

The first time I saw Lisa, she was sitting in a crowd of women all wearing the white uniform issued by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. She was obviously pregnant and clearly nervous. It didn't take long for me to realize that this lady did NOT belong in prison. As the weeks went by, I got to know Lisa and was taken by her gentle spirit and quiet determination.

Because she had been picked up for a minor offense, her stay at the Lane Murray Unit in Gatesville was soon over. Now the dilemma was where could a Deaf, pregnant, ex-offender go to live? I offered to find a place that would accept her since she had virtually no support system. She had been living on the streets for years prior to her arrest and that simply wasn't an option with a new baby. I naively thought that it would be easy to find a place for her given her vulnerable situation and her pleasant personality. Was I ever wrong!

I called multiple places all over the state. The fact that she was an ex-offender, regardless of the crime, turned many off. Having a baby on the way was a deal-breaker for others. But most often, the reason for rejection was because Lisa is Deaf. No one wanted to deal with that. I grew increasingly frustrated as I called agency after agency. At the end of each phone call, I always asked, "Where else do you suggest I call?" My last phone call lead me to OLAMS right here in my own backyard.

Lisa was incredibly nervous that hot day in August when she arrived at "Angel House" as she calls it. Eight months pregnant, with only the ill-fitting prison-issue clothes on her back, she was truly starting from scratch. Then the real miracle happened. I watched as the staff and residents rallied around her. They made her feel loved and welcomed. They made her feel valuable. They gave her dignity. Her confidence soared. For the first time in years, all of her physical needs were met. Her health began to improve and on Sept. 23rd, she gave birth to a healthy baby girl.

Lisa is now living in Dallas in a transitional program for female ex-offenders with children. She is a loving, nurturing mother who has wonderful plans for a bright and self-reliant future for her and her daughter.

Thank you "Angel House" for giving her a chance. When no one else would, you stepped in to give Lisa the loving support she needed to succeed. You made the difference.

May God richly bless each one of you more than you could ever dream!

Nancy Pfanner

