

Alesha*, a 27 year old single mother of two, moved to North Carolina from Bronx, New York in 2002 with "L", her partner of eight years. Other than "L", Alesha had no other support system in this area. For three years, both Alesha and "L" were unemployed. She worked as a sales clerk for a year at a Chapel Hill retail store, but that job ended in 2006 following her conviction for misdemeanor larceny. Not knowing the impact that a guilty plea to larceny would have on her life, Alesha fell into a state of depression. She also gave birth to her second child during this period. With no emotional outlet and no medical outlet for treatment, she spiraled into a deeper depression. Out of work and feeling anxious and isolated, Alesha decided to solicit the help of InStepp, Inc in December 2009 after she saw a public service announcement on television about the Employment Reentry Assistance (ERA) Program for women. That decision changed her life.

When Alesha joined ERA in December 2009, she mentioned that her partner was also looking for work. Nicole Beatty, InStepp's Career Employment Specialist, referred "L" to an intermediary program for young fathers that helped him to find a job. After "L" became employed, Alesha was then able to complete ERA's required 20-25 hours of employability skills training in February and subsequently was assigned to a mentor. At this point, she began to step out of her crisis mode. However, she was still struggling because her family continued to be overwhelmed with the need for basic necessities. In addition to needing sufficient food to feed the family, stable housing and childcare were also critical needs. Again, InStepp helped her to regain a sense of balance in her life by providing her with resources about food, childcare and housing. Nicole helped Alesha to get a childcare scholarship, helped her to fill out the section 8 housing application forms and provided her with resources for food. "InStepp always has a resource when I ask and has been so supportive," said Alesha.

On March 18th, less than a month after completing the required ERA workshop, InStepp found Alesha an entry-level position as an office maintenance worker. Three months later, she was promoted to a supervisory position with the same firm. "InStepp has wonderful people that are easy to work with and don't talk down to you," says Alesha. "InStepp got me a job after three years of searching. I started at the bottom and in less than three months, I've earned a supervisory position. I had a hard time asking for help, opening my mouth when I joined the program. I have now gained both confidence and support through the ERA program."

Alesha says her mentor, Nyesha Robinson, has been good for her and she credits Nyesha for pushing her to achieve more and more. "She is determined to see me grow! We have a great relationship." Recently, Alesha took and passed the pre-GED course at Durham Community College and is now preparing to take the GED test. She next wants to enroll in a Business Technology course. In addition, Alesha now attends Victory in Christ church where she also has a positive support network in addition to her mentor.

Alesha is not an isolated case but rather 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 up to a year post the start of her employment.

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