

Although it has been 15 years since her last arrest and conviction, Tiffany* was still having difficulty finding a job. At one point, she had applied for over 50 jobs during a single year. When she connected with InStepp, Inc. earlier this year, she had little hope of getting a job that would provide adequate support for herself and her 8 year old son. Within a couple of months of joining the company's employment program for women and working with both her mentor and career counselor, however, Tiffany's outlook for her future began to improve.

Tiffany was only 17, working at her first job as a cashier, when she naively processed a return merchandise transaction without the proper receipt for a man she thought was returning a housewarming gift. After she refunded a second merchandise return for the same man, she was arrested and charged with obtaining property under false pretenses. The store thought she was part of the scam even though she did not know the individual who had perpetrated the crime. Three months later, she made another poor decision and received a second charge for larceny.

An acquaintance from Tiffany's old neighborhood told her about the ERA program at InStepp when they ran into each other on the street. Although she had gone back to school to become certified as a Computer Administrative Specialist and an Assistant Teacher in a daycare setting, no one would hire her for the entry level positions she was applying for either because of her conviction history or because she was overqualified for the job.

Tiffany completed the 25 hours of employability skills training mandated by the ERA program in April and was assigned to a mentor, Susan Flint. "Susan has been good at being understanding and supportive," states Tiffany. "She has enlightened me about a lot of programs that can help me." She even began to reconnect with the church. "I had been disappointed with going to church but over the last year, I started going more regularly," says Tiffany. "Susan, my mentor, has even become involved in some of the programs at my church."

With InStepp serving as an intermediary in the hiring process, Tiffany was accepted into the management training program for a local pizza chain during the last week of June. When it became apparent that lack of transportation would have a negative impact on her ability to move into a management role, Nicole, her career counselor at InStepp, was instrumental in connecting Tiffany with a local organization that makes discounted cars available to low-income individuals via agency referrals. "Nicole is quite possibly the most amazing person in the world," says Tiffany. "She is the most genuine soul I have ever met. I look forward to her calling me every week. She has really changed my life and I just want to thank her for looking for ways to help me and the other clients at InStepp."

Tiffany is not an isolated case but is typical of the many women who are now being helped by InStepp, Inc. She will continue to receive the support of the ERA program for at least six months after the start of her employment. "At InStepp, I have been able to find a good job and a car with assistance from the staff," states Tiffany. "I have also gained a little more confidence in my ability to get up and go. I advise any woman who needs help and support to join this program."

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