

HUFFPOST



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Mother-Daughter Team Dedicate Lives to Women and Children Affected by Substance Use Disorder

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PEXELS

Addiction is a progressive, chronic disease. Like other diseases, Substance Use Disorder presents [serious risks](#) for pregnant women and their children, both in and out of the womb.

With a record-breaking staggering death toll that continues to climb, [Parental Substance Abuse](#) is becoming more and more common. Prenatal complications due to drug use are just the tip of the heartbreaking iceberg.

According to Drugrehab.us, child abuse and neglect is more prevalent in homes with an addicted parent. Children with parents who abuse substances are three times more likely to be abused, and four times as likely to be neglected, than those who grow up without an addicted parent. In fact, 1/3 – 2/3 of all child harm cases involve some level of alcohol abuse or drug addiction.

More so, a child exposed to a parent's drug use is more likely to display behavioral problems and be at a higher risk for developing a mental illness, like anxiety or depression. Troubled children risk being placed from caregiver to caregiver, which is detrimental to their sense of stability and security.

Lastly, research has repeatedly found direct links between a parent's substance abuse and a child's likelihood of one day abusing alcohol and/or drugs later in life.

[Rebecca \(Becky\) Flood](#) and her daughter, Margaret Smith, have dedicated their lives to helping women and children across the country affected by Substance Use Disorder. The mother-daughter duo's philosophy?

Heal Women, Heal Generations.



BECKY FLOOD
The mother-daughter team

Parental Substance Abuse is a long-term problem that very well affects the child's capacity to complete school, get a job, and lead a healthy life.

Flood and Smith aim to provide mothers with the resources to enter recovery from drug or alcohol addiction. In turn, these mothers can give their children every opportunity to go on and lead a meaningful and healthy life.

Flood, in recovery for 41 years, has four decades of industry experience. For the past 13 years, she has been CEO of Southern California's [New Directions for Women](#), **an exclusively female, private drug and alcohol rehab program providing social model residential addiction treatment services for women of all ages, including pregnant women, women with children, women who have relapsed, had prior treatments and suffer from a co-existing disorder.** New Directions, celebrating 40 years of service, is one of only a very few centers in the U.S. serving this population. The goal is lifelong recovery.

"I was 15 years old when I was admitted to Riverside Hospital in Wilmington, Delaware as a very ill adolescent due to alcohol, medications, and illicit drug use. My alcohol and drug use negatively impacted me emotionally, spiritually, and physically, as well as my family. I struggled in school as a result of my addiction. I got into fights, I had suicide attempts, and my family was desperate for me to get help," recounted Flood. "I then entered treatment at a residential facility in Bel Air, Maryland called Hiddenbrook where I spent 45 days." recounted Flood, who remains deeply involved in spiritual practices and principles, applying them to every facet of her life.

While there are several government funded women and children's programs, not enough of them are able to treat those in need of services. In some areas, there is no access to this type of care at all.

"New Directions for Women is very unique in treating a privately insured population of pregnant women and women with children who utilize their health care to some extent, their own private resources, and we provide partial scholarship funding (made possible by generous donors) to give pregnant women and women with children the intensity and duration of care that they need to heal," explained Flood. **"We are only one in a handful of programs nationwide to treat this population of women.** There is still a scarcity of women coming forward to receive care. Many providers are treating women without their children, or treating a woman when she's pregnant and then needing to discharge her when she gives birth because they can't accommodate the child."

This practice doesn't help to create family healing or provide continuity of care. New Directions for Women stands apart due to its services. New Directions for Women, which has seen 5,000 women walk through its doors since 1977, provides onsite child care services, assists women in working with both public and private schools to ensure that their children's individual education plans (IEPs) are being met, and seeks out community support for the children.

Flood works with women who are in danger of losing custody of their children, women who have lost custody of their children, women who are in the process of reunifying with their children, and has created pathways for both the children and the entire family to come together so all the generations begin to recover.



BECKY FLOOD

Becky plays with her granddaughter

“Helping to save one life, and one child, is priceless,” said Flood. “The life healing work that I am blessed to participate in will change the world. We have alumnae that are now therapists, teachers, and starting their own non-profits. We have children who are becoming lawyers, that didn’t have to be afraid to come home any longer, that are finishing high school as Valedictorians of their classes. Most importantly, we have children that never have to see their moms under the influence again and that get to be with them their whole lives.”

While Flood supports women with Substance Use Disorder on the West Coast, her daughter, Margaret Smith, works with children of Parental Substance Abuse on the East Coast, providing their mothers the resources and time to heal.

Smith is one of the 45 million people who are [directly impacted](#) by the disease of addiction.

“I am not personally in recovery from addiction, but I certainly understand the journey of family recovery,” stated Smith. “My entire life has been surrounded by addiction and recovery. I attended Alcoholic Anonymous meetings regularly when I was younger. My mother (Flood) has been sober for 41 years. My biological father never sought treatment. My oldest brother has been in recovery for three years. I grew up surrounded by those in recovery. I have participated in interventions and offer many resources to families struggling with addiction.”

Practicing what she preaches, at just 32-years-old, **Smith and her husband already have fostered 33 children, five of whom they have adopted. Smith was just 24 years old when she took in her first child.**



MARGARET SMITH

Margaret and her family

“There are many things that lead up to me wanting to foster children,” said Smith, who noted she never saw her mother under the influence. They lived in a sober home, brought up on recovering principles. “Through my mother’s work, I remember the infants that were born drug addicted and the school aged children who were trying to heal while their mothers were in treatment. Interacting with these children always brought me comfort. I love all children but have always gravitated toward children who have higher needs and who need the most love and attention.”

Almost every child that has entered Smith's home has a parent who suffers from addiction. [Experts](#) estimate that 80 to 90 percent of foster care placements can be traced to parental substance abuse.

"I think the worst story I ever heard came from a woman whose mother was using drugs, and had raised her in an addictive home. At age 12, her mother started prostituting her so that she could support her own habit," said Flood. "That's just one example of thousands of devastating stories I've heard throughout my career."

"I want to show these children that there is a different and better life than what they experienced, and encourage them to seek that life. I hope the love and care I have given them will inspire them and reflect in their actions one day," added Smith.

Both Flood and Smith have no intention of slowing down, acutely aware that every voice and every action makes a difference in the lives of these fragile families.

"We, as individuals, families, and a nation, need to recognize substance use disorder and other behavioral health diagnoses as the diseases that they are, and put our resources into the solution," stated Flood, who was recently presented the [Mae Abraham Legacy Award](#), one of the industry's top honors. "As a nation, we will begin to heal and generations will forever be changed. **Joy conquers the tears, the shame, and the guilt, when these women are given the care they require with dignity, grace, and respect.** I've seen them bloom into amazing human beings - survivors that can thrive, lead, guide, model, mentor, change a day, a life, a world, when they are given what they need to be healthy, and whole, and well."

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