

## Jeffrey's Success Story

When Jeffrey talks about the path that led him to being homeless, he struggles to pinpoint one major cause. "A lot of things got me to this point," he says. Born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, he moved to San Diego with his father and received a college degree from San Diego State. After his father passed away, Jeffrey moved to Miami to be near his brother, the only real family he had left. He worked as a waiter in Miami, making over \$100 a night, and enjoying the city.

Looking back, Jeffrey concedes that his lifestyle in Miami was "overly self-indulgent." He had found college to be easy, but after leaving the structured environment of school, he "got a little carried away" with things. He took jobs and quit them a few months later; he drank and used drugs. "I never hit rock bottom," Jeffrey says. "I thought I was managing it OK." After a few years in Miami, as the economy began to falter, Jeffrey struggled to find the good work he'd been accustomed to. Restaurant owners were looking for younger, fresher faces, and Jeffrey was making a small fraction of what he previously had. At the same time, housing prices had skyrocketed in Miami—when he moved to the city, he found a nice apartment for \$350 a month. By the time he left, his rent was nearly \$800 a month. After spending a majority of his savings on an ill-advised move, his situation took a turn for the worse.

"Moving to Austin saved my life," Jeffrey says. He had always been adventurous—"kind of a free spirit," he likes to say—and when a friend in a similar situation recommended Austin, Jeffrey decided it was worth a try. Thinking back on his first visit to the ARCH, he remembers being terrified. "It was dirty, loud, threatening. I was just waiting to get punched or robbed." But he quickly came to see things differently. He was surprised how many people coming to the ARCH had jobs. He realized that the population was incredibly intelligent, and that the vast majority of them were "so sweet."

Jeffrey got into case management with Heather, whom he credits as a tremendous contributor to his success. The case managers at the ARCH "can really get you to the next level," he says. After being in case management for only a few months, Jeffrey got sick and collapsed while walking downtown. "I really thought I was going to die," he says. He was taken to Brackenridge ER, where he was so grateful for the wonderful care he received. Heather kept Jeffrey's bunk at the ARCH while he was in the hospital, and she checked in with him regularly. "If I didn't know I had the ARCH to come back to, I would have been overcome with despair," he says. "But Heather never got tired of me," he says. "When I needed her two, three times a day, she was there. She was perfect."

Today, Jeffrey is safely and stably housed thanks to a partnering social agency that placed him in subsidized transitional housing. "I can keep a roof over my head—it's clean, it's great," he says. He

appreciated being able to stay at the ARCH, but his apartment “feels like a home.” He likes that the living environment is structured, and he hopes it will serve as a stepping stone to getting public housing.

Jeffrey is working part-time as well. “I have a college degree,” he says. “I’m washing dishes right now, and I’m loving it.” He still faces a chronic leg condition that makes it difficult to work full-time, but he manages it well. “I like working,” he says. “I don’t like being home with nothing to do.”

Jeffrey’s best advice to other clients is not to wallow or give up on themselves. “Lots of other people gave up on me, but I never gave up on myself,” he says. “Try to find beauty around you,” he suggests—something as simple as a sunny day, a funny joke someone tells, or a walk down to the river. “And set time for yourself to do something ‘un-homeless’ every day—get out there and do things.” Finally, Jeffrey would encourage others to always apply for jobs. “People love that you’re interested in work,” he says. “Even if you get four rejections in a row, the fifth one you go to might be perfect for you.”

Jeffrey is proud of how far he’s come, but he seems almost uncomfortable identifying as a ‘success story.’ “I’m still a work in progress,” he says. “Not all my problems are over, but I’m in a much better situation than I was.” He’s looking forward to what lies ahead of him. “I want to figure out what I want to do the rest of my life. I want to be a productive citizen—pay taxes, give back...I still think there’s another act in my life.”