

## Strength, Determination and Integrity: Sylvia's Story

She stands on the stage at our annual Report to the Community meeting looking confident and poised. Yet, as Sylvia speaks, we learn her story is distressing, but also hopeful.

A young, 24 year old single mom of three children, Sylvia lives in poverty in Calgary. She struggles daily with multiple barriers that prevent her from breaking this cycle. Sylvia is currently working at a local hotel, however she is finding it challenging to secure a job that has the flexibility she needs to take care of her family and that pays enough to cover the high cost of childcare. And so, the cycle continues.

This young Sudanese mom was born in Kenya and immigrated to Canada with her family when she was 10 months old, escaping a war-torn country. Once in Canada, her family moved around often, finally landing in Calgary.

A visible minority, Sylvia experienced racism starting in Kindergarten, and compounding her challenges, she was also experiencing abuse at home. She says it was not easy growing up. "My father was an alcoholic and abused my mother, and us kids too," says Sylvia.

Her childhood experience, one of fear and neglect, lead to Sylvia's intense need to feel loved. She finally left home, believing that life would be better, but it was not. "I turned to men who were mirror versions of my father," says Sylvia.

*Continued to Page 2*



**Adopt a Family**  
*fueled by Lexus of Calgary*

Closer to Home's annual Adopt-a-Family initiative supports low-income families who would otherwise be unable to provide their families with a joyful Christmas.

**Sign up to support a family by Dec. 3rd at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com)**

Knowing she had no income or support, Sylvia says men tried to lure her into the sex trade, drug trafficking and robbery. Thankfully, they were not successful. "I chose not to pursue these options, however I ended up having three children at a young age," says Sylvia. With no money, few supports and three young children, Sylvia landed in a life of poverty.



Sylvia with her daughter.

In desperate need and feeling isolated, Sylvia was referred by Calgary Housing to Closer to Home's West Central Family Resource Centre. "I went to talk to them and immediately felt comfortable. They saw my potential. There was no judgement," says Sylvia. There, Sylvia received assistance and was connected to resources. She was invited to attend workshops and programs, free of charge, for both herself and her children.

Sylvia also received parenting supports. "She was very young, had no supports and although she was a great mom, she did not know about child development and how to parent effectively," says Minoush Rafie, Closer to Home Program Coordinator. Since Sylvia hadn't experienced positive parenting when she was young, she had no positive role models and little knowledge of parenting strategies."

Sylvia learned about trauma and understanding the effects of trauma in her life. She learned how to plan and set goals. She is working towards financial independence.

"These programs helped me to better understand community and the resources that are available. They also taught me about acceptance in society," says Sylvia. She enjoys sharing her knowledge with others and hopes her story will encourage those in situations like hers to ask for help. "You don't have to be at rock bottom to reach out for support and to be resourceful," she says.

Sylvia is still involved with Closer to Home, working towards a better life for herself and her children. Through her participation in programs, Sylvia has developed a sense of belonging and a sense of community, which are building blocks in overcoming poverty and trauma.

Sylvia continues to work hard and keeps an open mind to learning and growing. She is currently going to school taking esthetics, and also wants to study business and marketing. She has big dreams and is hoping to own her own business one day. "I love music and singing and one day I hope to translate my creativity into my own brand." But, most of all, Sylvia loves her children and wants to give them a good life.

Sylvia says her children taught her "strength, determination and integrity," but as we watch her telling her story on stage, in front of nearly one hundred people, we see that she always had these qualities, and it is really Sylvia who will be passing this legacy on to her children.

## Parenting Tips

**My 6-year-old seems to feel anxious in different situations. What are the signs and symptoms of anxiety in young children and as a parent, how do I manage it from day to day?**

Anxiety is a common mental health concern in children. Symptoms may occur as headaches, tummy aches, restlessness, sleeplessness, fear of being alone, etc. Children respond differently, so here are some tips to help understand and manage it together.

1. Teach your child how to identify and express their emotions. To enhance their self-awareness, help them understand their body's response to emotions. Try asking: "How does your body feel?"
2. Identify anxiety triggers together by listing activities and situations that make them feel anxious.
3. Together, brainstorm mindfulness and coping strategies (relaxation breathing, music, sports, etc.), to discover which activities lessen their anxiety. Try Coping Strategy Bingo or a Calm-Down Checklist.
4. Using a Worry Box encourages conversation about what worries your child. Empower them by teaching problem solving skills and how to ask for help or how to raise concerns. For more information about tools like the Worry Box, visit our blog.

As children can mirror their parents' actions, be sure to regulate your emotions and remain calm. Establish consistency, be empathetic and praise them for using their coping strategies and skills. If these strategies are not working, or if your child's anxiety is interfering with everyday life, seek additional advice from your doctor or mental health professional.

*Written by Bessie Dudu  
CTH Volunteer*

## We Need Your Help Opening Our New Teaching Home!

Closer to Home is growing! We are pleased to announce that we will be opening a new Community Teaching Home in Calgary this month.

Our Teaching Homes are a safe place for children and youth who have been separated from their families. This new home will house up to five at-risk youth until they are able to be reunited with their families.

Our staff will work with the youth and their support teams to create treatment plans and identify important skills that will benefit them in learning how to deal with others, such as family members, skills for school and work, skills for being involved in the community, and skills for living independently.



By creating these opportunities, youth will discover their success while in the home and will generalize their newly learned skills in future placements as well as all settings of their lives in the long-term.

To ensure the home is welcoming, safe and comfortable for the youth when they arrive, we are in need of some new items and gift cards, including:

- Bed Bath and Beyond Gift Cards (to personalize bedrooms and bedding according to each youth's preference)
- IKEA Gift Cards (to stock the kitchen with utensils, pots, pans and plates so kids will have nourishing homemade meals)
- Home Depot, Rona or Lowes Gift Cards (to spruce up the home and make it fresh, safe and inviting for the youth)
- Financial donations are always welcome and provide Closer to Home with flexibility to meet the greatest need, while providing the donor with a charitable tax receipt. Donate online at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com) or fill out the form on page 4.

If you are able to help, please contact Jessica at (403) 543-0550, ext. 250. Thank you in advance for your support!

\$50 (INCLUDES \$36 TAX RECEIPT)

### CHANGE A LIFE BY GIVING **MARLEY THE MOOSE** A HOME THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!

Make a gift in honour of a special someone this Christmas. Not only will you be supporting families served by Closer to Home, but a Marley the Moose stuffed toy will be sent to your recipient to notify them that a gift was made in their honour.

Visit [www.closertohome.com/marley](http://www.closertohome.com/marley)





## You Make Difference!

*Thank you to our donors who supported Closer to Home in the last quarter (July 1, 2019 to September 30, 2019).*

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And many more donors who wish to remain anonymous.

## Join Our Team

### Foster Parent

This full-time live-in position (24 hours a day) in your own home for an individual or couple looking to have a positive and lasting impact on children and their families. Foster Parents' primary objective is to provide specialized treatment oriented family based care for children who may otherwise be placed in more structured programs, follow all legislative and agency mandated policies and procedures involved in the care of foster children, as well as participate fully in the process of family reunification, if appropriate.

### Adopt-a-Family Volunteer

The Volunteers will work with Closer to Home (CTH) staff to help low-income families in the Calgary community during CTH's annual Adopt-a-Family initiative. The volunteer will help with administrative tasks, sorting gift packages in preparation for delivery to families, loading gift packages in vehicles, and/or notifying families when their gift package is ready. Time requirement: A commitment to a minimum of 3 shifts (3-4 hours per shift) in November and December.

*For detailed information or to check out more career and volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com).*

HERE'S MY GIFT TO SUPPORT THE NEW GROUP HOME AND OTHER SERVICES!



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*We will call you to process your donation through CanadaHelps. Ph: \_\_\_\_\_*

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You can also make your contribution online at [www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com), just click the DONATE button.

### Please return your completed form to:

3507A 17 Ave SW Calgary, Alberta T3E 0B6

Or fax your completed form to (403) 246-6406

**Questions?** Contact us at (403) 543-0550 Ext. 250

When this project is funded, additional donations will be applied to the area of greatest need to continue the work of Closer to Home. Thank you for your support.

[www.closertohome.com](http://www.closertohome.com) | Charitable Registration Number 89823 5759 RR0001

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