

Lindsay's PSE Journey

At the age of 21, Lindsay found herself 8-months pregnant, living on her own in a homeless shelter. Though she worked 50 hours a week, she couldn't find a safe place to live that she could afford.

Because of bad credit and a limited knowledge of personal finances, she ended up locked into a long-term car lease with high monthly payments. And not enough money for basic necessities.

Luckily, the shelter provided more than just a place to sleep. It also provided a case worker who encouraged her to apply for a program that changed her life's path.

Lindsay applied and was found eligible for the Post-Secondary Education Program (PSE) – a state program that helps parents of minor children to earn undergraduate college degrees so they can get good paying jobs and support their families.

For the four years she was in college, the program provided:

- a monthly cash payment that helped with basic necessities,
- a case manager who helped her focus on short and long-term goals,
- help with things like childcare, transportation, and school supplies, and
- referrals to programs that taught her skills like how to budget, use credit, and manage her time.

For her part, Lindsay had to get accepted into college, secure the funds to cover tuition, and do her school work. All while raising a baby!

Participating in PSE made her automatically eligible for 3SquaresVT – a federal program that helps eligible Vermonters to put food on the table.

"I grew up in poverty," said Lindsay. "With a single mom who struggled to put food on the table even though she had two jobs. What little food we had, was either junk food or fast food-like meals. I didn't know what a healthy meal looked like."

The money she got from 3SquaresVT meant she didn't have to worry about food. It gave her peace of mind and flexibility in her budget.

"Knowing I had money for food every month reduced my overall stress so I could focus on caring for my son and doing my school work," said Lindsay. "The extra help also allowed me to buy healthier foods and cook healthy meals. This was new to me. I had to learn the basics — not only how to cook healthy but also things like how long fresh fruits and vegetables and meats stay fresh in the fridge."

PSE, along with 3SquaresVT, gave Lindsay the opportunity to secure safe housing for her and her son, put nutritious foods on the table, earn a bachelor's degree in business from Champlain College, and become financially independent. But make no mistake, it was a lot of hard work. Support from family members, friends, and her PSE case manager helped — a lot.

"To be successful in PSE, you need to be able to focus on your long-term goals over short-term gratification," said Lindsay. "It's about knowing what's important and being willing to make sacrifices. But if you are motivated to do better and prepared to do the work, the program can help you change your life."

"My son now sees his mommy as someone who works hard, gets things done, and provides for her family. It was totally worth any embarrassment I might have felt for needing assistance."

Five years later, Lindsay is about to graduate from college, the first in her family to do so. And she has a full-time job with DCF's Economic Services Division — the division that manages the PSE and 3SquaresVT programs. She is very motivated to help others like herself.

By sharing her story, Lindsay hopes that others will see that it's okay to ask for help.

"It's a stepping stone to a better life. A life jacket when you're drowning."

She also wants everyone to know that most people who get government assistance do work, hard. They are just regular people who need a bit of extra help to improve their circumstances.

And when they get better, it helps lift up the entire community.