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## PARENTING INSIDE OUT

Sarina Hart went to prison in spring 2013, pregnant with her third child. She left behind two daughters, both in the custody of others, and a decade of drug abuse, violent men and self-destructive choices. Hart went into labor at the women's prison in Wilsonville and found herself shackled to a bed in a local hospital after delivering a daughter. She gave her up in an open adoption. Back home, Hart's father died of a debilitating neurological disorder. She felt she had lost everything. Hart left prison on Dec. 23, 2013, and landed in a women's shelter designed to keep her clean and sober. She wanted to be a mom again and take control of her life, but she was worn out. It was there that her mentor steered her toward a Southeast Portland charity, Northwest Family Services, and a court-ordered parenting program.

When Hart began the Parenting Inside Out program, she was sullen and exhausted. Those who ran the classes remembered her making little eye contact, scarcely speaking. Eventually she began to relate some of the details of her life under the grip of drugs and domestic violence.

She felt herself coming back to life.



*Parenting Inside Out* is a parenting class that meets twice a week for 12 weeks: 48 hours of deep introspection, group talks, role play and camaraderie. Northwest Family Services provides dinner, child care, TriMet bus passes and class materials free of charge.

Several weeks into the Parenting Inside Out class, Shannon Hoyer, a coach in the program, noticed Hart, who is now 28, opening up and relating some of the most tortured moments of her life. Hoyer remembered Hart as a standout. "She always had the most amazing smile," she said, and she was genuine and so supportive of her classmates. And she purged her stories of drug addiction, domestic violence and loss. Hart began taking meth at age 19. After that, drugs owned her. She sometimes stole the morphine that helped her dad cope with the pain of Huntington's disease in the final year of his life. From time to time, she shot up meth in the next room. "I was lost," she said. "I didn't even know who I was. I was a monster, really. ... All I cared about was my next fix." She clung to men who were bad for her and involved in selling meth. Distributing the drug, along with endangering a minor and driving under the influence, sent her to prison. But she found an upside to prison: She got sober for the first time in years and began to think of her future. One night, Hart mentioned that the next class was her birthday. She was turning 27 and hadn't celebrated her birthday in years. She walked into the next class session and her coach and classmates burst into a rendition of "Happy Birthday." Someone had fashioned a make-believe candle out of a Post-It-note, and there was a chocolate cake from the St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank on a table. Tears ran down Hart's cheeks.

Sarina Hart had a long, difficult life complicated by drug abuse, domestic violence and prison. But she found safe haven at Northwest Family Services. "People actually cared about me," she recalled. "They liked the sober me. So I didn't have to be someone else. It was empowering." One day recently, her oldest daughter, who is 7, drew a picture of her mom.

"Mommy," she wrote, "I'm so proud of you."

None of this would have been possible without Northwest Family Services, Hart said. Now she wants to give back. Her plans are to return to school and become a domestic violence counselor.

"They give back," she said. "I can tell you that they really do love people. People that give back are like gifts from God."