

Success Story



Terrence Bellows

Trainee, Ready, Willing & Able-Philadelphia

For Terrence Bellows, a Ready, Willing & Able trainee, growing up as the tenth of eleven children, there had to be cleanliness and order in his large household.

His older sisters and mother taught him how to clean floors, carpets, appliances, and keep rooms tidy and well-maintained. Terrence believed that his family “stuck together” because everyone did their part to maintain the family home.

It was also his sisters who helped Terrence when he later struggled with drugs and alcohol. During his twenty-five year addiction, he cycled between homeless shelters, the streets, and his family members' sofas.

His addiction also led to him letting go of all the lessons he learned when as a child: to take care of himself, to be positive, and to present his “best self” to others. He was living hand-to-mouth – only caring for his next fix, and not caring about what it was doing to his health, his appearance...his life.

Terrence's lowest point came in early 2009, when he was doing some manual labor on a day off from his full-time job at McDonald's. When Terrence offered a friendly hello to a young woman who passed by, she turned and told him sternly: “You stink like garbage.”

The comment stung, and at that moment, Terrence knew he had to do something to prove that he could be a product of his environment again: a hard-working, clean, self-respecting man.

It was around the same time that Terrence saw a crew of “men in blue” eating lunch at McDonald's. They told him they were all trainees at Ready, Willing & Able, a transitional work program for homeless and formerly incarcerated men.

Shortly thereafter, Terrence lost his job and was evicted from his apartment – but he also remembered what the “men in blue” told him. For the first time in many years, he saw an opportunity...and he grasped it.

The year-long transitional work and supportive services program offered Terrence the structure he needed to overcome his addiction and work his way to independence.

In October 2009, as a new Ready, Willing & Able trainee, Terrence received three suits from the Men's Wearhouse Suit Drive.

When asked the last time Terrence wore a suit, he said, “Years....years...and years!”

At 51 years old, he added: “I feel like a different person now. I have been clean [from drugs and alcohol] for 14 months. I want to look good, smell good...all the time. It all comes with wanting to be my best self.”

With the suits he received from the Men's Wearhouse Suit Drive, Terrence feels prepared for re-entering the job market and is confident that his job interviews will yield positive results. Also, with money saved while living at Ready, Willing & Able, he was able to get dentures that improve his appearance dramatically. So, what kind of job is Terrence pursuing, you ask? He wants to be a custodian. “My family taught me how to clean right [from a very young age]. I am good at it...and I take pride in my work.”

And your family is certainly proud of you, Terrence. You have come a long way!