



Cindy LaPlante

If it wasn't for the justice center, I would probably be dead.

I was convicted of a violent offense and sentenced to five years. I served one year at the Chittenden Regional Correction Facility in Burlington, Vermont, before being released on parole supervision. I violated multiple times for drinking. After I got out of rehab, I was placed in an apartment in White River, Vermont through the HCRJC. They gave me a chance. I stayed there for eight months without violating.

It was the best thing that ever happened to me. I learned violence is not the answer to anything.

When I walked in, it was just like a welcoming committee. The first thing that Martha and Jonathan said was, "How may we help you?"

I was scared because they had authority. Everything was strange. I didn't have my family around me.

On the way to my first meeting, I was crossing the bridge. I was so depressed. My thoughts were, "I'm going to jump. I have nothing. Now I'm just a common criminal." Then I stopped and thought, I have to give them a chance. When I walked in, everything was so comforting.

They saved my life.

After going through the justice center, people trust me. They look up to me. That has never happened to me before. They know what I have been through and what I have accomplished. I have overcome so many hurdles.

I'm still involved with the justice center and I don't need to be. They are my lifeline. If people give them a chance and let them into your life, let them into your heart, then you have nothing to worry about. They helped me in such a significant way.

Just because the HCRJC has authority doesn't mean they are going to harm you. They are there to help. If you are hungry, they will feed you. If I didn't have any money, they would buy me lunch. I would go down there and hangout. It was like a home to me. If I needed something, I would ask. It was hard for me to start asking for help. They are a loving little family. I classify them as my second family. They support me in everything I do. I make blankets and they buy them and give them to college students.

All they ask of you is to just be truthful and stay healthy. Hold yourself accountable for your actions. That's what I'm doing. I have done it ever sense.

People are scared to give them a chance. They say, "They have authority. They can put you back in jail." Then I say, "They don't want anyone in jail. They want you to learn." If you are honest, you get further. Even if it hurts. If you don't want to be completely honest, you are not being honest with yourself.

I'm still on my journey. It is an every day battle. I take care of my terminally ill father. It is tough but it keeps me going. I take responsibility.

I am working with Jonathan to get started on being a volunteer on the Reparative Boards. I want to give back.