

Dear Reader,

I am a current resident here at Criti. I just wanted to write in and share my experience over the past six months and how honored I feel to have graduated and found a place to call my own.

Before coming here, I wasn't in the best place mentally. My health was unstable, and I couldn't figure out how to get anything accomplished. I didn't know where to turn for help or how to move forward. To be honest, I was scared to come here.

In the first couple of weeks, I was sent to the hospital and have been back there multiple times since. Life didn't seem to be looking up. I had been here previously, and it made me fearful that I wouldn't make any progress this time either. Back then, I was pregnant with my daughter, and now I had two pre-teens — so if I'm honest, I was a proud but tired mama. I wondered, day after day, if I was making a mistake.

Talking with other residents gave me mixed feelings — sometimes I questioned if coming here was the right choice or if I would ever leave. But every Monday, the classes we had gave me and others a chance to talk and let things off our shoulders. Watching others leave — some on good terms, some on their own — made me want to put more confidence back into goals I hadn't revisited in a long time.

It really helped to have classes like credit repair and goal setting. The amazing people who came in, whether just once or returning every few weeks, gave me hope. Even if everything we did here didn't perfectly align with my own plans, the comfort and safety among other women and the encouragement from staff helped me realize I should pursue my creative passions — something I've always longed to do.

Inspired and pushed by many, I decided to open my Etsy shop again. I haven't made a sale *yet*, but Ms. Krystal (with a K, lol) taught me that sometimes you have to step back, look at things differently, and focus on small accomplishments. So now, instead of stressing about sales, I'm putting my authentic self and my work out there — from writing children's books to creating journals, making beautiful cups, designing clothes, sewing masterpieces, and anything else my creative mind dreams up.

I know you might be thinking, *No sales yet?* But I did get inspired to believe in myself again. I was given a chance to get a free new computer (many thanks to Ms. Sheba!) — something I cherish because now I can make designs and digital art, something I struggled to do before because of my mental state.

It sounds crazy, but without people like Ms. Katilyn (who kept reminding me, *You're going to graduate — I'm going to get you there*), the other ladies who were so open and real, and the amazing staff — like Ms. Sabrina, who kept me on my toes (which is both good and bad, especially when I wanted to hide!) — I wouldn't have been able to start again.

If I could give a special shout-out, it would be to these ladies, plus Mrs. Jessica, who helped me so much with my children, and Ms. Tina, who, even at night, would go out of her way to help me understand things. And let's not forget her Zumba class that kept the doctors off my back! Life wasn't always easy, but I had fun — so thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

Now that I have my keys — even though it's not the three-bedroom I dreamed of — my children are excited to have a place of their own to decorate for the first time in a long time.

To any future residents:

I know it can be tough to keep up with everything, but the joy you will feel when you finish will be worth it. Don't give up. *Do* cry. *Do* get frustrated. But know that these ladies will help you feel better, whether all you need is a smile or a hug. The front desk ladies will always lift you up and make you feel less burdened.

A few tips for future residents:

1. **Talk.** Don't be afraid to open up — you never know how someone here might help you, no matter your background or why you came.
2. **Remember:** It's only a season in your life, so take in all you can, even if you think you don't need it.
3. **Love yourself.** Smile. Don't be so hard on yourself — shelter life isn't that bad if you follow the rules and *push*.

Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

A Grateful Resident