



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Angela's Success Story

When Angela walked into the St. Vincent de Paul thrift store in the summer of 2020, she had no idea her life was about to change completely. Angela was experiencing homelessness. Temporarily living with family in Pittsburg, Angela knew she needed help. She had bounced between the homes of friends and family, sleeping in her car, and sleeping in shelters, but none of these were permanent solutions and these resources, while a blessing, were not helping her address her homelessness.

Angela found herself homeless after a relationship ended badly. Angela sent her son to live with his father, who she shares custody with, while she attempted to figure out her living and work situation. Angela said the unexpected setback of no longer having a place to live felt nearly impossible to climb out of without help.

"I had been homeless for about 5 years when I came into the thrift store that day," Angela said. "I saw a flyer for the Workforce Development Program, and I decided to give it a try. It helped me so much it's hard to say how grateful I am. But they helped me change my life."

The Workforce Development Program at SVdP is aimed at helping people overcome the barriers preventing them from finding and keeping a good job. Community mentors provide paid classroom instruction on the best practices of finding and keeping gainful employment, and the program is also paired with paid part-time on the job training at one of three SVdP thrift stores. Participants not only receive one-on-one training and guidance, but also receive much-needed compassion, dignity, and a sense of community with the other SVdP WFD participants, volunteer instructors, and the SVdP employees with whom they work with.

"I'm blessed to have found work as a community ambassador. I get to help other people who are in the same situation I was in find and access to services that help them back on their feet. It's very rewarding," Angela said. "I owe so much to the people who helped me. My mentor was such a great role-model and taught me so much about organization and preparedness." Angela said the SVdP WFD program taught her skills she is not sure how she would have developed otherwise. Angela said she had never worked as part of a team before and the training she received from the local thrift store manager helped transform her into a team player.

"Willie was one of the best managers I've ever had. He was so patient and kind to me, he really helped me develop the skills I needed to excel as a community ambassador," Angela said. "After the program, I just feel any opportunity I have to be generous toward others and help them is time well spent."

"I owe a lot of thanks to a lot of people," Angela said. "I lived in shelters, in my car, with friends and family, and I even started taking some classes at t, and they had a program the community college, which allowed me to sleep in my car in their parking lot."

Unfortunately, Angela's circumstances are not that uncommon. According to the Contra Costa County Point-in-Time Count, an annual survey meant to provide an overview of the demographics of homelessness in the Bay Area, approximately 39% of those experiencing homelessness on the night of the count were homeless to do some sort of relationship dissolution. According to the survey, 27% of people on the night of the count were homeless due to an argument with family or a roommate, and 12% were homeless due to divorce or separation. Unfortunately, for many of our neighbors on the economic margins of society, a single unexpected disaster like this can set them back tremendously.

"I am so thankful for the help SVdP provided me. I'm not sure how I would have gotten by at times without their help," Angela said. "I received care at the free medical clinic, food from their dining room and food pantry, and I can never express how thankful I am for everything my mentor taught me." "I even became a donor to St. Vincent de Paul. I didn't donate much, but I wanted to support the great work they do to help people in need."

Upon graduating from SVdP WFD program, Angela not only found stable employment and a place to live. She said her work is hard, but very rewarding.

"It's exhausting work but rewarding. I help people find places to get their laundry done, find food, get their haircut, all those little things you don't think about if you haven't been out on the streets," Angela said.

Angela added that the best part is how much more often she gets to see her son.