

Starting Over for My Kids

By Debra Reed



I quit my law enforcement job and ended up without an income, unemployment benefits or a job. Why quit a good-paying job? I was not fully available for my new baby. At 23, I was a single mother paying for child care and supporting my new baby while working long nights and weekend shifts. I was always on night shift and my baby had to go to a sitter and then in the day I was so tired I usually slept. This was not the life I wanted for my new daughter, Talissa.

Knowing that I would have more opportunities if I earned a college degree, I enrolled in Chief Dull Knife College. My fiancé, Horace, supported my ambition and made the commitment of staying home to eliminate child care costs. I took on classes and homework as I also worked to support my new family. I found that I wasn't making ends meet and applied for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF provided less than \$400 a month in exchange for 120 hours of volunteer work and enrollment in the Work Readiness Component (WoRC) program*.

The goal of the WoRC program is to help participants find employment and become self-sufficient. Meeting with my caseworker kept me focused on obtaining full-time employment. Through the encouragement of the WoRC program, I found a part-time job as a tutor. I supported my family on the meager \$70 a week I received from this job along with the TANF assistance. I always remember my Dad telling me that if I wanted an education I would have to make sacrifices in order to achieve my goals.

Through hard work and perseverance, and with support from my fiancé, I earned my associate's degree from Chief Dull Knife College. I then attended Rocky Mountain College where I graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management. In addition to school, which I attended at night year round, I had been working a full-time job to support my family. I'm still working that job today.

My husband has been so supportive and committed to staying home to raise our children while I work. On days when I felt like I couldn't find the energy to get up, go to work and school, finish homework and still find time to be with my family, Horace would find the most encouraging words to keep me going.

The hard work is worth it, because I get to see my children more. I hope one day to use my degree to obtain an administrative position where I can exhibit my talent and capability. To others going through a rough time, I would tell them attitude is everything. A great attitude in life will attract great people. Don't give up, even if success is through sacrifice. Always have a good work ethic. Dependability, interpersonal skills and initiative will help you be successful!



Debra Reed quit her job to be more available for her kids. Now that she has a degree, she's ready to try again.

** The Work Readiness Component in Montana is one of the more than 1,000 education and training programs that are part of the Women Work! Network nationwide. To locate other programs in your community, visit www.womenwork.org (click on the "Find Local Programs" link) or call (202) 467-6346. ✓*