

Q & A

ANJOLI YOUNGBLOOD



Don Campbell / HP staff

Anjoli Youngblood takes time out for an interview with The Herald-Palladium at Cafe Mosaic in Benton Harbor. She works two jobs and is raising a daughter, which means she has three jobs. Her life is on track, but she said past errors hurt her advancement.

How do you beat the past?

Anjoli Youngblood is seeking a better life for herself, her daughter

Life hasn't been easy for Anjoli Youngblood, 28, of Benton Harbor.

Raised in San Diego, she moved to Benton Harbor in November 2001 when she was 17 and a senior in high school. Her mother had moved to Benton Harbor two years earlier to care for grandfather, who had cancer. Anjoli stayed behind with her father until their fighting got so bad he shipped her to be with her mother.

In Benton Harbor, she helped her mother raise four younger siblings while attending classes at Benton Harbor High School and taking night classes so she could graduate in 2002.

It was not a stable time in her life. Her family lived with different people and even in a shelter for a few weeks. Later, she spent time in the Berrien County jail for fighting.

A little over a year ago she was a single mother living on welfare with no job.

Through hard work and with the help of many mentors, she now has two jobs, at AltTech in Benton Harbor and the BP gas station in St. Joseph, and is almost totally off welfare. But her past keeps tripping her up, as she revealed in an interview with HP Staff Writer Louise Wrege.

What was it like moving to Benton Harbor?

My senior year, actually, was really devastating. Coming here, I had a lot of problems at first. I was kind of depressed because I didn't know anybody.

What happened after high school?

I was really trying to help my

mom with my brothers and sisters. My mom was working, but it wasn't enough at the time for her to be as stable as she wanted. After graduation I got a job at Rainbow Apparel in the mall. I also worked at a factory that is no longer here - Modern Plastics.

You've had some problems with the law. How did you dig your way out of it?

I really haven't. It's been one of my downfalls, as far as me trying to get better jobs. I got in trouble for fighting. I cut a girl in her face. I did a little bit of time in Berrien County off and on - almost 6 months. I kept violating, going back. Did time on tether. I had to pay a lot of fines and costs. This happened in 2004. It's almost been 10 years.

I haven't gotten into any trouble since.

But that keeps following you.

It keeps following me. I got called by Whirlpool for a job. Once they found out I had a background, it stopped my interview right there dead on the spot.

I was going for nursing at Lake Michigan College. They told me if I pursued my career, my background would stop me from doing my internship because I would probably be dealing with children and older people. With a background like mine I probably wouldn't be allowed to pursue it unless I got it off my record.

You had a child. How did she inspire you?

My daughter, Lovely. I got pregnant with her around 24.

I just wanted a better life for her. I wanted her to be inspired by a person she can look up to. Not a person she would be embarrassed by.

I'm trying to start her off early by letting her know that anything you want to do, you can do it, no

matter what anyone tells you. Don't listen to the negativity around you, because it isn't going to get you anywhere. People only tell you negative things to keep you down at their level to where they're at.

People tell you nasty things to make you feel bad because they're feeling bad. I tell her it's not right to be mean to people. Always give people compliments.

You were a single welfare mom with no job. But you didn't want to be that.

No, I didn't want to be on welfare. It depressed me. I'm not going to say it was all bad. But just the fact of being on welfare, thinking this is the only way you can live. It wasn't what I wanted.

I received food stamps and Medicaid, cash assistance, but at the same time I was going to school at LMC, trying to find a job, going to classes at Strive, and Strive is basically teaching better skills for communication and work ethics.

What did you do before you got a job?

I volunteered at Cafe Mosaic. It was for work experience and to have something to do with my time to help me not be so down and depressed about what was going on. They have really wonderful people here who help inspire you.

How did volunteering help?

When I volunteered at Tri-County Head Start, it helped with my daughter so I could interact with her better.

I learned with the younger children how we're supposed to treat them and talk to them.

What to say to them to build their confidence to help them understand. Or using words to help them relax and communicate with you in a better way without screaming and yelling.

What advice would you give to

single moms with no jobs who want to do better?

It's baby steps, and you have to want it. You have to look for inspiration. You have to find people around you who want it, too.

Basically, you have to get yourself out of the group you are in. You have to wake up one day and say, "Look, I'm not going to be like everybody else. I'm not going to let my kids see us struggle."

That's one thing that inspired me. The struggle that I've been through with my mom and my family helps me in my everyday life. I don't want my daughter to see us struggle. If we have to struggle, I want it to be minor. Struggle with a test in school. Don't struggle with how you live - day-to-day life.

Are you where you want to be?

I'm still striving for greatness, but I just feel like there's something I can't get past. I'm telling myself I can do better, but it seems that as soon as I start getting ahead, the hours drop. Or my rent goes up. Or my car messes up. Which is everybody's life. But it just seems like it is hard to get ahead. There's always obstacles.

What do you see in your future?

In my future I see a better life. I see finally putting my felony and bad experiences with the law behind me and working my way up.

I see myself going back to school and getting my degree for nursing and photography. Photography is my first passion, but I feel you have to have a real stable job in order to do something you enjoy.

I like to help people. That's why nursing. Plus, in the future, to me, nursing is going to be one of the jobs that is not going to be replaced by computer technology.