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When I reflect back on my JVC year, my thoughts immediately drift toward my job placement and clients. I was a case manager in a community that provided services to homeless women. The majority of our clients were mentally ill and or substance abusers, so each day generally brought a new adventure.

You would probably say that I had a favorite client. While I learned a lot through my entire year experience, I truly believe that this woman brought me to not only a greater understanding of the injustices that plague our nation, but also a greater understanding of my own self.

When I began my JVC year Angela* was 27 years old (only four years older than myself). She had four children, each by a different father, and would later become pregnant with her fifth. All of her children were in foster care because she was unable to provide adequate care for them. Angela was barely reading at a first grade level, yet according to school records had made it to 9th grade when she the dropped out. Just knowing this information about her, gave me so much to think about. How did she end up in the life she did and I in mine? Would her life ever be able to improve? Could the cycle of injustices she had experienced in her life be stopped? And I think the most difficult of all how do I fit into this picture with her?

Through Angela I witnessed many of the injustices that go on every day. I saw a young woman who grew up in an unstable home with an alcoholic mother and a father who died at a very young age. I saw a young woman passed through the school system mislabeled as mentally retarded. I saw a young woman denied Section 8 housing time after time with no concrete reason. I saw a young woman about to have parental rights terminated because she was unable to provide housing in a reasonable amount of time.

But in Angela, I also witnessed a courage and strength like none other. I saw a student determined to learn to read. I saw an employee trying to save money to help support her family. And I saw a mother, who loved her children so dearly and wanted nothing but to be reunited with them.

My work with Angela was not easy, in fact there were many days that I felt we were moving backwards instead of forwards. We had our fair share of frustration when we thought we had exhausted every resource in the city, but somehow there was always hope when we managed to find one more! It took a lot of time, but things began falling into place. Angela was faithfully attending tutoring sessions to help improve her reading and math skills. She was visiting her kids on a weekly basis and she was also able to hold down a part time job as well. We still were unable to find Section 8 housing before my year was over. I have since been told that she has moved into a maternity home and she has found a house that seems promising. I can only hope and pray that this time it will all work out for her.

Working with Angela was such an amazing experience, granted it wasn't always easy but that is what challenged me and drove me to work even harder with her to help her create a better life for herself and her children. She is just one of the many people from my JVC year that will forever be ingrained in my heart.

** I changed the name out of respect for my former client.*