Rising Strong against addiction, foster-care crisis

**Spokane has an opioid-treatment program unlike others because of one goal: keeping families together.**

By CLAUDIA ROESCH | Special to The Seattle Times

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two a day for a month, Cicelia Bracken and her children tracked the progress of their home-under-construction, watching as beams were erected to sketch the outlines of an imagined life with a working kitchen. At 31, Bracken hadn’t had a place where she could shut the door and sit with her thoughts for years.

Nor had any four young children, all under age 6, who possessed the resilience, joy or skill for the tiniest bedroom. For most of their lives they had shuttled among foster homes, relatives’ houses and shelters — upheavals so frequent that the mere sight of a policeman in an approaching car made Bracken’s 5-year-old daughter sob uncontrollably. As the family’s income and circumstances continued to shrink, coming for anyone, Bracken would tell the apple-cheeked girl, “No, sweetie, they’re not coming for us.”

Since 2008, when she first began using heroin, then methamphetamine, Bracken had known because of her children’s needs, taken by 2016, when her kids were in foster care. She had worked as a social worker for Child Protective Services for 15 years.

But now she was part of an experimental program that focused on rebuilding families, and of those same social workers became her biggest cheerleaders. They treated her for depression, got her into a drug detox program. What she wanted was sobriety and mothering skills back on track by then, they said. Bracken, addicted for the better part of a decade, wasn’t nearly in remission.

An alumna of the child-welfare system herself, she’d dropped out of high school in the 11th grade. Sometimes she worked a couple of months at Walmart, or at a health-care aide. Otherwise, she panhandled. Burning through savings, the family lived on a food stamp that subsidized her son’s Meals on Wheels. So much for a civilian career.

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