

Shardea Udom

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\$5,000 WINNER
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Ever since I was two years old, I've had a hearing disability. I wasn't talking and my parents found out I needed hearing aids, and then I was able to speak. But it affected my confidence. I was bullied at school — kids made fun of me because I couldn't hear everything. And it's still a challenge now because often at work I can't hear what customers are saying and they think I'm ignoring them. I lip read, so during the pandemic masks made everything harder. Also, I was eating a lot of fast food and I was the heaviest I've ever been. I live with my boyfriend, Darren, who's supportive, but I wasn't feeling good about myself.

I'm 33 and felt my life didn't hold much promise.

I lost the motivation to work out and my self-esteem dropped to an all-time low. My friends would invite me out and I'd always come up with an excuse not to go. I was depressed and at work I'd end up breaking down in the bathroom. My co-worker, Clare Creegan, listened and empathized and inspired me to start the Thrive Challenge. She always talks about how it's helped her.

I looked in the mirror and said something has to give and it starts with me.

I began drinking water with cucumber and lemon every morning, which is refreshing and sets me up for the whole day. I'm cooking stir fries with veggies, chicken, and shrimp and I don't even crave fast food or candy.

Writing my thoughts and positive words in a journal helps to motivate me.

I'll write: "Shardea you are beautiful, you are smart, you will conquer everything. Just keep taking small steps."

My mom is my rock and she's become my workout partner.

There's a gym in her senior living apartment, and we do the treadmill and elliptical. It's also great bonding time for us. I've lost 17 pounds and kept it off, and I'm feeling great.

While I'm cleaning the house, I listen to old-school R&B and feel invincible.

I'll put on Aaliyah, Monica, or Chris Brown, and it makes me happy and peaceful. Darren and I play games together and watch movies — we love thrillers like The Rental.



I'm painting and expressing myself creatively.

I've been going to group art 'experiences' run by a company called: Painting with a Twist. You paint, laugh, and socialize, while having a good time. It's relaxing. I let go of all the stress. I went with my best friend, Kayla, for her sister's birthday and painted a pair of women's shoes. No one judges you, there's no right or wrong, and I created my own masterpiece. The title is "Keep Walking" because I believe when trials and tribulations come our way, the best thing to do is to keep walking. I hung the painting up in my mom's place.

I also love reading; my bookshelf is my thing!

I absolutely love a series of romance novels by Francis Ray called Graysons of New Mexico. Books open me up and give me insights into different worlds.

I'm going back to school and narrowing down different career options.

I've always wanted to do something in the medical field and I'm thinking of studying to become a pediatric nurse or doing counseling, because I'm soft-hearted and caring. I know some sign language and I'm also interested in becoming an interpreter, to help my fellow hearing-impaired people, and people who are Deaf.

I have more confidence and I know my hearing disability is not something to hide.

The other day a customer was trying to get my attention, but of course I didn't hear her. Once she was in my eyeline, I simply apologized and said, "I wasn't ignoring you, I'm hearing impaired." She said, "No problem at all." She wanted to know where the baby formula was. So I took her to find it and she was so grateful. It felt amazing to be open and be my true self.

My ultimate dream: to get married, buy a house with a picket fence, and have kids.

My other goal is to have a career I love. I have so much hope for the future and I know this is a new beginning for me.



THRIVE