

## **From Survival to Success: An interview with Hazel**

### **Hazel, do you have any favorite stories from your experiences with St Vincent de Paul?**

I got out of treatment on November 24, 2013, just before Thanksgiving. I needed something to occupy my time, so I decided to cook Thanksgiving dinner. And I did, for the whole shelter. St Vincent's provided all the food, and I started cooking. We served it buffet style, and everyone from the shelter came and made themselves a plate. That meal kept me from going to the liquor store, and it brought everyone together for dinner at a time when we were all down on our luck.

### **What do you wish others knew about your life?**

Because of the supports I received at St Vincent de Paul, I didn't give up.

### **Tell me about how you found St Vincent de Paul:**

A very dear friend of mine worked at St. Vincent de Paul and told me to fill out the application. I explained to her I didn't have any money, and there was no way I could afford to live there. She helped me navigate through the system to get in, and it only took about three weeks.

### **Do you remember how you felt at the time when you found support? How did it change you?**

I had not had a place of my own in almost seven years, and I felt like this could be the start. I know that I came to Juneau to get a new life, and I didn't feel like I started that until I moved here (SVdP). Having the support of housing, I was able to get employment. Only part-time at first, but it was a start. I was able to work my way into a full-time position at Polaris House, and in doing so, I also worked my way off Social Security.

### **What has been difficult to communicate to family and friends about your challenges?**

That I'm not going to give up. Before I got here, I had given up on my own life until I realized there were a lot of supports in place to help me to grow.

### **Can you describe how your life is different now?**

Oh wow, yes. That's the fun part. When I came to Juneau, I had a Walmart bag that had a handful of clothes in it. That was everything I owned. And through a whole lot of trials and errors and frustrations, just ups and downs all the way, I am now completely out of low-income housing. I have paid employment that I am proud of. I have been at Polaris House for over seven years now. With my job now, I help others find housing and not feel like I felt back then.

I came to Juneau, broken and not caring whether or not I ever got fixed. Today I am part of something bigger than myself. I have made a place for myself in this community. I work hard every day to help people overcome the barriers that they have standing in the way of them finding hope.

### **What have been the happiest moments recently?**

I was helping a senior a couple of weeks ago get out of an awful living situation. I gave him the support he needed to get into housing right here at St. Vincent's. Now he is in a place he can call home. I feel like I helped him find hope. I think that I was on cloud 9.

**What are some of your hopes for the future?**

My greatest hope for the future is that we can end homelessness! I will continue with the job that I have and helping others not to feel alone. I like to give people the key to their place. I want to be there for others.

**How has St Vincent de Paul helped you change your life?**

When I first came to St. Vincent de Paul I was in bad shape. I was able to get into the inpatient treatment facility at Rainforest. During my stay, management not only kept my room for me, but they also went in and cleaned my room to make sure there was nothing that would trigger my addiction and set me back. When I was released, I volunteered at the St. Vincent thrift store here on campus. I helped with the elders and children to keep myself busy and keep my days filled so that I did not have idle time where I was tempted to go out and drink. They assisted me in becoming a member at Polaris House. Now we work together as partners.

**What do you wish others knew about St Vincent de Paul?**

If I could just bring it to the world, I would love for people to know the resources and supports available right here on this campus. And I'm not just talking about the help of support that would maybe get you a few dollars to go to a grocery store or get a few dollars to go to the thrift store. That's not the kind of resources I'm talking about. I'm talking about the loving, caring people that work here.