



# Dedicated Foster Care

By Mary Rogelstad

She was born in a jail with a mother who was a drug addict and a father who was a pimp.

She says she heard that when she was four her mother took her to a babysitter and never came back. After that, she was taken from place to place - her grandmother's house, a group home, back to her mother's home, foster homes. But few people would be able to guess this is how Lisa Sallie's life unfolded. Sallie is one of the many people who have benefited from The Up Center's programs and have overcome great odds.

"I was dealt a hand that wasn't perfect," Sallie said. "But I haven't been through anything compared to some others."

Sallie said that she realized things could be much worse when she met a girl at the youth shelter Seton House who had been molested by multiple family members. From that time on, Sallie continued on a straight path. When her biological mother took Sallie into a crack house one day, Sallie had the strength to walk out - by herself. When she was in high school, she was placed in a foster home by Child & Family Services of Eastern Virginia, the former name of The Up Center. Her new foster mother was Leola Brooks.

"Ms. Brooks is like my mom," Sallie said. "In high school I told everyone she was my mother. I still see her all the time."

After living with Brooks for two years, Sallie headed to Old Dominion University. She faced some challenges moving to independence when she lost her Medicaid health insurance, but Sallie has relied on loans and money she saved. Brooks said Sallie has been very focused on her future.

"Lisa has been determined to go all the way. She wants to make a difference," Brooks said.

To do this, Sallie is looking at her career possibilities. She is now heading into her



Photo: Courtesy of The Up Center

Leola Brooks and Lisa Sallie

senior year at ODU and has her eye on the FBI or law school.

"I am considering going into the FBI to fight drugs, and I also am looking at law school," Sallie said. "I don't want to say drugs ruined my life, but I do have a strong stance about them, because I don't ever want to end up like my mother or have another girl go through the same things I went through."

Those goals and marks of success are ones that foster parents and the center treasure. Since the center re-started its foster care program 25 years ago, the agency's foster care division has specialized in helping "therapeutic" children get placed in loving homes. These children often have been abused or neglected and can have behavioral concerns that require much hands-on help. Sallie says she saw how dedicated the staff was.

"One particular caseworker who worked at the agency I liked a lot," Sallie said. "She came to family functions and was a big help when I was really frustrated."

If you are interested in becoming a foster parent to help an abused or neglected child, please call The Up Center at 757-965-8670. ♦

Mary Rogelstad is the Director of Communications for The Up Center.

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