

Shari JONES

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Story By:
KIMBERLY REVEIL

Shari Jones is known as a visionary in the social services community of North Central Florida. While working at Alachua County Sheriff's Office she played a major role in implementing the Inmate Transition Program providing therapy for cognitive behavior, substance abuse, and employability skills for inmates reentering society. As a counselor with The Department of Children and Families she used her skills to help stabilize homes and keep children with their parents. Local veterans found suitable housing, medical care, financial assistance and job placement during her time at Family Endeavors. And most recently, her team and clients at Family Promise benefit from her heart and hand as she serves as

Director of Operations and Lead Case Manager.

This "visionary's" gift of foresight led her team to surpass a ninety percent success rate for the past five years. Meaning, over ninety percent of families in the organization's programs have sustained stable housing for at least one year. When asked how she creates effective plans to reach such a grande achievement she answered that her main focus is helping her clients overcome one major obstacle - poverty. "When studying my client's different situations it was clear that everything goes back to defeating the cycle of poverty. If you can defeat poverty, you can defeat housing insecurity, education insecurity, and job insecurity," she shared.

Shari has dedicated her life to empowering people and communities. Many would be surprised to know

she earned a Master's Degree in Criminal Law but forsook a law career in exchange for grassroots social change. "I realized by the time I became a lawyer and these cases came across my desk, it would be too late. I've been successful because I was following my truth. Doors will open for everyone who does the same," she explained.

The decision to live in her truth has set the trajectory of her career. In partnership with local organizations she pushes initiatives like Mindfulness for Kids and Photovoice, giving children an opportunity to express their feelings creatively and without judgment. Also, Rape Aggression Defense (R.A.D.), comprehensive courses that provide awareness, prevention, risk reduction and avoidance, and hands-on defense training against sexual predators.

With resolve to her core values of education and financial freedom, she recruits students to Grow with Google programs, allowing them to gain certificates that enable an immediate break in the cycle of poverty. Along with that, Shari is a member of Newberry Opioid Task Force and the Prevention Subcommittee of North Central Florida Task Force.

She encourages those going through a rough patch to view their obstacles as opportunities and believe there is nothing you can't overcome. For neighbors desiring to become more involved she advises to take cues from your community, then you'll know where to start.

Besides truth, legacy is an anchor for Shari and a filter through which she makes decisions. "I want to make sure the lives of those I touch change for the better," she said.



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