

All You Knit is Love: Celine's Story

In the rhythm of the needles, there is music for the soul. These words from an old sampler describe how knitting has provided comfort and strength to Celine throughout the many challenges she has faced in a lifetime journey that eventually led her to Houston and to WHAM.

Celine's mother taught her to knit when she was five years old, in her central African homeland of Cameroon. An only child whose father died when she was eight and mother died when she was ten, she had no other family to take care of her, resulting in her being left in a stepmother's care. Celine remembers when she was too young to attend school, she played on the school playground with hopes of becoming a student when she reached the required age of twelve. Unfortunately, when the time came for her to start school, her stepmother was not able to pay for her own children and her stepdaughter, too, so Celine lost the opportunity to go to school. Into adulthood, Celine continued to knit, selling the items she made to help support herself. She married and had two children, and when her husband ended the marriage, Celine decided to make a better life for herself.

Fourteen years ago, Celine was able to come to the United States to Maryland where a friend helped her get a job as a live-in nanny. Her employer told Celine that if she ever left the house, the police would kidnap her and send her back to Cameroon. Living in fear, she took care of the children and house without venturing outside. During this time, Celine knitted items that her friend would sell for her in the neighborhood. When her job ended, she learned that there were other nannies from Cameroon living in the area, and the threat of being sent home by the police was a lie to keep her from associating with others from her homeland. Celine left Maryland and lived in seven states before eventually making her way to Texas for a job.

Six years ago, Celine came to Texas to accept a job as a nanny in Pearland, where she stayed until the family no longer needed her services. Without a job or place to live, Celine went to a shelter in Houston. There, she was provided yarn so she could knit items to give to the residents. She knitted, not only for the children, but also for anyone who wanted something hand knitted to wear. Celine was in shelters or homeless until being directed by a church to Casa Juan Diego where she was able to live, work in the garden, and volunteer while receiving help with obtaining work papers and finding a job.

When Celine became disabled and unable to work regularly, YMCA International helped her get Social Security benefits, and she was able to move into her own apartment five years ago. While her income is not sufficient to cover all of her expenses, Celine is able to make ends meet with WHAM's help of financial assistance and food to supplement her food budget. She continues her knitting and is able to supplement her income by selling her handmade items. Celine feels blessed by the help she has received and is choosing to give back by volunteering to teach knitting classes to seniors at WHAM.