



## Community Action Opportunities

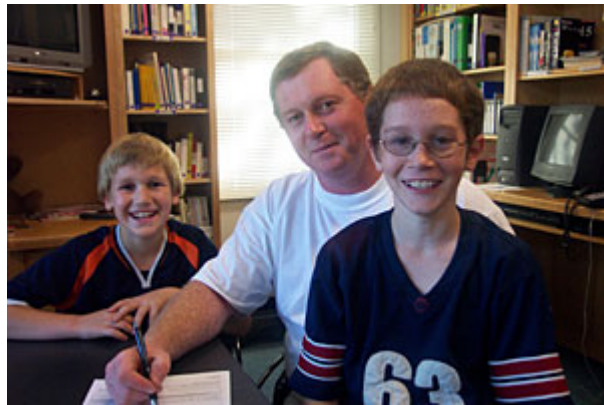
HELPING PEOPLE. CHANGING LIVES.

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### **Life Works for Fathers helped this man turn his life around for himself and his children.....**

When James Hensley joined Life Works for Fathers, he was at a very low point in his life.

Mr. Hensley had been taking care of his grandmother and she had recently passed. He was living with his mother and step-father in a rural area in Madison County. He had been unemployed for over two years. He had been out of touch with all four of his children, and he was in the custody of the court for not meeting his child support obligations.



James Hensley did not have a driver's license. He did not have a social security card. He did not have access to transportation. He did not have a high school education. He was cut off from mainstream society. What James Hensley did have was a desire, a strong desire to improve his life for his sake and the sake of his children – and that desire made all the difference in the world.

Mr. Hensley walked into the office of Robert Simmons, Coordinator of Life Works for Fathers, and said, "All I need is someone to believe in me, and I'll do the rest." "He set goals and then took one step at a time," recalls Mr. Simmons who watched Mr. Hensley take control of his life, assume parental responsibility and move toward self-sufficiency.

First, Mr. Hensley concentrated on getting a driver's license, then a social security card. He had previous experience as a painter, a carpenter and a general handyman, so he found a job as a painter. He learned to manage money.



He made steady progress to bring his child support payment current and consistently met his child support obligation for his two

oldest children, who were 14 and 16 years old at the time he entered the program.

When the mother of his two youngest boys left them in Mr. Hensley's custody, he moved out of his mother's house into a two-bedroom apartment. The boys were 6 and 8 years old at the time. Mr. Hensley used relationship counseling to work through his differences with the boys' mother, so that they can now focus on the children's best interests.

In the meantime, he was promoted to crew supervisor, earning a wage of \$12/hour and working 34 hours a week. Today, he manages two or three different crews. His schedule allows him to pick up his children from day care and meet their needs.

Mr. Hensley also reached out to his older two children. His daughter now comes for dinner.

After two years, James had established and was able to maintain a stable, healthy environment for himself and his children. He was ready to graduate. "We help fathers put their lives together and do it in a way that is sustainable," explains Mr. Simmons, "so that they can continue the journey even after graduation."

"James," Mr. Simmons says, "has remained anchored, and part of the reason he has remained anchored is that he's very involved in the church and is active in our Life Works for Fathers Support Group." Another reason graduates can continue to improve their lives is the program's emphasis on problem-solving skills. "A job is not what's wrong. And it's not what is going to fix it. The job is part of the situation, but it's not the whole solution," explains Mr. Simmons.

"James," Mr. Simmons emphasizes, "jumped in with both feet and hit the ground running and has not stopped." In the end, James Hensley found that one person to believe in him, and that person was James Hensley.

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