

Katina's Story: Homeless Teen to Beauty Queen

Katina Brooks became a teen mom at the tender age of 16. While many might have written her off as just another hopeless statistic headed for a life of poverty and dependency, her story - like so many others - is one of hope and possibility.

In fact, Katina beautifully demonstrates that the future is not written. Lasting stability and self-sufficiency are achievable when homeless families and children are given the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

Katina's Story

"I became a mom to my son, Jari, at only 16 and lived at home until I graduated from high school," Katina said. "My mom believed that tough love would ultimately make me more independent and successful, so she found Family Gateway. My three-year-old son and I left home and moved into the Annette G. Strauss Family Gateway Center when I was 19 years old."

"I was young, scared and didn't know what to do next. My case manager helped me look at my options and decide to further my education at the Bill Priest Institute. The professional office certification I earned and skills I developed at Family Gateway helped me get a job in the personal trust department of a bank. I continued to move up, taking my experience to New York Life Insurance and finally to my current position of administrative assistant in the product development department of Mary Kay."

Like many employees of beauty giant Mary Kay Inc., Katina has over 10 years of service with the company. She has also earned her associate's degree and is continuing her education in political science.

She's always looking for opportunities to better herself, "If I have to get out of my comfort zone (to grow), that's OK," she said.

She beams when talking about her son, now 23 years old. "He is bright, articulate and my gentle giant at 6' 7" tall. He loves to cook and is very good. Culinary school is in his future," she said.



"I am the face of family homelessness. When I tell people that know me now, they can't believe I was a homeless teen."

Katina takes time out of her busy day at Mary Kay Inc. to share a smile.

Service. The group shared their kindness and creativity with children and parents during a Valentine's holiday arts and crafts day.

The proud smiles on the children's faces were priceless and fulfilled Katina's mission. "Family Gateway was the place that gave me a start," she said. "I want to share with current residents that I was once where they are, and that they shouldn't let their color, age or anything else keep them from succeeding. It only takes a vision - if I can do it, they can do it."

Thank you for making success stories like Katina's possible with your support. See more photos of Katina's visit to Family Gateway and hear a message from her and her co-workers on the video page of our website.

Giving Back

In addition to her volunteer work as an Ambassador at Family Gateway, Katina hosted a volunteer group of her co-workers at Family Gateway as part of the Mary Kay Global Month of



Children made Valentine's gift bags to share with family and friends.