

thumbs up!

YMCA steps in to help single mom restart her life

By Christy Barritt
Correspondent

People have called Erica Kumatsky both courageous and a coward. She's not sure which one she calls herself yet.

Four years ago, Kumatsky, a single mom, quit her job, gave away her possessions, packed up her 3½-year-old daughter and started driving north from Florida to start a new life. The two ended up in Chesapeake.

With the help of a local YMCA, Kumatsky and her daughter have thrived in their new environment, despite Amelya's diagnosis of oppositional defiant disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"She was having such a hard time in school," said Kumatsky, 29. "It got to the point where I was getting a phone call every day at about

11:30 because she was having a breakdown."

Someone recommended the YMCA's Early Adventures, a free, collaborative program with Chesapeake Public Schools. It serves high-risk children and has an emphasis on kindergarten readiness. Kumatsky enrolled Amelya.

"They were more equipped to help with her," said Kumatsky. "She still had some behavioral issues, but they wouldn't call me to pick her up. They worked through it with her."

Still, Kumatsky was struggling financially. Once again, the YMCA stepped in to help with its after-school Open Doors program, which offers a sliding-fee scale.

"It allows us to help the people who really need it," said Kim Midgette, senior youth director for the YMCA.

Kumatsky, a Greenbrier resident said the staff really cares.

"I know this from the experiences I've had. They genuinely care. They're not here to sell you something. They just want you to be healthy."

Brendan Ash, a spokesperson for the YMCA, said the Open Doors and Early Adventures programs fit the Y's three goals: youth development, healthy living and social responsibility.

Kumatsky is working full time, as well as studying business management at Tidewater Community College.

"I feel it's important I get a degree so I can be a good role model for my daughter," she said. "I expect her to go to college."

Amelya, now 7, is a first-grader at B.M. Williams Primary School.

Kumatsky said moving to Chesapeake was one of the best decisions she ever made.

"Some people say you're so courageous for up and moving, and other people say you're a coward, you were just running away. At this point, I don't know which one it was. I just know that I needed a change."

And a helping hand. "I want to encourage people to think about making the Open Doors program one that they donate to," Kumatsky said. "There are so many families out there who could benefit from it."

For more information about the YMCA of South Hampton Roads, visit their website at: www.ymcashr.org or call 757-962-5555.

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Single mom Erica Kumatsky, who is working full time and taking classes at TCC, is grateful for the support she has received for her daughter, Amelya, in the YMCA's Open Doors and Early Adventures programs.