

I met Jill Elizabeth Armstrong a few years ago when I took a tour of St. Vincent de Paul in Clearwater. She is such an amazing and inspiring woman. She has touched the lives of so many people; we are fortunate she is part of our community.

**Q: Tell us a little about yourself:**

**A:** My name is Jill Elizabeth Armstrong. I have lived in the city of Clearwater for 12 years and recently bought a home here.

**Q: If you're not a Clearwater native, what brought you to Clearwater?**

I came to Clearwater in early 2010 to plan my 30th high school reunion with a neighbor I grew up with in Miami. I loved it here the minute I set foot on the Gulf coast of Florida. I was living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and within a month, put my house up for sale and moved here.

I have had a life filled with adversity and challenges and realized that I needed to stop drinking alcohol shortly after I moved here. I was in the veterinary field during my early adulthood and after moving here, I had a hard time getting a job as a veterinary technician because I was not licensed. After getting sober with the help of the wonderful support I found in Pinellas County, I waited until I had a year of sobriety and enrolled in SPC to complete my higher education. Not only did I get sober here, I achieved a stellar learning experience and earned my bachelor's degree in Health Services Administration- Human Services. As my recovery got stronger, so did my passion to serve others.

**Q: What type of work do you do here in Clearwater?**

I am currently enrolled at the University of South Florida taking certifications to better myself in the field of social work, servant leadership, and case management. I am a lifelong learner and use my lived experiences with my current evidence-based education to serve those in need in more efficient, effective ways; by meeting them where they are at on an individual basis.

I completed my capstone during my senior year in college at Pinellas Ex-Offender Re-Entry Coalition and was hired by St. Vincent de Paul after I graduated from SPC. I am a Workforce Development Specialist and instruct a program called STARS (**S**uccess **T**raining **A**nd **R**etention **S**ervices) which lasts four weeks with two years of wrap around case management. I work with the most vulnerable people that reside in our city and help them to develop life skills and employment readiness credentials. The goal of the program is to change the trajectory of a person's life who wants to become a productive member of our society, ultimately decreasing our homeless population on the streets of Clearwater.

The most important reason I decided to settle in Clearwater was the abundance of support I got from various organizations and institutions of learning that I came in contact with. I know that I found my identity through my experiences at SPC- Clearwater and the clubs that I joined while enrolled there. I found my calling to help others based on the unconditional love and services I found when I got sober here and made a better lifestyle for myself.

**Q: What's your favorite place to eat in Clearwater?**

My favorite place to eat in Clearwater, hands down, is Columbia Restaurant on Sand Key. It has been owned by the same family for well over a century and I believe that locally owned, family businesses are in the most need of our support. I also feel strongly about small family-owned businesses that depend on local business to make ends meet for their families.

**Q: What's a favorite Clearwater memory?**

My favorite Clearwater memory is walking across the stage at Tropicana field to receive my bachelor's degree which I managed to earn Summa Cum Laude.

**Q: What's a favorite place to visit in Clearwater?**

My favorite place to visit locally are our beautiful, serene beaches and dog friendly parks that have exercise amenities. My most loyal buddy is my red dachshund named Snickers who I rescued shortly after I moved here. Although he is getting up there in years, he still loves his favorite spots in Clearwater too!

**Q: What's your favorite local sports team?**

My favorite local sports team is the Clearwater Threshers. I love the all-American game of baseball and BayCare Ballpark is close, convenient, and is always a great time.

**Q: What are you most proud of?**

I am most proud of turning my life around and having the opportunity to help others that struggle with issues that I have experienced and dealt with. Watching others, motivating them, and believing in them until they muster the faith to believe in themselves is what drives me to do what I do. The process of witnessing these vulnerable people get their needs met, and finding stable employment gives them the chance to turn their lives around. It is a beautiful thing to see; one that no amount of money can buy.

**Q: Do you have a favorite holiday?**

I love all holidays, but still struggle during them as most of my family are deceased due to addiction. Since I settled in Clearwater, I decided to make new traditions for myself and the people in my life that I choose to call family.

**Q: We live in paradise, here in Clearwater, but is there any other favorite place you like to visit?**

We do live in paradise here. I had the experience of earning a scholarship to study abroad while at SPC. I spent two weeks in Ecuador and would love to go back to South America some day. I also chose to take Spanish during my time at SPC and have been maintaining my studies online to become bilingual. I believe that it is important and will enable me to assist even more people.

**Q: Any suggestions on how Clearwater can be an even better city?**

Because of my career, the changes I see that are most needed in our city are better triage systems for getting people assistance and more funding for affordable housing for the vulnerable populations I work with every day.

**Q: What is an important lesson you've learned?**

The most important lessons I have learned in my lifetime is to never give up hope, and family are those that we choose. Another gift is knowing that community is God's answer to loneliness. One thing that most people do not understand about the homeless population, or anyone struggling with addiction and mental health issues are the many barriers and challenges that we have to cross while being judged or stigmatized by our society. I used to consider myself a victim. I now am an advocate. My passion to assist those in need is what drives me to be a better person today than I was yesterday and fulfills a purpose beyond my wildest dreams. I am proud to call Clearwater my home.