



Colette Johnson: Then and Now -- Thankful and Giving Others Hope

December 2012 - Harlem, NY - Admittedly the mission of ParentJobNet isn't always easy, however when we aid in doing what we intend, finding meaningful employment for the parents of school-age children, it validates the effort. Colette Johnson's story can't be completely told here, mainly because it continues to be a beautiful work in progress. However the initial plot points include tenacity, persistence, awareness and commitment to herself and her child.

Johnson, a single mother of an 11-year old daughter in Harlem, is still writing her tale. Just a few years ago, she was gainfully employed in corporate America, and then it all changed.

"I had absolutely no financial worries at the time, and then everything changed when I got laid off," said Johnson.

She was unemployed for nearly two years and things looked dismal.

"No doors were opening, said Johnson, who was forced to tap into her meager savings for her daughter's college education just to buy basic necessities. "The worse thing about being unemployed is knowing that you are not able to replace the money that you are spending by not having a steady income."

Johnson of course realized the common frustrations many of the people who were, and remain, without meaningful employment. A friend however mention ParentJobNet to her and the story took another turn.

"I was doing a search [online] and found the ParentJobNet website," recalled Johnson. "What attracted me to PJN was the fact that they reached out to parents in need of job readiness, job connections as well as financial security. In addition, I notice they provided network events and career counseling and those were some of the things I thought I needed at the time, especially after being unemployed on and off for about

two years.” Johnson’s unemployment situation is something that ParentJobNet founder, Pat Craddick, has encountered before.

“We at PJN have a ground roots understanding of the experience of being unemployed”, said Craddick. “So, when parents come in we see things from the same perspective. Colette, as does everyone who PJN touches, received the benefit of our full-personalized service. We are able to empathize with them and treat them with respect and dignity, because we’ve all been there.”

“The experience at PJN was a very kind and caring experience,” said Johnson. “I had the pleasure of meeting with a job counselor, who was very encouraging and understood my situation and worked with me very closely to find employment.”

Most good stories have a hint of irony, and Johnson’s, so-far, continuing happy ending contains that, and bit of simple but sage advice.

“It was through ParentJobNet services that I was fortunate enough to find a job in a matter of weeks,” said Johnson. “I am now employed two years with the Manhattan Educational Opportunity Center, which provides academic and vocational programs for low-income New Yorkers.”

It’s always nice to hear about someone finding meaningful employment. However, in times as tenuous as these, being prepared for a possible change or a turn in another direction is advisable. Johnson is doing just that.

“I am happy that I’m employed and my goal is to move into a position where I could utilize my skills in a more productive way,” said Johnson. “Right now, the opportunity to advance is very limited because I do not have a degree.”

She’s currently taking steps to rectify that situation as well, and, ironically, it’s because of the job found through PJN. Employees at MEOC receive tuition help to attend college and Johnson is taking advantage of the program.

“I’m currently working on a Bachelor’s degree in Communication and Culture and will be finish by next year,” said Johnson who qualified for the benefit after six months of service. “I started as soon as I was eligible.”

The real benefit may not yet have unfolded and it couldn’t be a better situation for Johnson.

“My advice to someone who is unemployed is to be patient, have faith and never give up on your search,” added Johnson. “My daughter is very happy now and progressing very well in her new middle school. In addition, she has always told me that I was her role model because I am very supportive of her education and emotional growth.” Johnson’s daughter attends a highly sought-after middle school on the Upper West Side.