

HEALTH & WELLNESS

BENEFITS WELLNESS WORKLIFE
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Success Story: Cassonya Carter

"I don't want my lack of understanding about my body to kill me. I refuse to let this condition beat me, I will conquer it."

In 2005, Cassonya "Mama CC" Carter thought she had the flu. She was in and out of the hospital for four months without a diagnosis, until one day she was admitted to the emergency room. Things turned for the worse as she was put in a medically-induced coma, during which she had a stroke, an emergency surgery, and suffered paralysis on her left side. When Cassonya woke up two weeks later, she had several blood clots removed, 18 inches less of intestine, and found out she had ulcerative colitis/Crohn's, an inflammatory bowel disease that causes chronic inflammation of the digestive tract. "I'd never heard of the disease until it almost took my life."

CC supports her cousin, Becky Tezeno, by wearing workout clothing from her company, Tipple J's

Although that was over 10 years ago, CC says, "when you [go through] something like that, you don't forget it. You're grateful for each day." Her road to recovery has been a long one, and CC still manages her ulcerative colitis/Crohn's on a daily basis. But even through the midst of medications, flare-ups, strictness with her diet, and going through the various unpleasantnesses of menopause, CC is able to find positivity. She joined the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, as well as some local wellness organizations, including Grand Valley's Wellness program, which she has been a part of since it began. She found support in [STARS](#) (Sisters Taking Action Reversing Statistics) and [Soulful Motion](#) for women of faith. She credits those organizations for changing her life for the better. "They

are such a positive influence. We hold each other accountable, uplift, empower, and pray for each other.”

“I can’t change what comes my way, but I can change my perspective on it. What is in front of me is not as strong as the power behind me. I can’t stop living because something bad is happening.”

CC ran her first 10k at Gazelle Girl this year, and her second at the 5/3 Riverbank Run a few weeks later, even after a flare-up and a stint in the hospital. Famous for her quotes, she says “I went from walking on a cane to running in a lane.” CC is going into her 25th year at GVSU, and is now a senior academic advisor for the Kirkhof College of Nursing. She loved the experience of running with her coworkers, however, she admits she doesn’t like the sport, but does it to support causes she believes in.

For her to keep enjoying the great things in life, she has to watch her diet, which required serious changes after her diagnosis. “What I like to eat may not be what my GI system can handle. I have to be smart with my choices.” This has taught her to see food as nutrition, rather than something to just satisfy hunger. “A lot of things I used to hate, I now love, like avocado and asparagus,” she says.

Beyond the physical aspects of health, CC also makes sure to take care of herself spiritually and mentally. She has a daily reminder on her phone that says “change my perspective,” to keep herself in check. She stresses that her family and faith in God are motivators in her journey to live out her purpose. She knows that she can always rely on Him to get her through life’s challenges. “Even on my bad days God is still good. I’m still alive and have a chance to do something positive.” Her main goal is to live positively and purposefully.

Her experience has made her a better advisor to nursing students, by looking beyond that degree and focusing on their passion to help and to heal. “What’s important to me is how I impact others, how I make a difference. When I die, all the letters behind my name, all that I have and own mean nothing, it is laid to rest when I leave this earth. What matters to me is my legacy, the lives that I’ve touched and impact I’ve made to make a difference for generations to come.”

Do you know a GVSU faculty or staff member who serves as a role model for others living a healthy lifestyle? [Nominate your co worker for our next newsletter!](#)

Fall Resource Guide

A number of resources are available to you that will help you become and stay healthy and well. Check out the [Fall Resource Guide](#) for plenty of



New Work Life

Consultant: Elisa Salazar

"I've always had an interest and curiosity in people. I feel lucky and honored that I get to be a part of their lives, hear their stories, and witness the experiences they go through."

Elisa Salazar was born to serve. Since she was a young girl, Elisa felt a calling to help others. Her passion for doing so led her to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, from Hope College and GVSU, respectively. Elisa has worked in the "battlegrounds" of special education, juvenile justice, and mental health and substance abuse counseling. She was most recently a behavioral health specialist for Western Michigan University's Behavioral Health Services, and primarily helped people struggling with trauma and substance abuse. "I've spent a lot of time doing clinical work. I was there with people in their worst moments, when the damage had already been done."

Through those experiences, Elisa found herself wondering what could've happened earlier, where these problems were originating from, and why they were even happening at all. She wants answers to those questions. "That experience is transferable to this position because I've seen how bad it can get." She says it's been humbling to understand that any of us is a job loss or serious trauma away from potentially being in the same circumstances.

"You will have crises in your life, so what's your plan? I can help develop those proactive, preventive strategies."

Elisa is compelled to educate and share her knowledge so that fewer people may fall into those negative situations. She explains that planning ahead is essential by developing a mental health “fire escape plan,” that there are so many things that we can’t control in our lives, so it’s important to focus on what we can to keep ourselves protected.

At Grand Valley, Elisa wants to increase outreach – making sure that people are aware of the different services and programs they can be involved in. She has other thoughts for her new position, but says it ultimately depends on the culture. “I have a lot of different tools and ideas, but...I want to know what the culture needs, what are [people] asking for. I have to see what they need from me, then I can adjust accordingly.”

Whatever the GVSU community asks of Elisa, her ultimate goal is to help people look forward to going to work. She has passions in the areas of personal growth, mindfulness, wellness, strengthening families, and building a sense of community and belonging, all of which can benefit GVSU faculty and staff in the workplace. “If people are feeling supported, energetic, and excited, they can do excellent work, and we can create an excellent place to be.”

**Save
the**

Date! GVSU Wellness Summit

October 4, 2-8pm Kirkhof Center

Trying to find some balance in your life? GVSU's first wellness summit has much in store for all who participate. Learn about campus wellness programs and resources available to you, hear from people at GVSU who are living healthfully, and learn how to better your own personal health and well-being. Visit [our website](#) for more information.

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