

\$5,000 WINNER

Michelle Barrett

**Walmart Store #1843
McMinnville, OR****Money****Microstep**

Sitting down to talk about our finances

**Outcome**

"My new hobby is shopping at thrift stores and finding bargains"

In the past few years, my family has had a lot of big house expenses. We had to pay over \$11,000 for a new roof and buy a new water heater, and we had to repair our fence after a storm. My husband, Vince, and I want to provide a good life for our two sons, but it was hard making ends meet and I was very stressed. I was often in tears and I felt overwhelmed. My co-worker Jamie Saxton was a Thrive Challenge winner, and encouraged me to start.

Vince and I began taking a Microstep: sitting down to talk about our finances.

We discuss our budget for the month ahead, assess our expenses, and decide what to set aside for special celebrations like birthdays. We're putting \$100 away each month into our savings account and \$50 each into savings accounts for our sons, which will go towards college or trade school.

We cut back on things we want, but don't need.

For example, Vince collects Star Wars memorabilia and I love ornamental dolphins, but we already have a lot, so we've stopped buying more. I was thinking of getting a heart-shaped tattoo inscribed with my kids' names, but I decided that can wait. And we've stopped buying video games for the boys.

We're saving money by cooking at home and only eating out occasionally.

I'm having fun trying healthy new recipes. I just made delicious fish tacos. I buy Walmart's Great Value bread and cereal, which cost less than name brands and taste just as good. Other Microsteps have helped too, like washing our laundry in cold water, which still gets everything clean.

We have a 'Fun Money Jar' in the kitchen, which any extra cash goes into.

We've been turning cans and bottles into the recycling plant and they give you cash, which adds up. We're saving to go to the beautiful Oregon coast for a couple of days. So far we have \$500. Another way we make a little extra money is by having garage sales. We also have another jar by the door for donations to the Salvation Army, as it always feels so good to give back.

My favorite Microstep is shopping at thrift stores instead of buying new things.

Thrifting has become a passion. I'm finding amazing bargains on clothes and saving so much money. Since starting the Challenge, I've been working out a lot, and I buy great athletic clothes, like \$5 for a Nike sweatshirt. I've tried to instill in my boys that shopping in thrift stores should be applauded. You're being smart with your purchases. I love reading and I buy all my books second hand now, for as little as a dollar.

We're doing family activities at home that don't cost anything.

We've instituted "Friday Funday," when we'll play board games and do art projects. I love drawing cartoons. We're teaching our boys, Kenny, who's 17, and JJ, who's 12, to be careful about how they spend their money and save for things they really want. JJ saved for months to buy a gaming chair. I'm very proud because they now have \$1,000 each in their savings accounts from money they've received for birthdays and Christmas. They're learning to be responsible young men.

Having more control over our finances is a great feeling.

We've managed to pay for most of our household repairs. There'll always be unexpected expenses, but I feel much more calm because we're doing our best to save and spend our money smartly. I'm 47, and looking forward to being more financially stable as we get older. I'm also focusing on being thankful for what I have. I'm grateful to have a nice house and a good job, and I'm grateful that my family and I have each other. We may not be rich financially, but we're rich in love.