



## Life During Quarantine at Victory Programs

For more than two months, Tiffany Sanders would wake up at 3:30 in the morning in order to make it to work on time. She had a long walk ahead of her, from Mission Hill to Dorchester, during hours when public transit doesn't run. But Tiffany had somewhere to be and people who needed her.

When the pandemic hit, Victory Programs was deemed an essential services provider in Massachusetts. Early on, we reorganized space, freeing up one of our buildings as a place to physically separate clients who test positive for the Coronavirus. (Of course a positive test result also requires that the program they were in quarantine for 2 weeks as well). And while we did everything we could to prevent the inevitable, in early April our first client stepped through the doors to that separate quarantine building.

That's where Tiffany was headed on those long, early morning walks. Her regular job at Victory Programs is as a Risk Reduction Community Health Worker for our Mobile Prevention Team. Along with two other agency staff, Tiffany had volunteered to work at Victory Programs' quarantine house. Each staff committed to 12 hour shifts, seven days a week, and to spending the other 12 hours safely quarantined. When asked why she volunteered, she didn't miss a beat: "This was a time when clients needed us more than ever before. Someone needed to do it."

Krishna Dewashrayee, Program Director at New Joleyn's Home, also volunteered to work, and she was there when the first client



*After weeks and weeks working quarantine in full PPE, Krishna is back at her program and happy just wearing a mask.*

was admitted. "That's when it all got very real," said Krishna. "But I kept reminding myself of why I was there in the first place: These people needed me."

During their 12-hour shifts, staff were required to wear full PPE suits (see image above). Strict cleaning protocols were also in place and rigidly enforced. Meals were provided by Victory Programs' Boston Living Center and delivered by our Facilities team. It was truly a team effort!

While there were always 10 clients in the house and one staff member during each shift, for the most part, things were pretty quiet. "Some clients would work on their goals in terms of searching for permanent housing, jobs, and support services. Some would do support groups amongst themselves," noted Krishna. Needless to say, there was also a lot of movie watching and just getting to know each other.

Staff also had a deep understanding of the increased stress and anxiety our clients were experiencing, and their interactions were very much geared towards allaying those overpowering feelings.

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## Step through The Doorway

Since its founding over 40 years ago, Victory Programs' red doors have come to symbolize a place where homeless and precariously housed individuals and families can always turn to for shelter, sustenance, recovery, care, and professional, compassionate support. We invite you to learn about Victory Programs, the people we serve, and the impact of your support. Just step through The Doorway.

# A Message from Victory Programs Executive Director Sarah Porter



I'm excited to welcome you to The Doorway and ask that you come on in. Please, have a seat and take some time to read about what's been going on at Victory Programs through these unprecedented times. First I want to thank you and the hundreds of individuals, foundations, and corporations that have stepped up to help Victory Programs keep its iconic red doors open as we weather the COVID-19 storm. From contributions and grants, to in-kind donations of PPE and food – you've kept us going through these last six difficult months.

Since this pandemic hit in March, it often feels like we've done nothing but think about, plan for, address, and react to the challenges it has posed. And I'm wildly proud of how we, Victory Programs – our staff and our clients – have handled things.

Drawing on our history of helping others manage health crises, we set up sites, teams, and plans to address anything that came our way. People seeking services through Victory Programs were already facing wildly complicated and difficult situations

before COVID-19. With it, well, you can only imagine. A pandemic within an opioid epidemic. A health crisis amidst homelessness, substance use disorder, and chronic health conditions, stigma, uncertainty, and mounting hopelessness.

But the Victory Programs team rallied to not only help people keep themselves safe but to keep going, to stay in recovery, to improve their health, to find apartments ...and to hold on to HOPE.

Never hesitate to reach out to me directly with questions or concerns ([sporter@vpi.org](mailto:sporter@vpi.org)). The challenges posed by this pandemic will continue. Thanks to our caring community, Victory Programs will be there, with our red doors wide open.

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## Life During Quarantine at Victory Programs (continued)



*Tiffany Sanders who works on our Mobile Prevention Team said that she would not hesitate to work in our quarantine house again, despite the long commute on foot.*

And while Tiffany, Krishna, and Tony Jones (the third staff person) helped clients manage life in these unsettling times, they were also inspired by some of our clients' life views and determination.

Krishna, for example, got to witness what for many seems impossible during these times: a client moving from quarantine directly into permanent housing. "This client did not let COVID-19 get in the way of her plans," shared Krishna. "She remained focused on getting well, continued her research, and once she tested negative, moved straight into her own place."

It is in these moments that we see the strength and resiliency of those we proudly serve shine through. With the right support, they meet their goals – no matter what life throws their way. Even a pandemic.

Clients were allowed to return to their original program only after they received a negative test result. "When I saw the last client leave the house," said Krishna, "I couldn't help but think of how, when an entire team comes together – including clients because this time, we were in it together – victory is achieved."

# New Lease. New Life.

When you talk to Shaqukurra Thomas for the first time, you'll learn a few things about her very quickly: She loves her son deeply, values education, math is her favorite subject, and cleanliness is very important to her. She may even brag that her two-year-old already knows to put his toys away in his toy chest when he's done playing.

She's also thrilled to talk to you about her new home – her very first place of her own which she moved into with her son in early May 2020. "These last few months have been the most peaceful I've ever felt," said Shaqukurra, 26, when recounting the start of her new life with her 2-year-old. "Nothing in the world compares to the feeling of having your own place," she'll tell you. She'll also let you know that "finding it, in the middle of a pandemic, was not easy."

Shaqukurra was 14-years-old when domestic abuse and other circumstances forced her to leave home under the custody of the Department of Children and Families. She got her GED when she was 17, and then, not by choice, found herself on her own. She started studying Criminal Justice at Bunker Hill Community College but dropped out shortly after. "That's when life really hit me," she says. "I was bouncing around between family members, friends, and from one shelter to another." She lived like this for about 7 years.



Shaqukurra's son on clean up patrol!

When Shaqukurra had her son everything changed. Being a mom unleashed her inner-strength to find a place of her own and to go back to college. In March 2019, she turned to us, to our Revision Family Home, with her son, a few bags, and hopes of finding permanent housing and building a better life.

"Shaqukurra knew what she came in for. She was one of those clients with a lot of determination who used all the services we had to offer," said ReVision Family Home Program Director, Rose Panzner. She even took advantage of ReVision Urban Farm's job readiness program where she learned the basics of urban farming, harvesting, and introductory business skills. The Farm staff embraced her, and she lights up when she talks about her experience there.

Nine months into the program, with the support of our case managers, Shaqukurra was approved for the Housing Choice Voucher Program Section 8. Then the pandemic hit, and finding housing within the timeframe required by the state of Massachusetts seemed like an insurmountable challenge. "I got turned down very often," said Shaqukurra. "When you don't have credit, or anyone they can call for references, landlords reject you. But I was running out of time, in the middle of a pandemic... Everyone needs more time in the middle of a pandemic." She credits her case managers for keeping her going through this frustrating process: "The staff were very supportive and made sure I got to every appointment and remained actively looking for housing."

After five months, and many, many calls, visits, and rejections, what seemed impossible happened: Shaqukurra found her home and it was in her dream neighborhood.

Unfortunately, not every mother with children in our programs has been able to beat the odds yet. The pandemic has made finding housing, employment, and childcare all that more difficult. We are



Shaqukurra Thomas in her new home: "Nothing in the world compares to the feeling of having your own place."

doing everything possible to help people navigate these challenges and move forward.

Today, Shaqukurra is back at Bunker Hill Community College studying Business and Management full-time. She has a 3.9 GPA, and with only a few semesters left, she plans to continue her studies at UMass Boston. Her son is in pre-school, which is currently closed due to the pandemic, but she is happy to have him safe at home while she takes courses online.

Shaqukurra knows how lucky she is to have found her very own place during these challenging times. No doubt, it's as neat as a pin.

## Volunteer at ReVision Urban Farm. No green thumb required!

Our ReVision Urban Farm in Dorchester is now hosting volunteers again. It's the perfect place for community service during the pandemic. You'll be outdoors and socially distanced; masks are required and safety protocols are in place. Volunteer slots are limited! Contact [volunteer@vpi.org](mailto:volunteer@vpi.org).

Want to purchase our fresh produce? Visit [www.vpi.org/revision](http://www.vpi.org/revision) to learn about online orders or when to find us at a local farmers' market.

# CORONA SILVER LININGS

The virus has caused immense suffering and challenges since the beginning of the year, but there have been innumerable “silver linings” – acts of kindness and dedication that demonstrate peoples’ humanity and willingness to help others. Here are 3 examples:



*Victory Programs volunteer and mask maker Ross Ozer.*

## Got Masks?

When masks were hard to find, long-time Victory Programs supporters Ross Ozer and Kurt Einstein made sure we were “covered,” working along with dozens of other helpful hands at the Artisan’s Asylum in Somerville (a nonprofit makers space).

Other mask makers and suppliers have been there for us too: Asia Kepka • Boston Area Mask Initiative • Daniel Faucher Couture • Dorel Juvenile • Hannah Rosenblatt • Laura’s Sewing School • Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

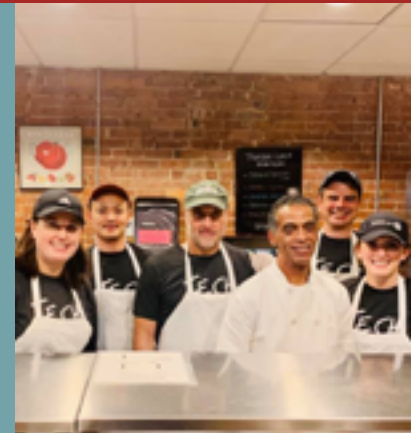
Many thanks for all the in-kind donations we’ve received, from hand sanitizer to peanut butter. Our needs are ongoing. Visit [www.vpi.org](http://www.vpi.org) and go to our Wish List page to see how you can help or contact [development@vpi.org](mailto:development@vpi.org).

## It’s Good to Be Back at the BLC!

“I consider members at the BLC part of my family,” says Dan Kelly, a volunteer at our Boston Living Center (BLC) for 25 years. “They become part of your life and your routine,” he added when we spoke to him about having to put our volunteers on hold since March.

We’re now welcoming volunteers back to serve meals at the BLC, in limited numbers per shift and with all sorts of safety protocols. Dan was one of the first to return. Having volunteered with other nonprofits during his hiatus, Dan observed that “The BLC difference is that you get a chance to meet, socialize, and get involved with the community you serve. That’s what I missed the most.”

To learn more about volunteering visit [www.vpi.org](http://www.vpi.org) or contact [volunteer@vpi.org](mailto:volunteer@vpi.org)



*A BLC volunteer group – pre-COVID-19 – is all smiles.*



## Victory on the Road

When the Mobile Prevention Team (MPT) got its new van at the beginning of 2020, they knew they’d be able to reach more people on the streets. They didn’t know that it would be a vital tool in helping to prevent the spread of a pandemic amongst those they serve – people who are precariously housed, living at street level, with substance use disorders and/or mental illness, and with chronic health issues like HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis C.

When the pandemic hit, MPT quickly refocused their efforts to educate on universal precautions and distribute hand sanitizer and masks. All this in addition to the usual: providing HIV/HCV testing, health navigation, syringe exchange, harm reduction counseling, and Narcan (Naloxone). We’re so grateful to have the van and our dedicated Mobile Prevention Team...on the streets, saving lives.



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