

MID-VALLEY

SECTION
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Ending cycles of dependency

Program assists at-risk women during and after pregnancy

By SAEROM YOO
Statesman Journal

Aubraey Ross, 33, had been on and off methamphetamine since she was a teenager when she found out last year she was pregnant.

She already had given up three children to adoption as a result of her drug use, which perpetuated her habit to cope with the shame and depression.

Ross was determined to break the cycle this time.

Today, she is home with a healthy 6-month-old son, Marshall, with no desire to go back.

"I look at my son every morning as he wakes up, and he looks up at me and smiles," she said. "He's beautiful — he's my life."

Ross received help from MVP Health Authority's MOMS program, which seeks and supports pregnant women at risk of substance abuse to help them stay clean and sober throughout and after their pregnancy.

She received drug and alcohol treatment, got help with post-partum depression and took parenting classes.

The program is available to any woman in the Oregon Health Plan-managed Marion Polk Community Health Plan.

Veronica Sheffield, the supervisor, started the program in February 2006 after learning that 114



Aubraey Ross plays with her 6-month-old son, Marshall, in their northeast Salem apartment on Friday. Ross benefited from the MVP Health Authority's MOMS program. TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Marion County babies were born drug positive and taken into protective custody in 2005.

That number steadily has declined since, with 12 babies born

drug positive in 2010, according to the Marion County District Attorney.

"Women are very motivated while they're pregnant to change their lives," Sheffield said. "It's a great window of opportunity."

Mentors, with the support of Marion County public health nurses, provide emotional, social and medical support for the women, making sure they stay sober and keep up with their prenatal care.

The program also has an outreach mentor, who seeks out women in the community and engages them, in hopes they'll become involved.

Women also enter the program through referrals from doctors,

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law enforcement and the court system.

So far, the program has seen 226 babies born clean and sober.

Alison Kelley, director of the Marion County Children & Families Department, said while the community has been effective in attacking its meth problem since 2005, other drugs are rising in popularity that may put women and their babies at risk.

"As one illegal drug subsides, another one is right behind it," she said. "We want to keep up the efforts to combat some of the other risks."

Sheffield said she has noticed an increased prevalence in narcotics and prescription drug abuse.

Other programs in the area that target prenatal substance abuse include Ten on Tuesday, started by Judge Pamela Abernethy, as well as the Marion County Health Department's maternity case management program.

The next step for MOMS is extending the program to support mothers longer after birth, to minimize relapse.

With a \$20,000 grant from the Henry L. Hillman Jr. Foundation, Sheffield hopes to build a corps of volunteers to support that effort.

Ross credits people from the department of human services, law

DRUG-ENDANGERED CHILDREN

Children born drug positive and taken into protective custody.

2005	114
2006	83
2007	52
2008	36
2009	12
2010	12

SOURCE: Marion County District Attorney's office.

enforcement and MOMS for her success as a mother.

"Before, I didn't ever think I'd be where I am today," she said. "I didn't care about my life and I didn't care about anything. I don't want anybody to go through what I've just been through."

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