

Twenty-six year old Kandi's* connection with the criminal justice system began out of desperation almost a year ago. For the past seven months, she has been jobless due to her need to move from state to state in order to escape an abusive domestic relationship. Although Kandi has still not found permanent employment, her life began to change its trajectory after she enrolled into the Employment Reentry Assistance (ERA) Program at InStepp, Inc. in March of this year.

Kandi moved to North Carolina in the winter of 2010 to see if she could make a fresh start for herself and her children in an environment that wasn't as fast-paced as the one in New York where she grew up. With no steady income or support from her children's father, she stole some clothes for her two little boys, ages 4 and 8, because they had nothing to wear for the winter. The misdemeanor charges against her are still pending.

Shortly after her arrival in Durham, Kandi was connected to InStepp by the staff at a temporary housing facility where she had sought shelter. Soon after her enrollment into the program, she completed 25 hours of employability skills training and began receiving individualized support from InStepp's Career Employment Specialist.

With the help of InStepp, Kandi has found employment in temporary jobs. InStepp also helped her to secure permanent housing by connecting her to an apartment rental agency that is willing to let her pay her rent in installments. With InStepp's help, Kandi has also been able to obtain food, stable daycare for her children and some basic pieces of furniture for her new apartment. She also received help from the program in prioritizing her daily activities so that she could move in a better and more focused direction. "I want to do better as a woman and mother and overcome my current circumstances," says Kandi. "I am persistent and determined. Other people would have given up but I still get up each day."

As an additional support system, Kandi also has received friendship, inspiration, and support from her mentor, Andrea Carter. "Andrea has helped me a whole lot," says Kandi. "She has led me to a church and we talk every week. She takes me out to eat and seems to enjoy my kids very much! She even helped them get me a plant and a card for Mother's Day."

Kandi is just one of InStepp's many success stories.

*Client's name has been changed to protect confidentiality.