

**March 2007**

**Interview by Orion Lumiere**

Although it was six years ago that she ran away from a lifetime of abuse by her family, Sisters' new staff member Shorty still always sits with her back to the wall. Glancing over her shoulder as she talks, she is unsure if putting her photo in this letter is safe. Finally, she decides it is: "I like coming into work every day because I feel safe. If my family tries to find me, the staff won't say I'm in here."



Shorty was hired into our new café temporary pool last year, drawn from our customer community. An aloof customer who used to greet staff with a solemn nod, Shorty has transformed into a coworker famous for her hugs. "The staff to me feels like the family I never had. I never got love when I was a kid. I feel loved and safe, that hasn't happened in my life before. I told a staff member, *if I hug you too much, it's because I never had it when I was a kid.*' I felt sketchy telling her that, but she said it was ok."

The new pool is part of the Work Force Development (WFD) Program, which honors the special needs that customers like Shorty bring with them when they re-enter the workforce, like the need for safety and extra support. It gives Sisters staffing flexibility and a potential hiring pool when positions open up.

"I love being a temp worker! I like coming into work every day, because I feel safe. I love all the staff. It's the first job where I like waking up and saying, "I get to go to work today." I feel welcome every day, and I like giving back to those going through what I went through, telling people about resources.

"It's also my first job clean and sober. I'm a lot more motivated, I'm not worried about the drugs wearing off. Customers come to me and ask, *where can I get clean, where can I go?* and I tell them. Now I know I can spend my money in a good way. Like with past paychecks, I'd go to the drug dealers' house for a bag of dope. Now I spend my check on things I actually enjoy: my i-pod, cell phone, take friends out to lunch. And I have a strong community now that I can be real around if I need to talk to them.

Shorty took another step into Sisters' community last month when Associate Director Kate Cox asked her to help do a sage smudging as a part of a ground breaking ceremony for Sisters' new Personalist Center: "I felt more like a part of Sisters' staff, helping out with *Sisters* instead of just doing my job – I was helping the groundbreaking for the PC! I'm Native American."

When asked about her future hopes and dreams, Shorty says: "I would like to work my way up to a full-time staff - because I know a customer who was a temp worker and now he's a cook. I would like to go back to school; I like working with homeless people, so maybe something along that line, do internships at nonprofits. I'd like to get my own place with my own bathroom and kitchen. I'd get a dog, too."