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## — Portrait of Hope ————— Renee Galante —

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When Renee first came to Project Self-Sufficiency in 1990, she was a single mother of a newborn daughter. With no high school diploma and no way to support her family, she felt helpless and hopeless. She had set no goals for herself beyond getting her GED. But once she had done that through Project Self-Sufficiency, the support and encouragement she received from her counselor and fellow participants made her want to aim higher. She applied for and enrolled in college with the help of financial aid.

That first semester of college, Renee met her future husband. She set her educational goals aside and became a stay-at-home mother. Unfortunately, 12 years later she found herself divorced and a single parent once again. This time, she wasn't so helpless or hopeless—she knew she could turn to Project Self-Sufficiency and get help setting new goals for the future.

This time around, Renee was not afraid to dream big. She decided to pursue her lifelong dream to study and teach art. In following her dream, she earned a B.A. in Art and a Masters degree in Art Education, and even spent a semester studying in the south of France! Renee is now a licensed and certified art teacher; an accomplishment that amazes even Renee herself. “In my wildest dreams I never would have imagined myself with a Masters degree,” she says, “since I never even finished high school! It has not always been easy, but I stand here as proof that you can achieve your dreams with a lot of hard work and the support and encouragement of your counselors at Project Self-Sufficiency.”

Renee has passed her determination and work ethic on to her two daughters. Her elder daughter is now in nursing college, and her younger daughter is a high school honor student. In her new career, Renee has the opportunity to inspire and encourage her students to follow their dreams as well. She hopes to do the same for other single parents who are facing the same obstacles she once faced. To her fellow Project Self-Sufficiency participants, Renee says, “While we have had a tough road to walk, we are the example to our children that, with an education, we can overcome adversity, set goals for ourselves, and, most importantly, fulfill them. I stand here proudly, a strong and educated woman with a bright future and the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others.”

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