

Introduction

Angela Buckley-Tochek

I am an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. I grew up in Cannon Ball and moved to this area in my twenties, I lived here for twenty years. I currently reside at the United Way Shelter. I have been there for one year and a half, off and on.

Reason for Homelessness

I wasn't always homeless. I took care of my mom in the Sanford Hospital and then she went into hospice until she passed away from cancer about a year and a half ago. I was sober during this time. After she passed away, I went to stay at a shelter. I began using alcohol and drugs after losing my mother. I stayed at a shelter and met others who were abusing alcohol and drugs when they were out on the street during the day because we were not allowed to stay in a warm place during the daytime hours.

Homeless Experience

Being homeless was one of the hardest parts of my life, second to losing my mom. The experience of being cold and never knowing when the next time I was going to eat. "My thoughts daily were either to eat to live another day or starve to die faster." The little bit the homeless people have, our stuff gets stolen, and we get mistreatment from other residents and sometimes employees. For many this experience may make their hearts harder but for me, it taught me to love people and to be kinder. I have to huddle with other people I don't know including people that I am afraid of or with people who are bullying or harassing me. I had to always watch my back. Some of the men on the streets make unsolicited sexual approaches towards the homeless women. Men pull up and demand sex from women who are homeless. Some of these men say sexual and derogatory remarks to the homeless women and no one says anything to them. It is primarily older men in their 50s and 60s who hit on us homeless women. We must carry some sort of weapon for self-protection from being raped and/or beaten. One time I was beaten up at a shelter during an overnight stay. I have learned to forgive these people. I had no choice but to forgive people who had hurt me. I have used Narcan on four people to save their lives. The homeless must stash their blankets and sleeping bags because everyone is trying to survive outdoors when we aren't able to stay at a shelter. Another experience I've witnessed is one of the homeless men getting hit by a car.

What has happened from this experience?

This has created PTSD; I would get night terrors. Today, I am getting medication and counseling for it to help me manage it.

What has helped me?

What has helped me is when God gave me a family, NATIVE, Inc. NATIVE, Inc. saved my life by using Narcan on me twice while I was at their place. They also saved my life by helping me get into treatment and remain sober by providing me with hope, support, and a safe place to practice my cultural ways every day. And by providing skills that were reawakened through sewing and beading that were taught to me by my grandmother when I was younger. NATIVE, Inc. has also helped me by accepting me, being forgiving and kind and loving to me like family, providing me with a safe place in the community, keeping me busy, and reconnecting me to our people and the cultural and spiritual traditional ways.

They also taught me how to hold myself accountable for my actions and for my future and how to hold my sobriety in high regard without forcing me and they always expect the best from me no matter what. Even in my imperfections they never turned their back on me. They always told me that I was a work in progress and to keep going even when I wanted to give up. In other places, I had been used to being looked down upon or ignored as if I were dead. Not at NATIVE, Inc., they spoke life into me. I am never alone, they always listen, they celebrate with me, cry with me, and smudge with me. I've gained perspective through this experience; I've learned that we don't know what is missing or what we need until we get the love acceptance and support from NATIVE, Inc.'s caring workers. If you need prayer at that moment, NATIVE, Inc. will give you prayer right then and there. This encourages me daily to stay sober. They also offer various sewing and beading classes, sweat lodge services, smudge and prayer circles, buffalo hunts, and community teachings showing us how to skin a buffalo; all these things have strengthened my spirit and helped me to find my purpose. I am treated like a human being; and like a Dakota woman, it is genuine, no one is doing it just to be kind. They see me, they see us.

Who I am and who I come from.

I have an associate degree in elementary education and a minor in special ed from the United Tribes Technical College. I am a mother of one son, but I have also raised many nieces and nephews because that is how Tribal people are raised, we don't just take care of our children. As Dakota people, we are taught to look out for each other, this includes our extended families. I was married up until six years ago until I lost my mother, then I was diagnosed with a rare disease then fell into a spiral of addiction and homelessness so I let my husband and son go so he could have a better life until I got better.

"I never thought I would die sober but now I know that I will".