

*"It is a great opportunity for people. It's not just a place to come. It's community."*



It all started with the universal problem for working parents, a search for affordable childcare. That's how Cindy Aiken found the after school program at Langs. *"It was just the whole atmosphere and the community sense that was there,"* raves Cindy. An admitted introvert by nature Cindy found herself getting to know people and making connections.

Then in 2012 a cancer diagnosis. *"For me it went really fast. When I found out about it it was like bang, I was in surgery",* she says. After her cancer treatment began Cindy had to quit her job. She had no benefits and found herself housebound. This difficult period would have been even more devastating but, *"there was a moral support here (at Langs). There were people that I could talk to if I needed to. That was mainly my focus when I was here. That I had somebody to turn to."*

Then, another blow, changes to her husband's benefit plan meant that they would have to start choosing between medications needed for herself, her husband and her daughter. Money was tight and carefully budgeted. Once again Langs offered some relief. *"I belong to the pharmacy here and they're great. When I didn't have the money they would help me out by saying 'ok when you get the money you can pay us."*

Cindy found herself spending long periods of time at home alone. She needed something to do, but she was unable to go back to work. Once again she found what she needed at Langs. She became a volunteer.

Assigned to the front desk in the Resource Center Cindy found that helping others forced her to push against her own limitations. She began to feel less

introverted, more willing to reach out. *"It changed me in leaps and bounds. When you're an introverted kind of person you kind of feel invisible, like nobody notices you, but my confidence and my self-esteem just grew and grew."*

She took the initiative to research and creates a 'back to school' bulletin board. Its successful response encouraged her to continue creating new resources - posting books of the month, creating a job board, which got her to thinking *"wow Langs would be a great place to work."* As luck would have it staff at Langs were already thinking the same thing, *"I had one lady here Suzanne, who said 'there was a job posting coming up here and you're gonna apply for it', and that was the end of it."*

Cindy is going on three years cancer free and she's become a valuable member of the Langs team. Often counted on to help create innovative programs, like the one she is currently working on, a cooking program with recipes for products typically found in a Food Bank Box to make them more tasty and appealing.

With her supervisor a great supporter in helping her transition from volunteer to employee Cindy describes what Langs has done for her as 'boosting her up'. *"I feel so much stronger. You know my health may not be 100% but my mentality, my spirit, the things within me. I know that I'm a better person for having been here because I feel better about myself. I have come such a long way in such a short period of time."*

Cindy is forever grateful for Langs and the opportunities it has created for her. *"It's just a great big family sort of atmosphere. It creates opportunity to advance, so that people aren't stuck somewhere. They're not stuck on social assistance; they're not stuck on parole or whatever difficult situation they are in."*