

Transformation: From streets to shelter to self-sufficiency

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WACO—Michael DeLeon, 58, has a smile that will make anybody laugh. And he has a lot to smile about. He has emerged from the streets to a new life that overcame his own personal disappointments.

"I have never been a drunk or a drug user, but I had a disregard for financial responsibility," said DeLeon, a former photojournalist who has more than two years of college at the University of Texas.

Michael DeLeon

"I love electronic things and would waste each paycheck on things I did not need. I had no savings and couldn't pay my rent, ending up on the streets of Waco in March, 2011. If it wasn't for Mission Waco, I'd still be out there."

For the next several months, My Brother's Keeper—a homeless shelter operated by [Mission Waco/Mission World](#)—became his temporary home.

"I couldn't believe I was living in a shelter since I didn't consider myself as a homeless man," he said.

It was there that things began to change. He learned about Mission Waco's transitional program that allows residents of the shelter to stay in the same bed for six months while they get a job and commit to move responsibly toward permanent housing.

"They gave me the tools to succeed," he said. "I just had to find the desire to change and be productive."

And he did. Within three months, DeLeon found a job as dishwasher at the

World Cup Cafe, started his savings account, and soon graduated from the transitional program earlier than anyone before him.

After several months of work, he saved enough to buy a bicycle so he would no longer have to walk everywhere. Within a few more weeks, he had enough money to move out of the shelter into his own apartment.

"It's not much, but it will certainly do for now," he said, adding he is saving money to buy a car. "I don't want to be a dishwasher the rest of my life, so I need to get an inexpensive way of getting out to look for better jobs. But for now, it is one step at a time."

After becoming a Christian at Church Under the Bridge in the midst of his struggles, DeLeon began attending Acts Christian Fellowship, where he worships weekly.

"Christians have loved me, showed me direction and stood with me throughout this transformation," he said.

—Jimmy Dorrell, *Mission Waco/Mission World*