

Testimonials: Success Stories in the Words of Those Helped by Social Services—and Information Resources

If you're compiling a presentation or materials to demonstrate why information resources are so crucial to those in periods of crisis, there is perhaps no more compelling proof than that offered by those who have themselves been helped by information and social services. If you can, acquire testimonials from those who have been helped by your library and community services. These may be anonymous, or identified by first-name only—make sure to require no more information than the writers are comfortable providing. The following are examples of such testimonials from across the Web.

1. Homelessness

- *"I wanted to leave but had nowhere to go. Every time I tried to make a plan to better myself or get out of the situation, I never succeeded. Things continued to get worse, and my kids and I were kicked out with nowhere to go. We were homeless for months. After a few referrals, I was led to Horizon House. I feel the words "providing services" is an understatement. My case manager has provided support and motivation and helped me with every aspect of my life. Thanks to her, my children and I were safe and in a home by December, 2010. I was also able to take 17 credit-hours and graduated with my BS in August 2011. I was recently hired as a Community Outreach Coordinator where I help people get the resources they need to get their lives on track. I love my job! I plan on attending graduate school soon." –Felecia (<http://www.horizonhouse.cc/programs-services/testimonials.aspx>)*
- *"The role that SOME played was they gave me a place where I could store my medicine, I could get my proper rest, I could cook my meals. These things I needed in order to sustain and be healthy so I could go out and seek employment, go to school. They gave me the opportunity to feel like I was that guy again. And that's how I feel again." –Larry (http://www.some.org/about_success_main.html)*
- *"I moved in [to the Renaissance Apartments] late summer of 2002. I was so proud to be in my own apartment. It meant so much to me to have my own apartment keys, after being homeless and kicked out of places, you really learn to appreciate your own place so much. After being on drugs and alcohol for so long, it felt like the clouds lifted and I was finally able to see the sky clearly. I did everything that was expected of me and more. I attended computer classes, swimming lessons, group meetings, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous meetings, I even started going to church again. Then TRC started hosting meetings in the building on Saturdays. I was so glad we had meetings in our own place of living. I started speaking about my experience of being on drugs and alcohol to help others. I felt good about myself, being able to live clean and sober and even helping others." – Shirley, (http://www.trcwabash.org/Ending_Homelessness.html)*
- *"When I arrived at the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, I thought life was over for me. With the help of the shelter, and the State of Maine, I found out how wrong I was—life had just begun. Every door I tried, opened up wide for me. I arrived 4 ½ years ago, and in that short period of time, I earned my Section 8 Voucher, took the homebuyer's course, and I'm now buying a house. 3 years ago, I enrolled at Umaine—I'm currently a junior, earning an English degree and minoring in Disability Studies. I plan on dedicating*

what's left of my life, to writing grants for those who need help. I credit all of my achievements to the beginning—the way the shelter opened my first door. Thank you...Randy” (http://www.bangorareashelter.org/index.php?id=47&sub_id=132)

2. Unemployment

- “We had a patron who had been out of work for a very long time and he was basically computer illiterate and was having trouble looking for jobs. We helped get him on the computer and showed him a few job search websites. He came in daily and practiced signing on to the computer, checking his email and searching for jobs. After several weeks, he was able to finally get a job. He thanked us all profusely as he had not only found a job, but had also become computer literate, which he had once thought was impossible.” - Cynthia Cameron at the Shreveport Memorial Library (LA)
(http://www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/Job_045_Seeker_Success_Libraries_throw_out_a_lifeline_to_the_unemployed.html)
- "I was laid off in mid-November and therefore was forced to enter into the job search market. I read in the newspaper of the job fair at your library and made a decision to visit and take advantage of the resources available. As part of this visit I also had the opportunity to sit with a counselor named Ben and have my resume critiques. That experience combined with several books that you had displayed on the topic of job search really helped me redesign my resume. From mid-November to mid-January I had five job interviews. Some went well, others not so good, but I certainly learned from each experience. I finally was offered a position that I was interested in, but I was not satisfied with the base salary. I went back to your library and read through a reference book that talked about negotiating salary which I found extremely helpful. Using techniques directly from that book I was able to successfully negotiate an additional \$10K in base salary and landed the job. I want to thank the library staff for their assistance and for having this program available to the public. I would certainly credit the program for helping me rejoin the workforce, which was no easy task given these difficult economic times." - library patron in Southeastern Massachusetts
(http://www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/Job_045_Seeker_Success_Libraries_throw_out_a_lifeline_to_the_unemployed.html)
- “I am very impressed with the Computer Training Classes and Job Help Programs at (the) Julia Boyer Reinstein library. Classes are available for different skill levels. There is an instructor and also another person who walks around the room and works with anyone who is falling behind or has a question. Some of the classes that I took refreshed my skills and others taught me new skills. The interview class that I took was very helpful. I appreciated the instructor looking at my resume and giving it the final tweak it needed. I found the classes helpful in looking for and finding a new job.” –Suzanne (<http://jbrpcc.org/success-stories/>)

3. Health

- “I’m in the TAY (Transitional Aged Youth) program and about a year ago, they (the TAY program) picked me up at end of acute manic episode. At the time I didn't think anything was wrong with me. My case manager helped guide me to new attitudes about my illness. At the Tamayo house they plan a lunch with TAY residents and it's a really effective way to create sense of community. TAY has hired a good doctor to provide me with advice and medications. Before entering the TAY program I hadn't receive effective medication with any apparent benefits. They (TAY program staff)

connect us to people who understand us and know what you've been through. My parents couldn't have me in my home because of my illness and I'd probably be in a state hospital without the TAY program.”- Mark (http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/about/behavioralhealth_stories.asp)

- “I don't remember a life without diabetes and an awareness of my potential for diagnosis. I watched as my grandparents, mother, aunts, uncles and cousins struggled with the disease--and while experience was a great lesson, the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program was the first education course to truly impact me. My life has been so positively impacted that several friends want to know what I'm doing that is working so well for me. The straightforward, simple preventative approach of counting calories, decreasing fat and increasing activity is easy to follow. It is put into easy-to-understand concepts that help me to focus on achieving a goal of lifestyle balance.

I used to lay awake at night and try to figure out how to lose weight and lower my risk of getting diabetes. Thanks to the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program, I now know what to do, am doing it, and am experiencing success.”- Donna N.

(<http://www.ymca.net/diabetes-prevention/testimonials.html>)

4. Domestic Violence

- “When I have told my story to friends and family, a few people's reaction is to ask why I didn't leave sooner, or they simply don't believe me at all. It is a shock to me how undereducated the public is on domestic violence. People do not understand how difficult it is to escape. It is almost impossible to gather evidence, because the abuser will find a way to destroy it. No one on the outside knows what is happening because the abuser has the victim trapped and alone. He cuts her off from all outside interaction, and attempts to control her mind, and in many cases, he is successful.” – Francesca's Story, National Domestic Violence Hotline (<http://www.thehotline.org/2011/11/francescas-story/>)
- “When I noticed it was affecting my kids, I gathered my strength and gave him an ultimatum. Family or beer. He chose beer, so I packed a few things in the car and we left. I walked out of my house with just a bag of clothes and one tiny box of trinkets. I learned not to be materialistic that day.” –Ashlyn (<http://wadv.org/Survivors.htm>)
- “It's easier said than done. Leaving is the most dangerous time. Whatever you do, do not leave and then come back!! I made that mistake a thousand times for financial reasons. Make you you have a plan in action.” – Kitty (<http://wadv.org/Survivors.htm>)
- “For the first 9 months after I left I was basically on my own. It was very difficult, lonely, scary, and I hated myself for ruining our family. Almost everyone was shocked and blamed everything on me, and I didn't even realize at the time that I was a victim of domestic violence, so I couldn't even defend myself. All I knew was that the way he was treating me was hurting me. They called me "selfish." It wasn't until 2 years later, after our divorce became final, that I found out that I was indeed an abuse victim. What kept me from going back was my gut instincts. I knew instinctively that he wasn't going to change, and even though he promised me the sun, moon, stars and universe, I knew I couldn't go back. Even though my family, who lived out of state, supported me emotionally, they still blamed me until they learned more on the subject of domestic violence. I had a few friends from the beginning who realized what had happened to me and supported me emotionally, and they helped to keep me going and sane. But for the most part, until I started seeking help after 2 years, I was fighting an uphill battle by myself. By forcing myself

to do simple things that I was afraid to do, going to a shelter training class, joining a wonderful support group, and finally purchasing my own fixer-upper house I was able to regain my self confidence and self-esteem.” –Lisa

(<http://wadv.org/Survivors.htm>)

- “I have a student who attended class when (...) you came in for the presentation. (...) The girl did not know of different forms of abuse until your presentation. (...) She said it was because of the information from class that she and her mom can now be safe and are going to counseling. (...) So thank you, thank you, thank you. You touched a life in a positive manner. Hopefully healing can begin and a cycle is broken.’

Sherry Logan, teacher, Forest Grove High School, Forest Grove; May 2006”- in

thanks to the Domestic Violence Resource Center (<http://www.dvrc-or.org/domestic/violence/resources/C70/>)

5. Education

- “My fiance died a month before we were to get married. The next month, my mom took ill, I moved in with her to take care of her. She died a few months later. Then the daycare where I was working closed. I couldn't find another job. Without money coming in to pay the bills, I lost my home.

I felt so alone. I got so depressed that I tried to kill myself. I was in the hospital for a couple of weeks. When I was discharged, I got sent to an emergency shelter. I didn't want to stay there.

A case manager told me about N Street Village. They met with me for an intake that same day. That night, I got a call asking if I wanted to move into their shelter. I was nervous, but I said yes.

I had never seen a shelter that looked that good. I participated in activities, got to know the staff, and made friends. I took Education and Employment Center classes. Now every afternoon I work as a receptionist in our lobby or in our Wellness Center. It makes me feel good that people can rely on me.

I have gotten healthier since I have been at N Street Village. I used to be a size 36.

Now I am a size 18! The Wellness Center has helped me get appointments with cardiologists and helps me keep on top of my heart problems.

When I first got to N Street Village, I didn't know how my life was going to be or what I was going to do. I know that this time next year, I'm going to have my own apartment and a job. Every morning when I wake up, I tell myself how proud I am of me.” –Kate (<http://www.unitedwaynca.org/stories/entry/n-street-village-debras-hope-renewed>)

- “ For me, the GED was a very important step. It is a very satisfying experience in all aspects of life. Personally, obtaining this diploma made me see things completely different. Since at different times I put up obstacles without realizing that I was the only barrier for them so I decided to set an example that education is the only weapon to excel in this country or anywhere else. Indeed, it is very important to continue studying and to have more institutions like this that gives you so many opportunities to better yourself.” – Perla (http://www.education.ne.gov/ADED/pdfs/GED_Success_Testimonials.pdf)
- “At the age of 73, I decided to go for my diploma and enrolled in the GED program at Western Nebraska Community College. I was honored to receive my diploma at the graduation ceremony, along with other much younger people. I chose to go into a different profession which required a diploma. Realizing now the need of a good education; I strongly recommend every young person to stay in school. If for some reason, you have dropped out, then by all means apply for your GED. This could be a

huge stepping stone to college and perhaps further education. I regard the staff, teachers and tutors at WNCC with highest respect. It was a most enjoyable experience. My only regret is that I waited so long to make this decision.” – John (http://www.education.ne.gov/ADED/pdfs/GED_Success_Testimonials.pdf)

6. Life Skills

- “I like going to the FBR Boys & Girls Club at The Arc, or what us teens call THE CLUB, because it's fun. You always have something to do and it's like another home. Some of the programs that I've joined are Passport to Manhood and Career Launch. Passport to Manhood is a health and life skills program for males that helps you to become young men and teaches the expectations men have in life. Career Launch has helped me prepare to select a career and I just recently joined the financial literacy program called Money Matters to learn to save for college. I've achieved and experienced so many things since joining the Club like meeting President Obama being interviewed and speaking out about the high school drop-out crisis.” – Michael (<http://www.unitedwaynca.org/stories/entry/boys-girls-clubs-making-a-difference-for-michael>)
- “The Internet is an incredible tool, that can benefit so many people - the tutors, teachers who help the average person learn to use the computer are accomplishing a great act which allows for growth and LIBERATION!” – Rodi P. (<http://wplreferenceblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/what-people-say-about-librarys-computer.html>)