



BOSTON SPIRIT

Jonathan Scott

President & CEO, Victory Programs

In 1975, Jonathan Scott walked into The Victory House as a Boston College volunteer. He hasn't walked out since. What started as a single South End residence for homeless men has evolved into Victory Programs, an agency with 18 programs, mainly living and recovery communities, offering hope and support to over 2,600 people annually: including those battling substance abuse or chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS. That transformation is largely thanks to Scott, who ascended from his first volunteer role (as a guest-sniffing "human breathalyzer") to a savvy CEO responsible for many shrewd mergers with other vital entities: most recently the Boston Living Center, New England's largest community resource for those with HIV/AIDS, after that organization was nearly destroyed by embezzlement. But when Scott steps in, victory is assured.



[SPIRIT] YOUR FATHER WAS A LEGENDARY CONDUCTOR OF THE NEW YORK CITY BALLET; YOUR MOTHER, THE FIRST WOMAN FILM CRITIC FOR THE 'NEW YORK TIMES'. DO THE ARTS INFLUENCE YOUR NONPROFIT WORK?

[JS] I grew up doing homework backstage at every great opera house in the world, and got to experience what artists go through to make something beautiful: the dedication, the inner strength, the belief in a vision, the ability to make something from nothing. I grew to love the power of words, and every time I do public speaking I think of my mother, and that artistic process that never ends. I rewrite my address after I've already given it!

HOW DID VICTORY PROGRAMS DEVELOP ITS REPUTATION AS AN ESPECIALLY LGBT-INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION?

In 1975, if you were gay you had to hide who you were to get into a homeless shelter. I was coming out myself at the time, watching people be barred from other facilities. I remember one young guy knocking on the door of Victory House after he was thrown out of the Salvation Army and beaten up. I vowed I could make a difference, make it known that if you were gay or transgender this was a safe place for you. It was my bit for the community.

YOU'RE ALSO THE FORMER CHAIRMAN OF MASSEQUALITY. TELL ME ABOUT THAT TIME.

I was so impressed with how the LGBT community came together and the way that activism had changed since the '70s, when I remember going to Pride and feeling the people full of anger. The anger was justified, deeply rooted in horrific loss. Our demonstration was not pacifist or peaceful. So it was amazing to be part of the gay marriage movement, with this other spectrum of love and

beautiful, persuasive activism. A great joy I've had as a gay man out for 40 years is seeing the different ways our community comes together.

ARE THERE CERTAIN MOMENTS THAT KEEP YOU MOTIVATED?

Every day I come to work I have that experience. I talk to people who are newly diagnosed with HIV or living with the ravages of addiction, and every day it reminds me that I'm a beginner too—and there but for the grace of God go I. Our residents bring more to my life than I bring to them. They always tell the truth. When you have nothing left to lose, the only thing to do is face the truth. It's amazing to be reminded of that.

WHY HAVE MERGERS BEEN SUCH A SUCCESSFUL APPROACH FOR VICTORY PROGRAMS?

I specifically look for organizations that are anomalies, individualistic, and provide something no one else is providing, but that is still so important to an overall infrastructure. But we're not McDonalds that comes in and puts up our golden arches: we honor the story, tradition, and brand personality of each organization. We've had 15 different mergers with agencies that otherwise would have gone out of business. Now they can live out their purpose. Because one thing I know is that once we lose something we love, it's almost impossible to get it back.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM LOOK LIKE?

Understanding that AIDS is not over. That addiction is hardly over, though it may morph into the next club drug du jour. We still have very core societal problems, and with our programming happening in an urban environment, we also understand that communities and needs change from block to block to block.



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