

From Survival to Success: an interview with Travis

Travis, do you have any favorite stories from your experience with St. Vincent de Paul?

Yeah, I mean my story's my favorite one. [Laughter]

What would you wish others to know about your life?

I am a person in long-term recovery and I was a person who was homeless for six years. After seeking recovery through Rainforest and After Care, I was helped out of my homeless situation by St. Vincent de Paul by moving my family and I into the family shelter.

How did you find St. Vincent's?

It's a well known resource among homeless people and I utilized the free clothes store that they do for years and then somebody there, DeLila, told me I should come sign up for a place. I did that and I was on the waiting list for a while and then I got in.

Can you remember how you felt at the time, when you found the support, and how did it change you?

I was in quarantine at the Native hospital waiting for my son to be born and I was calling everyone I could. I had nowhere to go when my son was born and I was really scared. I called St. Vincents and they didn't have a room ready, but I told Roy my situation and he said that he's going to do everything he could to get ready. And you guys pushed forward and got that room ready ahead of when it was supposed to so that when me and my wife came back we had somewhere to be, instead of just showing up with nothing, nowhere to be with our new baby. I was overwhelmed with gratitude that you guys made that way for me.

Can you describe how your life is different now?

Yeah! So, not only did you guys provide a place for me to land--with no money by the way--but knowing my situation, you guys gave me a chance with a job at the Sobering Center, so I'd be able to afford at least to pay my rent. But then that moved into a better job at the Warming Shelter, where I was able to pay my rent and save and buy the things we needed for baby--diapers, all that, wipes and clothes--to get the things for my wife that she needs. Really you guys gave me a new lease on life. And now, with the experience I had being a paid worker at the Warming Shelter, I was able to get a really, really good job with that experience and the training that you guys provided for me through the Homeless Training Institute.

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

It's hard when you rack up as much criminal history as I have and you have so much drug history in such a small town. Everybody knows it, you know. And to try to get... A lot of people are burnt by giving chances to people and people aren't very quick to give somebody a chance with work, employment, housing. St. Vincents is willing to do that, knowing my criminal history, knowing my struggles that I have with addiction, and willing to give me a chance. That's made a way for other people to see that I'm...you could take a chance on me because I didn't burn you guys.

What have been some of the happiest moments recently?

Well, I'm expecting another baby but every day with my son is the happiest I've ever been in my whole life. Having a space for me and my wife... before we moved in here, we had to live in separate places because I didn't have stable housing which was a part of how, the only way they would let... the court system would let me out of the halfway house or GHS. Having them inside and safe and warm is a bigger deal than anybody could ever imagine that hasn't experienced that kind of thing. And having my wife safe. She had to live in some pretty sketchy places before we moved here and she wasn't safe a lot of the times and she got hurt really bad because of it. So now having a safe place to come home every night and also the help that I'm getting to get permanent housing through Tom Keller (with the Navigator Program that Bartlett Hospital supports) out of St. Vincents.

That leads into the next question, which is, what are your hopes for the future?

In the near future, my hope is to get into permanent housing. I'm on the list for low income housing and I'm nearing the top of the list now. I already have my dream job, thanks a lot to you guys honestly and the experience I got working with you guys. Yeah, just more permanent housing, a couple more bedrooms. [Laughter]

You know, as you grow your family, these are not big rooms in our shelter.

We're so grateful for the space but we're outgrowing it. It's warm, it's safe, and it's inside. I couldn't ask for anything more than that.

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

That they'll work with you. If you're in any kind of place that you're wanting to change your life, you know, I didn't have to be secretive about my past history with addiction and my struggles there, or with homelessness. I could be open and honest because the staff are caring and understanding and some of them have been through it in one way or another. So, you know, it's not a place that you have to hide or present a false front for. It's somewhere you could be real and open and honest about your situation and not just immediately be rejected because of it, which is pretty rare.