

Bio – Dr. Brenda Combs



Dr. Brenda Combs is a symbol of inspiration and perseverance to all who meet her. A little over a decade ago, she was a homeless crack addict, a petty criminal, a gaunt and hopeless wreck who had been shot and beaten and raped during the endless years she called “a freeway underpass in the worst part of Phoenix home.” It took hitting rock bottom for Dr. Combs to find the strength to turn her life around on a blistering summer day.

Dr. Combs now spreads a message of hope wherever she goes. Her journey has not been an easy one, however. Growing up in a middle-class family in Northern Arizona, she fell into a bad crowd, began using drugs, and dropped out of school. Her life continued on a downward spiral, leading to her serving jail time and becoming homeless. During her darkest days on the streets, she endured unspeakable trauma, including being beaten, shot, and raped. Her journey, which has been called “From Homeless to Hero” by local media, has received tremendous national coverage, including an article in Reader’s Digest and interviews on The Today Show and CNN News. She has also appeared on radio talk shows across the country and been invited to sing and share her message at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC.

“If I can do it, anybody can do it,” she says. “I believe in myself and my ability to do my best. I’m intelligent and I’m capable of achieving greatness. I think every person has inside of them what it takes to succeed. The day I woke up on the streets and someone had stolen the

shoes off my feet was the day I knew I had to change my life. I knew God had a better plan for my life than this.”

Dr. Combs began taking major steps to reenter society as a productive individual. She entered rehab and worked hard to overcome her addictions. While living in low income housing, she took a part-time job at a school located in an at-risk neighborhood not far from the streets that had been her “home.” As she worked with these children, she knew she had found her life’s calling: to teach and to inspire by sharing her own story of overcoming tremendous obstacles.

Once she set her sights on becoming a teacher, there was no stopping her. As a single mother of a young son who suffered a stroke at birth, she juggled three jobs while earning a bachelor’s degree in human services. She taught at a school for children with special needs and continued to pursue her education at Grand Canyon University, where she earned a master’s degree in special education in 2007. She has since received a doctorate in organizational leadership with an emphasis in education under a scholarship presented to her by Grand Canyon University, becoming one of their first doctoral students. She travels around the country sharing her story as the university’s “ambassador of inspiration & achievement” with a variety of audiences, including youth groups, churches, and professional organizations.

A victim of domestic violence in the past, Dr. Brenda Combs now serves as an advocate for domestic violence awareness. She also lobbies for the rights of the homeless community and, in 2009, was named a national ambassador for the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association's "Power to End Stroke" campaign. Recently, she was selected by the WNBA’s Phoenix Mercury as an “Arizona woman of inspiration” for the second year in a row.

Dr. Combs will share her impactful story with us at More Than a Meal-A Night of Hope: Small Bites for Big Change on September 28th, 2023. Many of those we serve are where Dr. Combs was years ago. She is a shining example of why at Paz de Cristo, we never give up hope on those we serve. Since we opened our doors 35 years ago, we have provided more than 2 million meals and provided countless other services to the Phoenix East Valley community. Your donations at this event will support the work and mission of Paz de Cristo as we Feed, Clothe and Empower our Neighbors in Need.