



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF PEACE



Denise "Dee" Burris

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Thankful for the support she received as a young girl at Peace Neighborhood Center, Dee Burris continues to stay in touch with Peace and Bonnie Billups. She also pays it forward professionally, working as a social worker with the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, Washtenaw County Child Protective Services.

Dee Burris lived in South Maple housing, attended Dicken Elementary School, and participated in Peace youth after-school and summer programs from the age of five through elementary school, before she had to move to Ypsilanti when she was ten as part of a foster care placement. She's now a married mother of two with a 13-year old son and 5-year old daughter, and works as a social worker with Washtenaw County Child Protective Services.

Dee's been generous in sharing her story:

“ Though my mother's struggles meant a “chaotic” home, she made sure my older sister and I attended Peace programs as much as possible. I really looked forward to the tutoring I got after school and the fun we had at Peace's Summer Camp. At the time, Rose and Bonnie were both there; [they were] staples of our community.

At Peace, a lot of the kids came from vulnerable families that didn't have a lot; some kids came from broken homes. They made sure every kid felt safe and knew that they would be taken care of. I still remember the fun girls' nights Rose hosted for us, with a movie and a sleep over.

Those moments and experiences we had at Peace were such a vital part of our life. Peace was our shelter and pretty much our only source of consistency growing up in a single parent home with neglect issues. When I was 10, we were removed from my mother's care, though my sister and I were lucky that we could stay together. Our placement meant moving to Ypsilanti, and it was hard not to be able to attend Peace programs. But I always kept in contact with Bonnie.

I aged out of foster care when I was 20, and moved back to Michigan to attend Eastern Michigan University. I was always interested in a career in social work, and started working in Child Protective Services in 2011. With a stable job, I was able to go back to EMU to earn my Masters in Social Work.

Though it's hard to pinpoint just one thing, what I appreciate most about Peace is that I learned a lot of lessons and values there. The staff showed us how to treat each other with respect, [though] they weren't afraid to call us out on stuff. You got to witness how adults should behave and what healthy relationships look like. The work Bonnie and the Peace staff continue to do is so important. They do so much for families and do a good job connecting with kids. For a lot of these kids, Peace is family. Even when kids grow up, Bonnie makes sure to stay in touch.

Your connections to Peace Neighborhood Center don't end even when you stop attending programs. It's an amazing organization. I guess it says a lot about an organization when you stay connected because the time you had there was so meaningful.”

Changing People's Lives for 50 years.



Peace
Neighborhood
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