

Kelle Wright's Goodwill Success Story

Before I came to work for Goodwill, life was never easy. I became addicted to drugs at an early age and used them on and off for many years. During these years, despite my struggles, I was able to gain some job skills, including management experience. But this did not keep me from hitting rock bottom.

That happened after being arrested for drug sales and possession. I was facing a prison sentence. I was living in a room above a donut shop, with no money, addicted to drugs, and my kids were living with their father. There was no way out. I had to face the consequences of where my actions had brought me.

I come from a family of multi-generational drug users. Using drugs was a way of life for us. Just prior to my going to prison, I had the realization that this cycle had to stop, and it had to stop with me. I found the answer. If I wanted to make a difference for myself and my kids 'I' had to change myself.

The three years I spent in a maximum security prison for women was probably the best thing that could have happened to me, though I did not think so at the time. Although drugs and alcohol are readily available in prison for those who want them, instead I chose to take a vocational course, as well as immerse myself in every self-help course available.

I was fortunate enough to attend a great 'Pre-Release' class about two months before being released from prison. In this class, I learned how to set goals. I mapped out my goals. My first priority was I needed a 'job.' I needed a job, preferably a good one. Where was I going to get it with a criminal record? In my class, I was given a list of resources that included a couple of places we could potentially find work. Goodwill was one of the names on the list.

I had been out of prison for about one week, and I was in the car driving when I passed Goodwill. Although I felt nervous about going into the Goodwill store on the spot, I managed to muster the courage and talked to the store manager. All of my prepared speeches went right out the window, but the manager reassured me and told me my story was familiar at Goodwill. She sent me to apply for the Goodwill Academy, and within a week, I was in the program, receiving paid, hands-on job training and case management.

After all my past experiences, I know I needed two things. I needed sobriety, and I needed to work. I did both of these things with the help of Goodwill, and I am now a self-supporting and contributing member of society. I take my job very seriously, and I feel honored to have my job. I remind myself daily to stay humble and grateful.

At Goodwill we are all about second chances. Goodwill gives everyone a hand-up rather than a hand-out, and with hard work and dedication, Goodwill gave me the skills and confidence I needed to succeed and break the cycle of addiction that had been controlling my life. Today my life is good. Here I am, five years and five Goodwill promotions later – the Director of Sales & Operations in Solano County at Goodwill Industries of the Greater East Bay.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my story.

Gerald Wright's Goodwill Success Story

My story is similar to Kelle's story. Before coming to Goodwill, I had worked in a variety of occupations, from pumping oil off of barges and ships on the Mississippi River to driving forklifts and trucks for construction companies. Throughout my career, one thing did not change – my struggle with addiction. Before I came to Goodwill, I was using drugs, off and on, for 35 years.

Getting sent to prison for the third time for drugs was the turning point for me. I realized that all of the fun I thought I was having was not really fun, and all it had gotten me was jail time. After my last release, I was sentenced to a two-year outpatient drug treatment program, which I successfully completed. Part of the requirements of the program was that I secure 'gainful employment.' I went to a meeting for parolees that was being held at the local Goodwill, and here a case manager gave me information about Goodwill's job training programs.

I went to a Goodwill Orientation after learning about the program, and although there was a waiting list, I kept myself focused and soon was accepted into the Goodwill Academy. I was placed into the truck-driving training program. By this time, I had been sober for five months.

I put the energy I spent on my addiction in the previous 35 years into my dedication to work. After a few months of driving trucks in the training program, I received my first promotion. Since then I have had a total of five promotions in the last four years, working hard to improve myself and grow my career at Goodwill Industries of the Greater East Bay.

Currently I am the Director of Sales and Operations in Contra Costa County. I'm grateful to Goodwill for the second chance and the opportunities I have received. I now have pride in my work, and my family and friends are also proud of me.

In addition, coming to Goodwill changed my life in another way – I met my wife, Kelle, here at Goodwill. Sharing a similar history has made our bond stronger, and we both work in leadership positions at Goodwill Industries of the Greater East Bay after having started as program participants.

Thank you very much for taking the time to hear my story and how I changed my life with Goodwill's help.