

By: Evelyn R. Richardson
Daughters of Eve founder

Please keep Energy Assistance programs for needy families like mine.

Self –Reliance and Community

Three months ago I resigned from my job due to an overwhelming stressful work environment, unethical dealings and collaborations, unfair wage treatment, and expectations that weren't achievable considering the time restraints. I could have lasted longer under any of those circumstances except the ones that went against my Christian values and ethical morals. I was scared but as I wrote up a resignation letter that was mild I said within myself, "God you better have my back, because my front is out the door." Everyone called me crazy for leaving a job in this economic climate and as the months wore on without another job I at times doubted my decision to leave a job for the ethical reasons that caused me to lose sleep many nights, break out in hives, gain 30lbs, and be agitated at home far more than what was acceptable. Unfortunately I worked with a lot of unethical people who lied constantly and sabotaged my work for lack of better words. These were people who decided to do these unethical and fraudulent things just to secure allegiance from bosses, colleagues, fellow church members, and to gain continued funding from funders. I prayed and built myself up on faith and walked out that door with a peace that was solid on the fact that I will not be a party to any organization or office that say they are providing valuable and sustainable services to a community of people who face abject poverty and it was not true. Sure they serviced some people but in that office the greatest portion of their filing system housed falsified documents and made up families just to boost the numbers.

The cover up was the work of a past situation and I strongly believed that moving forward the right thing could have been done to correct the damage and offered my opinion on this being done. The problem to the present director appeared to be that cleaning up the mess would have been more work than just leaving it like it was and I was not going to be a party to it under my position. So I quit and filed for unemployment till I could secure another job which I felt would not be long. I am usually not a bragger but I have some really good and useful skills when it comes to working with the community and know that I would be a valuable asset to an ethical and empowering office.

By the second month I started to feel the crunch of unemployment after I was denied unemployment compensation, so after over fifteen years I went to the Department of Social Services to ask for cash assistance. I was denied of course and referred to a program called Safety Net. The worker who was very helpful had asked about my story and I shared a bit and she shared how her friend was in a similar predicament in the past but that today under no circumstance are you to ever quit, she said you should have let them fire you. I had shared the organizations name and when she returned from a short step away from her desk she mentioned that this is the same organization

that heads up the Safety Net Program and asked if that would be a problem for me. I replied not at all and she makes the referral and about two weeks later an appointment is scheduled for me to meet with a people empowering people worker. I sign lots of papers and we talk a bit. I outline my goals and she schedules another meeting in two weeks after outlining their program for me. I took the referral to get help with my lights and gas at the time because when it came to empowerment, despite my circumstances I was a regular poster child, but I am not too proud to receive assistance in achieving my goals if I can't accomplish my basic needs on my own as a result of living beneath the poverty level circumstances. She critiques my resume and state this may be why I haven't gotten contacted and asks me to work on that till we meet again. She also states the program can help with bill payments up to six payments for each bill. We leave and I submit all my bill info and continue to job hunt as well as make a visit to the Labor Department to get help to work on my resume. I knew it could be better but that very resume got me quite a few jobs in the past. She never follows up with me about the bills she was supposed to be looking into so on the day I found out I got the job I applied for I contacted her via e-mail and phone stating I got a job, in-spite of my resume and I ask about the bill situation. No response via e-mail or phone. So I decide to call the woman who is supposed to be my safety net worker on a Saturday and leave a message but she picks up. So I stated I wanted to share my good news and ask if I can get help with bus transportation until I can secure my first paycheck, and this is where I was amazed. Every barrier that I needed a safety net for, her response was **no I don't have it, no, my director says we have no funds to help you with your lights and no money to help you with your gas, and no, we do not have bus tokens for you to get to work Monday, and no we will not be getting bus passes for quite a while per my director.** So then I ask, with my human services background, "Is there anywhere you can refer me to?" And **she says no, I do not know where to refer you.**

I have a little background in Early Childhood Education and as a teachers assistant I was told and trained how to limit if not all together get rid of using the word no in the classroom. It is said to have an overbearing and controlling effect on children who feel empowered to make some decisions for them selves. Finding other ways to say no without literally saying the word no is a skill but it is an effective skill to learn because no has a crippling effect. It is finite, closed minded, and leaves no wiggle room for consideration in the minds of children and people for that matter who for the most part will rebel if they feel that your NO is unfair and limits there ability to be empowered and /or have a degree of control over their choices or actions. I couldn't help but think that this safety net worker whose title read "Manager" needed that training. So after the fifth no I informed the Catholic Charities worker that I will not need their services and that this was reflective of the behaviors behind me leaving my job. I had witnessed the resources going to people who had no basic needs and the ones who came to them for resources that needed it were turned away simply because they didn't get involved with every program that was offered at the site. The reason those who did attend everything did so was because they were established and the programs provided were extra curricular trainings and not having any real lasting impact in the community as to

addressing the needs of the needy or teaching self-reliance. Certainly I liked my work and I liked and valued the women who did frequent the center but I knew that these women really didn't need the services provided but that there were many families who could if only the time was provided to really market some sustainable programs. Truly impoverished or needy families will not be found sitting on a family center couch five days a week reading a book with a group of women who can go home to functional families and financial security.

After her saying no so many times I was left to think if this organization is receiving millions of dollars from the state and federal government and referrals continue to be made and taken I am sure they assume that they are able to say yes to something for a family in need of these services. My resume was the least of my needs and secured me a job before I utilized the Labor Department's help with my resume. I was at the Labor Department almost every other day utilizing their services even before her contact with me. If the name is People Empowering People I would suggest that they please find another way to address the times when they simply are not useful to the families who come to them. The best time this worker could have said no was when the referral was made. **They should have told my DSS worker NO, we are not equipped and have no more funds to help anymore families.** But the truth might lose them a funder or some funds, so not taking new people who only benefit their numbers was not likely to happen at CC.

A couple of months ago I had the pleasure of sitting in on a few classes called Family Development Credentialing. I was allowed this training due to my employment with Catholic Charities where I worked at that time. My director did not want to lose me on Fridays and tried everything in her power to get me to tell her supervisors why I couldn't and didn't want to participate but I declined the offer and started the class. Right at the beginning I learned wonderful new language like social workers and human services workers not having the ability to empower others but that empowerment gained is by the individual as well as "power over" approaches being non-effective in contrast to "power with" approaches when dealing with families. The large book I brought home was entitled "Empowerment Skills for Family Workers" and the first subject line that caught my eyes after the title of the book was this statement "Restoring a sense of self-reliance and community." After that I knew this book would be helpful in the pursuit of my purpose-driven life that entailed being self-sufficient for my children, family and community. Certainly everything I have learned over the past 8 years of my life I have done my best to share with others who face or faced the same challenges and barriers I have faced to self-sufficiency and reliance.

My story is not one that would sit on any front page of a magazine with such titles as "Family or Abundant Life, or such happy-go-lucky articles of children who grew up with money, parents who worked extra hard to instill family values, work ethics or that nice pleasantries stuff. I say that because not long ago I had a conversation at the North End Farmers Market with a woman I respect and whose judgment I consider well. Trudi Mero of Nutmeg Planners, we talked about my passion, community work and she had

some warning advice for me and assured me that she was watching me, which when people say that I get a sense of dread unfortunately, because then I become not only accountable to God for my actions but to those whose eyes are watching, and although I want to make a difference I don't want to be judged for what I feel is right in the event it is wrong because I am still learning my style of leadership and how best to effectively incorporate mine with the styles of other leaders to be empowered to make effective change without wasting valuable time on foolishness like unethical practices and office drama. Now if there was a magazine called "Lets Cut to the Chase" my picture and story might be inside of that one. Any way I asked this woman I consider one of my mentors why are so many of our leaders selling out the community for personal gain? Her reply was because they themselves are financially challenged. She said the one thing that probably kept her honest and her work marked by integrity was that when she lost her husband at a young age who was a legislative person that she had the backing and support of her parents. She stated when she needed something all she had to do was ask them. She said it was hard raising a family with no husband but that support gave her a degree of stability she wouldn't have had otherwise. And she proudly threw back her shoulders when she mentioned that she didn't have to give the money back. After the conversation was over and still to this day I ponder her words of wisdom regarding integrity. I always think how yes I am financially stretched and my support is limited because we all have our degree of financial instability in the sense that my family supports do not just have thousands of dollars lying around that I wouldn't have to pay back. But even with her pearls of wisdom I knew that I had what it takes to be full of integrity regarding my handling of money for my people and community in spite of the fact that I had limited resources of my own.

I remember when I was growing up I would share everything unselfishly with others. I also used to be totally shocked and hurt when I noticed that the very people I would be gracious with turned out to be selfish themselves. At a young age I learned that not everyone viewed life, values, feelings, and emotions the way I did and it hurt for a while until I grew up and learned that my views, perceptions, actions, and ways made me unique, powerful, and beneficial. At some point I learned that I had to be more frugal with my resources without being insensitive to the needs of others. That's when I made up my mind to work in an area that would expose me to connecting people to others with the resources that could help them so that I could be mindful to not care past my ability to sustain my own family. This took focus and priority. During my conversation with Mrs. Trudi she stated as if she had a crystal ball, she said "our children have a different view of the realities of our lives." She said if I was hungry you would give me your last box of cookies but then your kids get home hungry and ask where that box of cookies is?" At first I almost interrupted and said yes I would give it to you if you were hungry but when I realized where she was going I knew that this wasn't true. Back when I shared of my last I wasn't the Christian woman I am today. I would give because I had the ability to get way more if I wanted to. My older kid's reality was different than the batch I am raising now. Although all of them have the stories of want, lack, and need at various points depending on my circumstances at a specific time but my older kids tell

stories of when I would give them \$100.00 just to get them to stay clean or always wearing designer clothes and having the first and best of a lot of material possessions. My kids now wish they were born back then. Today I have less than when my older children were young because I work hard for every penny I earn so I value it more. My thinking today is that I can't help you unless first I can help myself.

Recently I organized my 3rd successful block party and community event. The first two I had gainful employment while I planned and had the events. This year I was unemployed. Well the government does not pay for you to leave your work for Christian values which I would wholeheartedly understand if it weren't for the unique circumstances around this particular resignation. This was the hardest three months of my life since I have been involved in trying to make positive impacts in my community. The first event we raised about \$1000.00, the second event I raised \$250.00 and paid out of pocket \$ 1,250.00, and this event in September 2011 I raised through collaborations over \$2,500.00. I raised and spent this money on the community when I had no money of my own and I had to share with my children who are still with me the importance of understanding what's ours and what is given for the benefit of the community and the people we love. Certainly my kids benefitted from the money at the same measure that all the other over 150 kids who attended benefitted. Certainly this was not ours but a gift from God to share with others. I may not always be able to be empowered to make differences for myself but as my greatest mentor, my father said last week during our morning walk " you have an ability to make a difference, and if you can't make certain things happen for yourself, at least try to make it happen for someone else." I love my dad! I didn't have a job and I certainly couldn't have asked for money from these collaborators to pay my three months of backed up bills or buy my sons school uniforms but I was able to ask for and get forty -one book bags for community kids, food from three community based organizations/ collaborators as well as free raffle items, and flowering pots to beautify our neighborhood and homes, Community based organizations resource information(most valuable) for the community, and a day filled with fun, community engagement, and awareness of the services that are housed in Hartford. Then I remembered Mrs. Mero's comments, (My mom is deceased and can't help me.) my father helps me out a lot at times but his wisdom and love is more valuable, but I am pleased that when I need to help others outside of my means I have shown to the community that others care and can make it happen even as I struggle along side of them. And I don't have to PAY IT BACK and I never heard NO once, more less five times in one paragraph.

Restoring a sense of self -reliance and community is a subject that is dear to me. I always consider my self a hands on type of worker bee and the book states, empowerment skills for family workers also teaches family development workers how to **collaborate skillfully with others to help communities become more supportive to families.**

This is my goal, my passion, and my purpose. And then sometimes when we don't allow our limitations to cripple us from helping others, God will show his favor upon our life.

Exactly seven days after the block party I got a job offer. **(Please note that these comments, opinions and statements in this article are reflective of my experiences and thoughts and are not identified as anyone or any other organizations views. They are solely mine.)**

If you are interested in finding out more about the Family Development Credentialing Class please contact: Trish Moylan Torruella at the Department of Families, Children, Youth & Recreation 550 Main Street, Room 306 Hartford, CT 06103.

Sincerely,

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Daughters of Eve: Mission Statement

To educate the spirit, mind, and body, for community leadership in four core areas, academic achievement, health equity, civic involvement, youth programming, as well as address all disciplines of human resources and human services.