

PROFILES OF HOPE: Meet Donna, an IOH resident:

I am blessed because I was raised by two very strong women, my mom and my grandmother. They pushed us to work hard. I had my first job at 8 years old, folding lids that fit over boxes of peaches at my grandmother's café. I still remember getting my first check - it was for \$12, and I was thrilled.

My beautiful daughter was born in 2003. We never had a lot of money, but we got by. The turning point came when I lost my job at Gwinnett Medical. I was the unit clerk in the orthopedic department and I loved it. My plan was to stay there and make a career, but sometimes plans don't work out. A new director was hired, positions were shuffled, and I lost my job. It was devastating. When my car broke down, we were in real trouble. I lost the apartment and we stayed with a friend from church for a while. Finally, I had no choice – my daughter went to her father's and I moved into a shelter downtown. It was a hard decision, but at least my daughter was safe.

My experience at the shelter was life changing and humbling. Although probably the lowest point of my life, it was also the best thing. I was introduced to a program that helps women work, and then eventually to IOH. I got a temp job with the State of Georgia, and I prayed so hard for God to help me do the best possible job so I could stay. My prayers were answered and I was hired full-time last April.

From the shelter, I moved to an extended stay motel. It was awful, dangerous and very expensive. My daughter could not stay with me there. I needed a place where we could live together while I got back on track, now that I was working full-time. IOH has been that place. This program is the break that I needed, a chance to save and plan for the future.

When I leave IOH, I want to give back. I want to be in a position to reach out to those that need help, and give hope to those who have none. That's what IOH has done for me, and what I hope to do for someone else.