

Healing Place gets help with interviews

Julia Vail | October 15, 2008



Christy Broughton of SAS, left, with Healing Place client

RALEIGH, N.C. -- While teaching a class at The Healing Place of Wake County for people preparing to enter the workforce, Betsy Johnson noticed a problem.

"A lot of their resumes were just sort of thrown together," says Johnson, transitional case manager at the Raleigh-based nonprofit, which serves homeless people recovering from addiction.

Because of the time students had spent in recovery to overcome their substance-abuse problems, she says, "they didn't know how to talk about criminal background or explain the gaps in their work history."

In response, Barrett Joyner, development director for The Healing Place, got in touch with human-resources recruiters at SAS, the Cary-based business-software company where he had previously served as head of U.S. sales.

"Here were people who had interviewed probably thousands of folks, who did it for a living, and knew what employers were looking for," Joyner says.

Three SAS employees responded to the call in July, holding mock interviews at The Healing Place and offering job-related advice to six men and women trying to enter fields such as retail, health care and customer service.

"I feel like we were able to boost their confidence," says Kathy Hardy, a corporate recruiter for SAS who conducted several of the interviews. "Many of them had been out of the workforce for a long time, and we could provide them with information on how they could address that."

As of January, Wake County had more than 1,100 people living on the streets.

"I really don't think that a lot of people are aware that Wake County has the problem with homelessness that we actually do," Johnson says.

The Healing Place, started in 2001 to address the issue of homelessness in the area, serves about 200 people in active recovery from drug and alcohol addiction.

More than six in 10 graduates of The Healing Place are still sober and employed one year after leaving the facility, the group says, compared to the national average of fewer than three in 10 recovering addicts.

Participants in the mock interviews say they are grateful for the guidance.

"Trying to get our lives back on track, it's very rewarding to know that people in the private sector are in your corner," says Cynthia Emery, who is preparing to graduate from the center and enter the workforce.

Hardy of SAS says she received hand-written thank-you notes from several participants.

After the first round of interviews, Hardy says, she approached SAS management about inviting Healing Place staff to a company meeting to spread the word about the mock interviews to other recruiters who might be interested in helping.

Johnson of The Healing Place, who spoke at the meeting about her personal journey with addiction and recovery, motivated about 10 SAS employees to volunteer.

"I believe everyone that was in the room that day, as a community, as a society, were all willing to step out and help," Johnson says.

The Healing Place now schedules mock interviews the last Friday of every month, with SAS employees lined up through November to volunteer. The last round of interviews was held Sept. 26.

With only one or two exceptions, all the participants in the first round of mock interviews found employment, Johnson says.

"They learned to walk in with the confidence they need, and their heads held high," she says.

Aside from the valuable interview advice the participants received, they took away another important lesson.

"It's not just a dog-eat-dog world out there," Emery says as she takes a break from completing a job application. "People do care."