A Foot Out the Door to a New Life

Thanks to you, a Spectrum client is on his way to becoming a chef.

Spanish rice was the first thing Lopez learned to cook. “It is really hard to make rice when you are five years old, especially when the stove is like six feet higher than you are.”

When his mom locked Lopez and his brother and sister alone in their apartment, a neighbor slipped the rice ingredients through a hole in the wall along with directions on how to make it.

“She wanted to go out and get money and feed us but she would forget and not come back some nights and some nights she would come back with a black eye. Guys would take advantage of her and beat her up.”

Eventually the police came to take the kids away. At first, they were put in foster homes in Lopez’s native Colombia, but these were not good experiences.

“I used to be really bad, had a lot of anger problems and I was just not in a good stage and [my foster parents] would take advantage of it. On Halloween they would lock me up in the back of the house and take the other kids out trick-or-treating. I would be in the back in the dark, just locked up.”

A team of one, supported by you. When Lopez was eight, the three kids were adopted together by an American family, and they settled first in Colorado and then in Vermont when Lopez was in tenth grade. A big wrestler in Colorado, he started his own team of one when he arrived here, practicing with a nearby high school.

continued on back

A drawing Lopez did for the BTV Street Chronicle, a free zine of writings by Drop-In Center clients (see our online blog to read the past issues). Thanks to you, Lopez not only had a place to stay, but he also got help with managing his anger, finding jobs, getting into school, and building the skills he needs to thrive as an adult.
Paying it Forward

In lieu of gifts, a couple asks guests to donate to Spectrum at their wedding. You can do this too... and what an impact you will have!

When Ewing and Theresa Fox were planning their wedding last summer, they asked themselves what they could do to make their day a little special. “We have a house full of stuff,” says Ewing. “I don’t need another set of china.”

So they asked their friends to donate to Spectrum instead of registering for gifts. Why? The Drop-In Center had been a lifeline for Ewing as he tried to kick drugs and alcohol as a teen.

“I was working a bunch of jobs,” says Ewing. “I was living in somebody’s walk-in closet, and there wasn’t really a safe space to be. I was still drinking a lot but when I was sober-ish, it was a place I could go where I was safe. It was just warm, friendly, honest, and available.

“There were a couple of times where, if I hadn’t been there, I don’t know where I would have been. Even in recovery, even once I had a place to be all the time, and I had a meal, and I had a roof over my head, it continued to be one of those safe places.”

“ Asking my friends to donate just seemed like a good way to give back.”

Like many of our donors, Ewing Fox had personal reasons for choosing Spectrum as the beneficiary at his wedding. He’d been a client once. If you would like to donate to Spectrum in lieu of gifts, contact Beal at 802-864-7423 x351 or bstgeorge@spectrumvt.org.

Mark’s Mission Moment

“Thank you for giving me a reason to get up in the morning on really bad days.”

I wanted to share this note with you, which was written by a 21-year-old who uses our Drop-In Center, where they cook meals and join in daily activities (they choose to use gender-neutral pronouns). This is someone who has felt incredibly isolated and has often been in crisis—until, with your support, they found belonging and acceptance at the Drop-In Center. I think their words say it all.

Be a Part of the Movement!

On March 31, 2016, 100 business and community leaders will come together for our Executive Sleep Out, spending the night outside overnight in solidarity with teenagers and young adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

That same weekend, across Chittenden County, over 300 students will join the movement at the Student Sleep Out. You can help by registering or donating today at www.spectrumsleepout.org—and together, we can make sure every teenager or young adult can get help when they need it most.

Join us by registering or donating today at www.spectrumsleepout.org
We sat down with Spectrum’s new Clinical Program Director, Leslie Ferrer, who came on board a year ago. She oversees several of our core programs, but at the heart of each, her goal is to help young people make at least one connection to a positive person.

Q: What are some of the biggest challenges that our clients face?
LF: On the most basic level, accessing clothing, food, and housing. Finding housing is just getting harder—it’s getting more expensive and vacancy rates are very low. But also, many of our youth are disconnected and don’t have positive relationships with peers and adults. So for them to be functional and healthy, both physically and emotionally, they need to connect with at least one positive person.

Q: What is Spectrum’s approach to working with youth?
LF: We use positive youth development and strengths-based approaches. That means we make sure that the choice is in their hands, that we give them as many resources as we can, and that the services we provide are the highest quality available using best practices and research.

Q: What motivates you to do this work?
LF: When I was younger, connecting with positive teachers and mentors and community programs in my life was so powerful. I want to make sure that kids that are out there floating can get that same connection.

Q: What has been one of your favorite moments so far?
LF: On Christmas, donors offered to cook meals for the kids in our housing program and the youth really enjoyed it. And then at dinner, someone rang the doorbell and surprised us with casseroles! These are kids who didn’t have anywhere to go on Christmas, a day that’s supposed to be about love and caring. And total strangers came out of the woodwork to say, “We do care. And you do matter.”

“You save lives!”

Thank you, our youth were fully outfitted for winter this year. Here are some things we’re still looking for.

We’re still looking for:
- new socks
- backpacks
- lip balm
- sewing machine
- headphones
- winter boots
- tents
- long underwear
- L, XL, & plus-sized clothing

If you’d like to join the Legacy Society, contact:
Sarah Woodard
Director of Development
802.864.7423 x350
swoodard@spectrumvt.org

Leslie Ferrer, Clinical Program Director (in blue) meets with staff in our Drop-In Center.
Wrestling was a very big thing for me because I was diagnosed as bipolar when I was adopted. I had a lot of anger problems, and I could just put all my anger out there without getting in trouble.”

After high school, Lopez was living at home and hit a rough patch. “I was not on my meds and I was getting irritated by everyone in my house. I just was not in a good place.” He got in a fight with his sister and pushed his mother. His dad intervened and Lopez threw him into a wall.

He had to leave and went to stay with a friend, who told him about Spectrum. With your help, we were able to give him a room in the Landing (our emergency shelter), and, eventually, in our transitional housing.

“Through counseling, I’ve learned how to calm down. I’ve figured out ways to cope. And Spectrum staff have been there through everything. They’ve helped me when I’ve had a lot of bad, emotional days, stressful days.”

A big heart and a big future, thanks to you. Thanks to generous donors like you, Lopez also got help with finding jobs, and he completed a 13-week training at the Community Kitchen Academy run by the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf. This January, Lopez left our program for culinary school.

His dream? To open the first Colombian restaurant in Burlington (called Cattleya after an orchid found in his native country). “I want it to have an open kitchen,” he says, “I want to work with the Community Kitchen Academy. Any graduates who need a job, they can come. And I’m going to come back and cook in the Drop-In sometimes.”

“If there weren’t a Spectrum, I would have to worry about an apartment, paying bills—I wouldn’t even know the skills to deal with that so it would be a lot harder for me, especially when I have a lot of disabilities. I would probably be on the streets. And cold. It’s a very great program for people who want to get their foot out the door and get their life started.”

“Lopez is the kind of guy who is always light-hearted and has a smile on his face,” says Mike Shirk, Lopez’s case manager. “He has a big heart, an incredible amount of talent, and the drive to go far in life.”

As for Lopez, he hopes to pass those traits on. “One of the things I’m going to do when I get older is adopt a kid from Colombia,” says Lopez. “And I want to give them a life that I never had. Because I would understand what they went through.”

Yes! I want to make sure help is there when youth need it most!

☐ I’d like to make a donation of ____________________ (Surprise us!)

☐ Please make my gift monthly!

Your credit card will be charged on the 15th of each month—or call Beal at 802-864-7423 x351 to set up an automatic draft of your checking or savings account.

NAME ________________________________

ADDRESS __________________________________________

CITY ___________________ STATE ___________ ZIP ______

EMAIL ____________________________ PHONE (in case we have questions)

☐ Please charge my ☐ Visa ☐ Master Card ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

CREDIT CARD NUMBER ________________________________ EXPIRATION DATE ________________________________ SECURITY CODE ________________________________

PRINT NAME AS IT APPEARS ON CARD ___________________________ SIGNATURE ___________________________