Carli had years of experience working in social services, but when the recession hit, she found herself unemployed. With so few open positions, she knew that her Bachelor's in Psychology from Boston University and her masters level coursework in social work wouldn’t be enough.

She turned to the Mass Rehab Commission (MRC) for help where they offer vocational services like resume writing and job referrals.

“When I told MRC that I didn’t have anything to wear to an interview, they referred me to Dress for Success Boston,” recalls Carli.

Carli had heard of Dress for Success Boston, but had never been there herself. As a social services advocate, she was used to providing services for others, not receiving them. And as a plus-size woman, she didn’t think that they would have much to offer in her size.

Her visit to the boutique was not what she expected. She had imagined a thrift store with used items to pick through. “I was really impressed with how enthusiastic the volunteers were. My personal shopper found something in my size that fit, and I was pleasantly surprised by that. She dressed me all up including earrings and matching necklace, and I was ready to go.”

In her position, Carli refers women to social services programs, including Dress for Success Boston. “It was awkward and humbling to be on the receiving end, but now I can share my story and experience with my own clients. It helps break down the stigmas attached to receiving help.”

Beyond filling the very practical need of having nothing to wear, Carli sees the bigger impact that Dress for Success can have: “My experience did a lot for my self-esteem. It helped me feel prepared, put together, and composed. When you don’t have any self-esteem or any confidence, you’re not going to take chances and put yourself out there at an interview where you could be rejected. It helps create resiliency, I think.”

Carli knows from her own experience that it’s not easy to ask for help, but is grateful that organizations like Dress for Success Boston are there for women to support them through tough times. “I will be forever grateful for Dress for Success Boston, because they helped me retain my dignity as I struggled to regain employment.” Carli went on to attend a job fair and interviews that MRC helped her arrange. After almost a year of searching, she secured a job as an independent living advocate at the Boston Center for Independent Living where she’s now been working for almost two years.