

A FAMILY ONCE MORE

Mom beats addiction, gets kids back



4 HOURS AGO • DEIRDRE COX BAKER

The process of recovery from drug and alcohol dependency can take dips and turns, but it has ended in a happy place for Rozanne Robinson, who will celebrate this Christmas with her children at their new home in East Moline.

Robinson, 44, lives in a comfortable, slightly crowded apartment on the city's eastern edge. The family's newest addition, Teddy, is a four-legged ball of fluff and a delight for the kids.

The family scene is somewhat new to Robinson, who temporarily lost her children when they were placed in the Iowa foster care system because of her dependencies. She's gotten clean, has a part-time job and a lot of determination, and provides a loving home to her youngest children: Sabrina, 14, a freshman at nearby United Township High School; Elijah, 9, and Shaniya, 7, both of whom attend Wells Elementary School. Another son, 18-year-old Elgin Robinson, attends Rock Island High School and stays with his mother a few nights each week.

"I'm not perfect," Robinson said, but she has a fierce devotion to her kids. All told, she is the mother of three boys and four girls. One son lives in Ohio, and the two eldest daughters are adults.

"They are healthy and educated," she said of her offspring.

Doing well

"Rozanne is doing really well," said Kit Speirs, a caseworker with the Direct Family Intervention program at Bethany for Children and Families in Moline. Speirs, who has 21 years of experience in the field, worked with Robinson throughout 2011 and has kept in contact with the family ever since.

The caseworker's job was to help Robinson maintain her sobriety and to help her parent the children on her own — for the first time in a long time.

"It was pretty rocky at first," Speirs said, noting that the family used to live in an unsafe neighborhood. "But in the course of the year, she did a really good job."

Beating addiction, violence

Robinson experienced drugs the night of her first marriage, more than 20 years ago. She had a "huge, fairy-tale" wedding in Rock Island and then was introduced to marijuana laced with cocaine.

She was one of those who quickly became addicted, she explained.

Robinson was treated successfully for her addiction in California and she fell in love again while in that program. The couple moved to North Carolina, where she enjoyed a lifestyle that included a new house

and cars. But her spouse began using drugs, so Robinson returned with her children to her parents' home in Rock Island.

The cycle of dependency continued, though, and her parents eventually had her committed to a hospital-based treatment program.

"That's when I lost my kids to the courts," she said.

She was in the process of getting her children back in 2010 when another relationship ended in violence. Over a 24-hour period in July 2010, Robinson was repeatedly raped and nearly killed by a companion who used drugs. He is serving time in prison for those crimes.

"I don't know if God put that in my path to make me stronger, but that experience left me numb. I think I cried once," she said.

Afterward, Robinson gained the strength to speak out about domestic violence and dependency issues.

She was one of the first persons to get involved in Douglas Park Place, which is administered by the Riverside chemical dependency program, a division of the Robert Young Center for Community Mental Health. Her youngest children were in foster care in Muscatine while she concentrated on staying sober and well.

She has since spoken about her experiences to various audiences and was a featured speaker last month at Bethany's Family Awards Celebration.

It's a process

What Robinson has accomplished over the past few years is a process, not a quick fix, said Speirs, the Bethany caseworker. "Once a parent has a damaged relationship with their children, it takes time to fix," Speirs added.

Robinson takes responsibility for her mistakes, and that's a big difference between her and others in the same position, Speirs said.

"One reason she got better is that she was able to tell the children that the mistakes were not their fault, that she had made some really poor choices. She took responsibility for her choices about boyfriends, social contacts, dealing with stress," Speirs added.

It's also a process to renew family relationships. "But Rozanne is open and honest in the process, and that makes such a difference," Speirs said.

These days

Robinson faces continuing challenges. She is employed part-time at an Arby's restaurant in her neighborhood. She spends much of her free time at Gaines Chapel AME Church in East Moline, which her grandparents attended.

At Gaines, she helps to cook breakfast and sings in the church choir. "I'm no Diana Ross," she joked.

She enjoys her job at Arby's, where she was chosen "Employee of the Month." She'd like to become a medical assistant some day, and a long-term dream is to open a women's shelter.

"What keeps me going is to get my kids to school and interact with the public at my job," Robinson said.

She tries to stay busy and keep her mind occupied. "I am involved with my kids," she said. "It's just fun

being with them. I can act like a kid again, and be funny with them.

“I am blessed by God.”