is receiving treatment and following the doctor's guidelines, there's no reason their kids aren't safe with them."

Eventually, after a few more years of struggling to stay sober for her sons, leaving them for months at a time for in-patient treatments, Julie found Bexar County NAS (Neonatal Alcohol Syndrome) Collaborative and Casa Mia. For the first time, she was able to have her kids with her throughout treatment.

"Sober living with my kids was really the answer for me," Julie said. "The other times in treatment programs, I was constantly worried about, 'Where are my kids? Were they okay? Were they going to visit me that weekend?' I wasn't able to concentrate on myself."

Julie lived at Casa Mia with Lincoln and Kennedy for nine months, participating in parenting classes and focusing on her therapy. She felt supported by staff and the other moms in the program.

"All the girls helped the other girls out with their kids," Julie said. "Regardless of your personal relationship with someone, at the end of the day, all the girls always came together. The kids came first."

Before finding Casa Mia, one of Julie's earlier therapy counselors taught her whenever she had urges, to instead focus on thinking about someone she could help. She thought of her sons.

"Being able to have [Lincoln and Kennedy] with me at Casa Mia really made the difference in me being



able to stay sober because I was just so happy to be able to be a mom while in treatment," Julie said. "All I wanted was to be a mom. Now I am a mom and now I get to see my kids grow up and I don't ever want to have to leave them again."

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After Casa Mia, Julie got her own apartment. She found an eight-to-five Monday through Friday job. She has health insurance; Lincoln and Kennedy are in school; Julie enrolled in college.

"My kids now have consistency," Julie said. "They know I'm going to be there."

JENNIFER'S STORY

Jennifer believes that sometimes, addiction is not a choice. Sometimes things happen in life and without the right resources at hand, drugs feel like an easy out.

"When my baby didn't make it through heart surgery, I didn't know how to deal with that," Jennifer said. "Instead of coming home with my son, I came home with a box – just a box. I didn't know how to cope. I turned to drugs."

Eventually, CPS took Jennifer's daughter Leiahnnah away and she was stuck in a vicious cycle of drug use and incarceration, until her probation officer helped break the cycle.

"He said, 'We're not going to put you in jail; that's not helping you. We are going to get you into treatment. You need help – you don't need prison,' Jennifer said. "' I thank him today that he did that for me because that's what changed my life."

Through the Bexar County NAS (Neonatal Alcohol Syndrome) Collaborative, Jennifer found Casa Mia. There, she discovered the tools and skills she needed to cope without using drugs, and found long-term friendships with other moms.

"Casa Mia's peer council allowed me to be other women's support," Jennifer said. "To be able to give them advice, I had to take it myself so that's what I did. It really helped me strengthen my inner self to know I could help other women, even if it was just keeping them from using just that day."

Without the opportunity to reunite with Leiahnnah at Casa Mia, Jennifer says she would not have had the strength or motivation for her treatment.

"Leiahnnah is my motivation to do better in life," Jennifer said. "If I hadn't been reunited with her in treatment, I wouldn't have cared, I wouldn't have fought as hard. I saw women who didn't have their babies – it made them harder. It was easier to go



back into addiction than to hurt from your child being taken away."

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Jennifer hopes that one day, the system may change. Instead of removing children from mothers, more places like Casa Mia will provide help needed for children to stay with their mothers.

"I think if they would try to understand a mother more, the mother would have a fighting chance," Jennifer said. "It's when our babies are removed from us that we start giving up. Part of recovery is we do slip, we do make mistakes as humans, as mothers. Our children give us hope to do better."