



**JENNIFER WATKINS**

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*"If you are able to be a blessing to someone then be it. My goal daily is to be a blessing to everyone I come in contact with."*

- Jennifer's motto

I am a wife to an amazing husband (who waited 6 years to marry me) and mom of 2 biological adult daughters now 24 and almost 23 (she was born on my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday) and 1 bonus daughter (who passed away last July (she would have been 37 this year).

I have worked in the human service field since 1989 with my first job working with 25-5 year olds at the YMCA in a camp. I stayed at the YMCA until 1992 working in different jobs at the Y, one being a program manager of an after-school program while still a full-time student. I studied at the University of Rhode Island from 1988-1991 studying early childhood education. My plan was to be a kindergarten teacher. I ended up taking a year off from school as working full time with school full time was very stressful.

I continued working at the Y and decided I would volunteer my time at a nursery located in Providence on the southside. It was a nursery for children who were in state custody that were born HIV+ and/or drug exposed. That volunteer opportunity quickly turned into a full-time childcare worker which quickly turned into the Program Manager. Some of my job tasks were to supervise parents while they visited with their babies in the nursery. I loved to see when babies were reunited with their parents.

It was this job that made me want to change my major to Social Work. In 1992 I decided to go back to school part time while still working full time as the Nursery Manager. I learned so much about child development, child reunification, substance abuse, alcoholism and how resilient babies really are. In this same year my then boyfriend proposed to me. I said yes as long as he would be willing to wait until after I graduated. Because I was starting all over again in school in a different program and a different college, I ended up graduating 6 years later with my BSW from Rhode Island College on May 23, 1998. Two

days later, on May 25, my husband and I got married.

It was then I knew that I wanted to work with children and families. I had no idea that I would end up at Travelers Aid (now Crossroads Rhode Island) and stay for almost 24 years. Today I am the Vice President of Emergency Shelters and Housing Problem Solving. I absolutely love the work that I do. I oversee 6 emergency shelters, one Domestic Violence Shelter, and the Housing Problem Solving team (mobile diversion, working with the local school department, library and other housing developers in the area to get people into housing before they reach our shelter system).