

I was 39 years old when I first became homeless. I was working at IBM, and took a company buy-out in 1988. I was caring for my ill mother at the time, and mounting medical bills soon became unmanageable. Our home was foreclosed upon after we fell behind, and I had to place my mother in a nursing home. I asked myself, "How could this happen to me?"

I have three degrees, I had a home.

I came to Poughkeepsie to see if I could get help, and I was told to go to the Dutchess County Coalition for the Homeless emergency shelter (DCCH), which I did many nights. In February 2000, a case worker gave me an application for Hillcrest House, and I was accepted. After moving into Hillcrest House, I felt like I had a family again. Only a month later, I was offered a job there. I think that the staff saw something in me, that I was determined. I am not a stereotype of a homeless person. I don't do drugs or alcohol.

Today, I still work at Hillcrest House and DCCH as head DCCH coordinator. Every night at the homeless shelter, guests bring stories of homelessness. I tell them, "I know what you are going through, I feel your pain, because I have been where you are." I want them to know that there is life after homelessness. You can go on and make a better life than the one you had.

Chris Canale
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