

Bridges Out of Poverty: A Client's Perspective

"If it wasn't for a place like the YWCA of St. Joseph County, many women would be dead or in jail... my morals and values have all changed since I've been here."

Mary S., age 42, grew up in Logansport, Indiana with four siblings. Both her parents are deceased and she is the mother of an adult daughter.

Mary has nothing but praise for the staff of the YWCA and the programs that are helping re-shape her life. "Without the YWCA, I wouldn't have been able to get where I am now," she stated in a recent interview.

Mary is a resident in the permanent housing program and she is well acquainted with issues of poverty. Her mother was a welfare recipient and Mary said that she thought that was the only way to live.

Mary suffers from mental illness and is a recovering alcoholic but you would not know it. She is determined and highly motivated not only to stay sober but to help others overcome their challenges as well.

When asked about her thoughts on the Bridges Out of Poverty program, she said, "I feel privileged to be one of the first ones in the class. I am not only learning this to help others as a co-facilitator, but to apply this to my life."

According to Mary, Bridges Out of Poverty is helping her to understand the importance of education and that she has options. She is currently working toward a certification in medical billings and claims.

Mary's journey to recovery began a few years ago when a female Elkhart police officer referred her to the YWCA of St. Joseph County after her boyfriend threatened to kill her. Before that, she had tried to commit suicide.

"Surviving the attempted suicide was my spiritual awakening," she said. "I don't believe that people are put here just to breathe. I know what my purpose in life is, thanks to the caring staff and the programs that are administered at the YWCA."

Besides wanting to teach and mentor incoming YWCA clients, Mary is in the process of developing a Dual Recovery Anonymous support group for transitional and permanent housing residents struggling with mental illness and addictions. She also wants to advocate for a living wage ordinance.

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In addition to the above story in the YWCA newsletter, the following is an excerpt from a letter from Brenda, another graduate of the Bridges Out of Poverty/Getting Ahead program at the YWCA.

"I just completed an eight-week program called Bridges Out of Poverty through the YWCA and was in the program's first graduating class on July 27, 2006. I was impressed with what I was able to learn; like the way out of poverty begins with me, setting small goals which are reachable, learning to use resources and more. I also learned the 'hidden rules.' These are the rules that different classes use to

operate at home, work, and in the community. I learned to use the tools in this class to set goals within my reach to work my way out of poverty, instead of looking for a hand-out. The class has taught me I don't have to stay stuck. I can and will be a success not a statistic."