

A Family Finds Relief Through **Our Network**

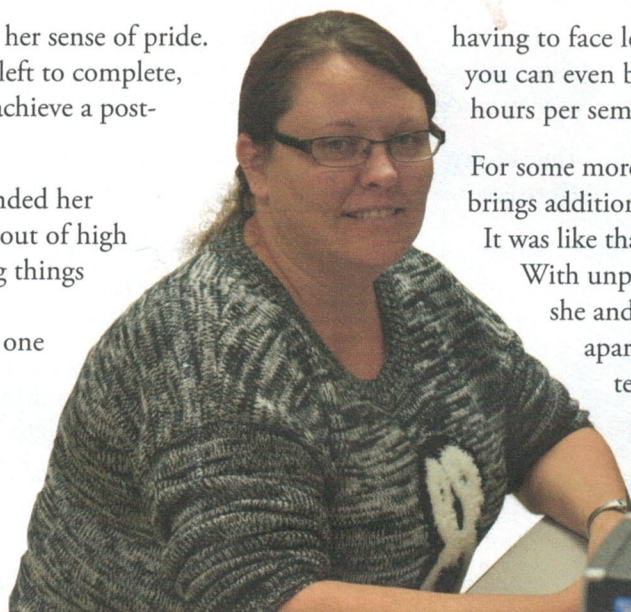
At age 34, Angela is rediscovering her sense of pride. With just one semester of college left to complete, she'll be the first in her family to achieve a post-secondary degree.

Like most of her peers, Angela landed her first job on a factory line straight out of high school. She took pride in "making things that people and businesses need," moving on from long stretches at one plant after another, as each shut down or moved overseas. After three years at United Chemi-Con, Angela was among nearly 150 workers let go from the Lansing plant.

The company filed for and was granted coverage under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Act. For the company's displaced workers, TAA would pay for tuition and textbooks and, in some cases, provide a small stipend for transportation. It was a chance to start over but, for Angela and others, it would mean facing some significant challenges first.

"I was math illiterate," said Angela. "I literally could not divide and failed the math placement test to enter the Business Administration program."

"It's not uncommon," explained Kendra Perkins, an instructor and advisor at Wilkes Community College (WCC) Ashe Campus. "Many of the students coming to us through TAA have not gone beyond high school. They worked for years at the same plant and made a good living – enough to be able to provide for their needs and most of their wants. Now they're back at square one. Just imagine being unemployed and



having to face learning how to use a computer before you can even begin taking the required 15 credit hours per semester."

For some more than others, the loss of income quickly brings additional challenges and difficult choices.

It was like that for Angela and her husband, Travis. With unpaid bills mounting and no relief in sight, she and Travis could not afford to keep their apartment. They made a very difficult choice, temporarily giving up their home life together and each moving in with their own aging parents, who themselves are facing significant health issues and medical bills.

"The cost of gas alone to get back and forth to school can be a barrier to getting back on the road to economic stability," said Kelly Vannoy, Board Chairperson for Ashe County Sharing Center. "It's one of the reasons why we took the lead this past spring to establish an on-campus food pantry in partnership with WCC Ashe Campus and Second Harvest Food Bank. We all have a basic need for nutritious food to get through the demands of the day. This partnership is strengthening our community, one family at a time."

PARTNERSHIPS like the one between Ashe County Sharing Center, Inc., Second Harvest Food Bank and WCC Ashe Campus provide a network of support on the road to financial stability for people like Angela. All of us can use our connections, too – be they through social media, businesses, civic groups, faith communities or others – to bring awareness and resources to help fight hunger. It's a piece of what it means to be part of the solution.

Angela admits, "It's a pride-swallowing thing to ask for help. You're there with young people who are just getting started, and you don't want everyone to know that you can't make it. I've come this far, and I'm going to keep on doing whatever it takes to finish and get a good job. I want you to know that this pantry is helping me and my family and many others. It means you care about what is going on in our community and that you care about us. That matters. It matters a lot."