



One Family's New Futures Stories

The following are the real experiences in their own words of lone parents who completed our flagship New Futures programme.

Stephanie

I'm a lone parent and I recently graduated from One Family's New Futures programme. I want to share my story because it changed my life.

Before I began New Futures, I had worked part-time on and off since becoming a lone parent. I signed up for the programme uncertain what I would gain from it, but clear that I had nothing to lose. I knew that I wanted a brighter future for myself and my child and to be financially independent – but I also knew that I desperately needed guidance on how to achieve those goals.

First, my New Futures group taught me to accept that I was a lone parent and that this was OK. I realised that I hadn't fully acknowledged the reality of my situation up until then.

Then, we looked at our self esteem, confidence and beliefs, all of which helped me to get a greater understanding of myself. My coach Helen helped me to explore my values which was groundbreaking for me as I realised how important they are to me.

I looked at a whole range of career options including starting my own business and returning to education. But, something clicked for me when we were asked to imagine our dream career – the one we would choose for ourselves if we had no restrictions. I immediately chose dance, thinking that's what I'd do if I could turn the clock back to being 18, before I became a mum.

Suddenly, with the support of One Family, all the barriers that restricted me from following my dream simply fell away. Mental barriers, practical barriers and financial barriers all disappeared.

I began my full time degree course in dance last September. I am coming to the end of my first year and cannot believe how my life has turned around. Full time dance training can be challenging as it's a very high-energy course combined with academic work. I have to be very organised and sometimes it can be exhausting along with parenting alone. But I am working towards a career I am passionate about and one which gives me enormous satisfaction.

I am grateful for the opportunity New Futures gave me. It helped to guide me into my very own new future.



Christine

I have been living in Ireland since January 2005. I came here, freshly married, with a good job opportunity in my pocket and full of hope and happiness, with a heart full of curiosity for a country I had never been to before. I had no idea that this, all this, could change in an instant! Being blessed quickly with my first child and having her here, we were quickly established with good jobs, a beautiful house in a very nice area, everything was perfect.

It was a rainy and cold January evening, my daughter was just two weeks old, when I experienced for the first time the other side of my husband. He left me with no notice, bag of debts, not one Euro in my pocket and a whole background of lies and deceit. Even though I am European, I was a foreigner in the country, had no support at all and felt totally alone and overwhelmed.

Being in a situation feeling like that with financial burden and emotional issues and still in a state of shock, I fell into depression. I isolated myself with the feeling of desperation and a big part also was being ashamed to be a single parent. Living in a lovely estate, with the picture perfect families I became an exotic in one minute. I was at the end; I was so down that I wanted to take my life.

One summer day I was so low that I took out the phone directory and looked for someone to talk to. As I was not successful after a time of searching and investigating I called Parentline. I broke down and told them I need help otherwise I do not know a way out; and they referred me to One Family. I remember my first contact like it was yesterday. I talked with the counsellor and from the first moment I felt at home. She told me about the free counselling service in the organisation and also the free childcare facility onsite.

I needed a few pushes by myself to overcome the feeling of embarrassment and shame of being a lone parent and having failed to be a NORMAL family... What I want to tell and emphasise here, is that it is a FACT that One Family saved my life in many ways. The person I am now is because of One Family. I learnt the most important things and tools in this organisation. Today I am proud of being a lone parent, knowing in my heart that my daughter and me we are a family. I did all the courses: Positive Parenting, Family Communications, and New Starts. I joined the social group and I even went on the annual summer holiday with them. It was so important to recognise that there are many women in my situation, who have passed similar situations and also went through hell and survived that.

The courses are not called self-development courses for nothing because I learned so much about me and my inside. The same is true for my daughter. With me isolated she had big difficulties in the beginning in the crèche. But with the fabulous staff of the crèche and their loving and professional care my daughter made an incredible step in her development. I can't tell enough how good they are. My weeks, my months, my 2 years were built around One Family - their support, information and encouragement. Step by step I found back my self-confidence and I started getting my head up in a totally new way.

Now I stand at a turning point in my life. In two weeks time I will be moving to another county to get my feet back on the ground. It is the start of a new life. My daughter will be in



a community crèche and I have already jobs lined up. It's still exhausting, but I now have the strength and the courage to start again.

I want to emphasise again, that One Family saved my life, made me what I am now and where I stand now. In the difficult time I asked heaven for a sign to help me out of this hell ... and he showed me One Family. God bless you all and just go on with your fantastic work, we lone parents need you.

Ava

I want to tell you about my experience on the New Futures course. I came to Ireland for a better life but the experience I had was quite the opposite of that. When I was in Nigeria, I was a happy, open, caring, kind, confident and friendly person.

By the time I got here, it was not me anymore, but just the image of me. I was really scared of people and I could not trust anybody. I stayed on my own and I kept to myself. The situation I was in affected my self-esteem and my confidence went down.

So I did a course in Liberties College – Applied Social Studies. During that year I didn't talk to anyone in the course. I felt I was not good enough. I was pregnant at the start of the course and I thought people were talking about me and laughing at me. I felt bad. I had my baby on the 8th May, after doing my last exam. I went from the exam to the hospital to give birth.

In June 2011 my support worker in Sonas Housing told me about New Futures at One Family. The New Futures course changed everything in my life. It gave me the confidence I wanted and my self-esteem is very high again. I learned how to change my way of thinking and I think positively now.

I take care of myself and my son. I can now ask for help if I need it. I realise the strength I have in me and that I have to let the past go and start my life again. I have changed back to the person I was in Nigeria, even better. Because I know what I want, I can now make decisions and take full responsibility for my family.

My ambition is to be a fashion designer. I would like to work in the high street and have my own brand. This September, I will be doing a literacy course in Crumlin College to improve my written English. I will also continue my dress making class. Then my plan is to study fashion buying and merchandising in Crumlin, FETAC level 5/6. After that, God help me, I might end up in the National College of Art and Design to do my degree and make my dream come true as a fashion designer.

I would like to thank all the New Futures team for giving me the opportunity to do this course and the One Family crèche staff who looked after my son while I was doing the course. I would also like to say thank to my wonderful course mates, for your support, love, care and the friendship.



Samantha

Before I completed the New Futures course at One Family I was very set in my beliefs and the way people saw me as a lone parent. I have two daughters and I was struggling with them. They are great kids and I get great support from their dads and their dads' families but I never felt confident enough to be responsible for them. I was full of fear about the future as a lone parent.

I did a positive parenting and stress management class through One Family and then went on to do New Futures. This course helped me open my mind and gave me the confidence and motivation I needed to move forward. I grew up in an area that was badly affected by drugs and I've always had an interest in helping families that were affected by drugs. However I never thought I could make a career out of it. On the course I realised that I had a passion for this work and that it was possible to do further study into the area. I applied for an Addiction Study course and am now studying for my certificate in Maynooth College and I plan to go on and do the diploma next year.

New Futures helped me lose my fear of change. Prior to this I was always scared of change and always settled for what life threw at me. But I now know that change is a constant part of life and that my life will continue to change in the future. I'm no longer afraid because I now know what I want to do and that I will achieve it once I put in the effort.
