

THANK YOU PATHWAYS

Note: The following speech was given by Pathways Out of Poverty program student Dana J. Britton, who graduated in December 2010. It is being published with her permission.

The instant Pathways Out of Poverty crossed my path, it changed my life forever. The day before that and some years back, I had come to a crossroad in my life, but it felt like a dead-end. The only reason I say that is because when I got to the crossroad, I didn't know where to go from there. The only thing I knew how to do at that point in my life was to survive, by almost any means necessary (I'll just leave it at that.) I dropped out of school in the ninth grade when I got pregnant. At that point I was only at a fifth-grade math level. (I really thought I had some type of learning disability.) I gave up back then. I wasn't interested in school. I wanted to do everything but the right thing, I guess. I don't know for sure. But I do know one thing . . . that's when I started going down the wrong path, the pathway to poverty.

So, anyway . . . from that point on I continued going in that direction for many years. (I made a lot of bad choices, choices that eventually landed me in prison, after a long string of events.)

Between the age of 14 and May 2009, I've had numerous jobs, some good, some not so good. But at the same time I had no education, I accumulated a long criminal record, got addicted to drugs, lost my family, started hustling, and like I said, I eventually went to prison, twice. The last time I got out, I discharged October 2008 from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections. I moved back to Nebraska in May 2009 because all of my family is here. I started looking for a job right away, but I couldn't seem to find anyone who would hire me. I was on the verge of calling myself, trying to get on some type of hustle again. But I knew that that's what I did not want to do. I was tired, tired of just barely surviving. Tired of ripping and running. Tired of not having an education. Tired of being broke. Tired of not being a productive person in this society. Tired of the closed doors.

I knew I needed to make a change in my way of thinking. Only problem was I didn't know where to go from there. Pretty much homeless, jobless, no education. I hit the bottom. I was calling agencies, my food stamp worker, everybody I could think of who might be able to lead me in the right direction. NOBODY!

But my prayers were answered. This program is exactly what I needed to turn my life around. Pathways Out of Poverty has been and is exactly that for me.

I started the program in October, and by the grace of God, I will graduate Dec. 22, 2010, with computer skills, job and interview skills, career and money management skills, and also a certificate in construction training.

Some things that this program has done for me, just to name a few, and never forgetting the rest: Self-respect, determination, a chance to get my GED, job skills, and I got to meet people who really do care. There are so many other benefits. This program is allowing me to better myself in all areas of my life. I truly need Pathways. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me to be the best person that I can be, and I know that I couldn't do it without all of you.

Thank you very much.