

CASE CLOSED:

What It All Came Down to for One Motivated Mom

When Kearstyn was referred to Easterseals Vermont by the Department of Family Services, she was a new mom juggling an extreme set of circumstances. Her substance use was putting custody of her daughter, Armani, at risk. Her case was in family court. What Kearstyn did next would make all the difference in keeping them together.

Kearstyn started meeting with her Easterseals VT family engagement specialist, Jill, for family-time coaching sessions. They discussed Kearstyn's successes and challenges as a mom, created need lists and goals, and practiced parenting techniques.

Kearstyn soon met her goals and mastered the skills Jill taught her. "She didn't need my help with that, even through the addiction," Jill says. "She was really motivated to participate. My job was just to keep reminding her, 'you're her [Armani's] mom.'"

From family-time coaching, Kearstyn stepped down to care coordination, a lower level of intervention. Jill connected her to services and resources in the community.

Still, Kearstyn continued to struggle with her addiction. "She was worried her daughter would not come home," Jill says. "The biggest challenge was believing in herself—that she could get help and stop the need to use heroin."

Jill's support of Kearstyn propelled Kearstyn forward. "Jill was always believing in me, saying, 'I know you can do this.' She'd push me to make calls to find help," Kearstyn says.



Kearstyn and Armani enjoying time outdoors.

To beat her addiction, Kearstyn eventually sought residential treatment. That meant leaving her community and her daughter. Jill wrote letters advocating on Kearstyn's behalf and set up video and in-person visits for Kearstyn and Armani to keep them connected during their separation.

Despite the progress Kearstyn had made, she knew it was all coming down to one thing: could she get clean? "My case had been open for a while. I had to turn things around. I had

this realization in rehab: 'it's now or never.' I didn't want to lose my daughter."

Kearstyn's determination and hard work paid off. On July 7, 2022, Kearstyn's court case officially closed. That meant she had complied with all court conditions to keep her daughter at home with her. From finding help through counseling, completing parenting courses, and achieving sobriety, Kearstyn had followed through and met every goal.

These days, Kearstyn works and takes care of Armani. She describes it as tiring but worth it. "Life is so much better," she says.

Kearstyn cites Jill's support as key to her recovery. "Jill always went above and beyond – from helping me find treatment to food stamps and more. She guided me, was an advocate for me. In family-time coaching, she was always playful with my daughter."

When asked what made the difference for Kearstyn, Jill says, "Following the family-time coaching model and giving it her all. She was really ready. We helped her find her strengths and have a better image of herself. But it was really all her. She had to believe in herself. That's what it came down to."