



Bill's Story

In His Own Words

When speaking with my housing case manager, Lois George, in December of 2019 about some goals I would like to work on, I mentioned I would like to find a full-time career that offered a comprehensive benefit package but also aligned with my personal core values and beliefs.

I was referred to the Employment Center in January. By February, I was sitting face to face with Humaira Zafar in a conference room at the Howard Street center. That first session I will not forget. I sat there feeling excited, a little overwhelmed and determined. At that time, I was working an average of 27 hours a week in a job I had been in for 5 years. As I began to share my work history, my barriers I faced with employment, criminal history, no driver's license, no college education, and being a 48 year-old young man who wanted to begin a career in social services.

Humaira not only listened, she heard my desire to find a career where I could not only excel in, but also sustain a living in Chicago. She began by handing me job description that aligned with my idea in the field I wanted to enter. She handed me a resource for Office Careers training. Humaira sensed I was experiencing a blockage in moving past my personal set limitation of computer literacy. She offered to help me with rebuilding and rebranding my resume. This was the pivotal support that I needed. I was taught how to intergrade the correct language from the job description into my resume. I had forwarded a couple of job links that I was interested in and to my surprise, she offered to help me apply online. This really helped me move from talk to action. I really wanted to succeed.

I started working with Center for Changing Lives, who I was referred to by HOW. With their help and Humaira, I was able to increase my computer skills, learn financial literacy and continue to search for a career change.

In March, I received a call from Thresholds in response to the job application I had submitted online. (Thank you, Humaira) Due to the COVID environment unfolding, I did phone interviews and Zoom interviews. I was offered a position as a part time Desk Clerk. I thought it was a great entry level position that I could supplement my current job with hours to make 40 hours finally. Then on April 4th, I lost my job of 5 years. I was on employment for about 5 weeks. Before starting May 5th at Thresholds. I instantly fell in love with the organizations mission. I excelled in the role as Desk Clerk. I began working more hours every week as my abilities to adapt to the role. My work ethic, attention to detail, customer service and talent was being noticed by multiple program directors.

In August, I noticed on the internal job board, a posting for an Administrative Assistant position. I decided to apply for the role as it was full time, came with benefits and PTO. I knew the skills I had recently learned would help me fit nicely into the role. I interview with the senior program director and program director on a Tuesday, on Thursday I was offered the promotion, and started that following Monday. I received a 32.5% raise, health benefits, PTO, 403b retirement with company match, etc.

I have been in the new position about 3 months now, it is my dream job. My years of office support positions and skills is helping me thrive. HOW has helped me with work clothing, transportation cards, computer literacy, and so much more. The things that are immeasurable are the shift in my mental health, my financial stability, the ability to enroll in college to help me in my role. Most of all, I feel like a productive member of society because I will be able to afford my rent, I no longer need Medicaid or food stamps. My hopes and dreams have been restored because of HOW's supportive services. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have changed my life!