



Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland and members of the House Criminal Justice Committee; my name is Angela Thornton Case Manager/CRRP for Volunteers of America Ohio & Indiana. Thank you for taking the time to listen to one story out of millions. I live in recovery. My story is not that different from many others, yet I am one of the lucky ones that received help and services when I needed it.

I became addicted to pain medication at the age of 22 after a serious car wreck. The stages of despair that I reached was enough to keep me in the throes of addiction, yet not enough for me to stop using. It wasn't long before I began buying pain medication on the street, once the laws became more strict and tracking was applied to emergency rooms visits, it left me no other option, or I felt that way at the time. By the time I was 28, I was using heroin intravenously on a daily basis. My life was a mess, living on the street, having no family to turn to, I felt as though that was my life, until I died. I knew that heroin would kill me, yet I could not and would not stop using. I had never searched my soul for a purpose; I had none at the time.

In 2016, I went to prison for drug possession. That was the first time I felt like I could actually change my life around. I met some amazing women while there that shared their stories with me, their journeys, and their sorrows. My time there was the most teachable moment I have ever experienced. I was one of the first women in the state of Ohio to be a part of the TTP program; it was the pilot program that year. It allowed first time offenders the opportunity to receive substance abuse treatment over serving an entire prison sentence. I attended thinking for a change groups while there and built a support system. Going to prison, then to the VOA facility gave me for the first glimmer of hope I had seen in many years. I have never regretted my choices or poor decisions surrounding those events because they facilitated an amazing transformation for me and my life, without it who knows what would have happened.

After completing my programming, I was sent to a Volunteers of America halfway house. Staying at the VOA drastically altered my future. I encountered some of the best human beings there. While at the halfway house before going home on an electronic monitoring unit, I attended substance abuse group as well. Learning the social skills necessary to succeed was something I had never attempted to do before. Those skills have served me well in the years since. After leaving the VOA in August of 2016, I began to make changes in my life, using the tools that I had learned while at the facility. I had the sobriety but no job. No job I had applied for would see past my felonies, to allow me the opportunity to show them I was a hard worker. Fast food places were my future, or so I thought. I knew that I was passionate about helping others make major changes, just as I had done, but I did not know how I was going to do that flipping burgers. I had all these talents and encouraging things to say, yet I was still not in the position to truly share those with people who needed them.

In 2020, I applied for a resident monitor position of the veteran's resource center, VOA, in Mt. Healthy. I was given the job and I have not looked back since. I have been promoted three different times since working at the VOA and I have no plans to slow down now. I am a case manager now at the reentry facility in Cincinnati. I have the ability now to interact with individuals I know are suffering just as I was. People who have made serious choices in their lives without fully knowing the ramifications of their actions. Once they get here to the facility, their future is a part of my responsibility, just as it is theirs. I can share my experiences, teach those tools, and most importantly listen to them. Most of my clients have

had some of the worst life experiences I have ever heard; they have survived some of the worst circumstances. It is my job to help them chip away at the barriers to their potential, little by little, building a rapport, and being transparent. I am their advocate, but more importantly, I teach them to advocate for themselves.

Working for this facility has allowed me to fulfill, and continue to chase my dreams. In addition, help others discover theirs. Working as an intricate part of the justice system, allows me to be the change I would like to see in the world. Again, I appreciate you taking the time to read the words of just one being that has been positively affected by the system, I will never be the only one. As long as there are people in this world that are willing to share their struggles, and help the next person in line, the evolution will continue to take shape.