

Bree Swartzmiller

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\$5,000 WINNER
Neighborhood Market #7299
Port St Lucie, FL



I'm a single mom with five kids, aged between 15 and 24, and five grandchildren. There are six of us living in a one bedroom apartment: Angel, my 15 year-old daughter; my son, Naikeem; his partner; and their two kids. I've been feeling anxious and depressed. It's so hard trying to keep everything clean and tidy. I'd stress eat and buy cheap fast food. I'd cry a lot and I felt like I was always talking about my problems, but never doing anything to fix them.

I'd say my depression goes back to my childhood.

My mother was an addict and the last time I saw my father, when I was 12, he was drunk. As a teenager I tried to commit suicide but I'm proud that I never gave in to my depression. Both my parents died young. I'm 43 and I want to live to see my grandkids and maybe great grandkids too. I don't drink or use drugs and my kids and I have had family therapy, but I wanted more support. My store manager, Heather Gunnell, told me about the Thrive Challenge and I said, "I'm going to try this."

I cut out red meat and eat more veggies.

I'll saute chicken with a little coconut oil and have it with veggies like asparagus and squash. Everyone in the family has a hectic schedule but I make sure we eat together at least once a week.

I go for brisk walks and monitor my steps with my Apple watch.

At work, I'm always running around the store and going up and down ladders. And at home I'm running up and down the stairs. I've lost 17 pounds and feel great.

I'm making time for myself.

I learned how to do breathing techniques and how to meditate. When everyone's out, I'll put on music like Bach or Beethoven, or nature sounds like birds and ocean waves. I'll sit down, breathe in and out, relax, and let everything roll off me. I say to myself, "Today is going to be awesome." If I get stressed at work, I'll do something as simple as taking a minute to breathe deeply.

I'm spending time with my friends doing activities we enjoy, like bowling.

Every other Sunday my co-workers and I get together for game night. Right now we're playing Dungeons and Dragons.

I think giving back is important and I've been volunteering for the Pace Center for Girls which advocates for girls who are at risk and helps them get the education and counseling they need. We had a women's empowerment summit at our church.

I've gone back to school and I'm studying for my high school diploma.

When I was young, I never got the chance to get my GED. My goals are to move up in the company — I'd love to be a team lead, get my driver's license, and eventually buy my own home.

I'm saving money so my kids have more opportunities than I had.

I've been putting away \$20 from every paycheck. Saving is hard for me but I want my kids to aim high and get a good education. I tell them, "I want you guys to be in a better position than I am in, so I'll help, but you need to work hard."

I'm connecting with my kids and grandkids — we go to the park and to the movies.

It's important to me because I never did that with my mother. Angel likes to go to an anime store in the mall. I don't know anything about anime but I'll listen to her and ask questions because it's her interest. We're communicating more. She knows she can talk to me about anything and everything.

I can handle everything a lot better now and I feel more calm.

I have more energy to play with my grandchildren. In the past, I always felt like screaming and yelling. I'm doing my best to let go of the past and heal. I've forgiven my parents: I know they were addicts and that addiction is an illness. The biggest thing for me is knowing that I am good enough as a person, which I've never felt before. I am worthy of being loved and I am worthy of respect.



THRIVE