



Many thanks to our longtime partner Macy's. They generously donated more than \$7,500 in gift cards specifically to outfit this program and ensure that each person has what they need.



Tammy and Tashonna are so proud of the Low Threshold Housing team for putting so much time and dedication into this program. "It's really just been an all-out Victory team effort," says Tashonna.

Victory Programs Opens Doors to New Permanent Housing

The first step to getting homeless people off the streets is acknowledging that they are just that: PEOPLE. People who deserve the opportunity to exit the patterns in which they are caught and to move forward.

But if you're living on the streets, you're just trying to make it through another day. It's impossible to move forward on your own when you must focus on sheer survival. You cannot address your substance use disorders, your mental health issues, or your chronic illness if you're sleeping on the sidewalk. You can't find a job or housing when you don't have a roof over your head. You need some sort of support system to guide you.

Victory Programs believes in "Housing First." And we're proud to announce that over the last month, 15 people, coming directly from living on the streets, were handed keys to their own room in one of six apartments in two buildings that comprise our new low threshold supported permanent housing program. It's part of our continuing work to address both homelessness and the opioid epidemic. The program houses a total of 23 individuals and every room will be filled in the coming months.



"They start remembering times before the crisis in their life spiraled so far out of control – what their dreams were like. Because they can start focusing on their dreams again."

As described by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, this low-threshold approach "views housing as the foundation for life improvement and enables access to permanent housing without prerequisites or conditions beyond those of a typical renter. Supportive services are offered to support people with housing stability and individual well-being, but participation is not required as services have been found to be more effective when a person chooses to engage".

Our new residents will be helped through this transition 24/7/365 by staff who are passionate about their work, and believe that each person can stabilize and realize their goals. The Low Threshold Housing team recently spoke with The Doorway about the new program.

"It's housing for folks with enormous barriers, who have substance use disorders, who are chronically homeless, who are familiar with the Mass and

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Cass area, who are living out there on the streets... some barrier has stopped them from being housed,” explained Tashonna Simmons, Director of Supportive Services. “We take them ‘as is’ and ask, ‘Hey, what can we do to improve your life right now?’”

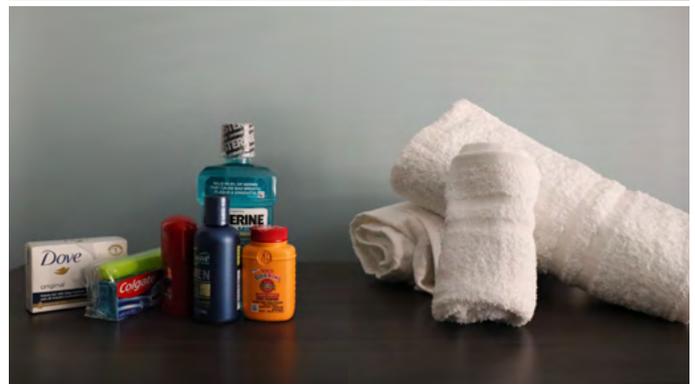
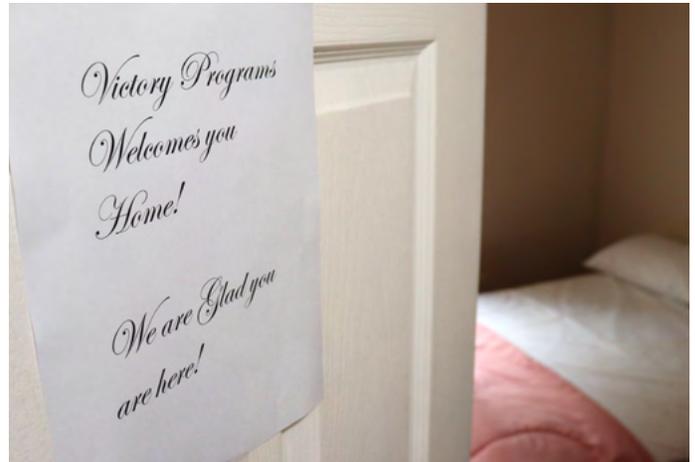
“I feel like a lot of people in this world, especially the people experiencing homelessness, don’t have a support system,” Deneysa Rivera, Housing Search and Stabilization Manager, told us. “I always hear from clients ‘I don’t know where to start. I didn’t know where to go.’ Knowing they do have some type of support system from us is giving them more motivation to continue on the process because they know they’re not alone.”

Trae Weekes, a Low Threshold Housing Search and Stabilization Case Manager, told us about a client who had been homeless for eight years and who cried when he heard he would be moving in and asked Trae to call his mom. Of course, Trae called her right away.

For another client, this is the very first time they have a place to call their own. “She’s so excited to have her own room that she can go to and be in her own space,” Deneysa told us. “She’s been working so hard to get to where she is, and she is finally here. She’s been calling me every day excited about this.”

Staff are brimming over with their own excitement and hope. But the Low Threshold Housing team knows the transition to permanent housing will be a challenge for many. “A lot of people have gotten to the point where they don’t think they deserve it. And it’s hard for them to be here,” explains Tammy Simmons-Dixon, Director of Victory Programs Housing. “And then, there’s sometimes guilt because they’re off the streets, but now their cohort isn’t. I think working through that whole transitional period will be the most difficult part.”

The team eagerly awaited move-in day, hanging “Welcome Home” signs on the doors to each room, stocking clean linens and donated toiletries, and making sure every bed – every full-sized bed (because, as one staff person said, “these are grownups”) – was neatly made.



The team made sure everything was ready for move-in day.

We promise to keep you up-to-date on the progress made by the residents in this program. But, as Tammy told us, “Three to six months, that’s when it starts to set in. That’s when people really get it. That’s when you really start to see progress and they really accept being housed and start thinking, ‘These are the things that I want to do differently.’ They start remembering times before the crisis in their life spiraled so far out of control – what their dreams were like. Because they can start focusing on their dreams again.”



Help Keep Our Clients Warm and Healthy

The brutal winter weather is around the corner and we rely on our caring community to help people stay warm, and to ensure that their basic needs are met. Remember, too, that your donation of cold weather gear and supplies to Victory Programs is not just about survival. Distributing these items builds trust. It opens dialogue – and that’s the first step to providing services to people on our streets. Please consider purchasing items such as hats, gloves, long underwear, hygiene items, and more to Victory Programs. We’ll make sure they get into the hands of the people who need them most.



To see our full wish list of winter gear and supplies, please visit our website at www.vpi.org.

A New Outlook at New Joelyn's

Chances are if you visit Alyssa at New Joelyn's, one of our residential recovery homes for women, you'll find her working out or deep into an online meditation class. "The gym is a way for me to release all my energy," Alyssa will tell you, "and meditation calms me down." As you get to know Alyssa, this makes sense: She is a wonderful combination of strength and vulnerability. Both are serving her well.

Alyssa will tell you that New Joelyn's is "not my first rodeo." She's in her twenties now, but when she was 17 she started going in and out of different substance use treatment programs. Her family — "my greatest support system" — made her seek the help she clearly needed. But she kept falling into the same cycle. "I've relapsed a bunch of times," Alyssa says, "but I don't think of it as a bad thing anymore. That's just how my story goes."

After relapsing again while in an extended recovery program in Maine, Alyssa realized what was preventing her from staying on her path to recovery. "It was me," she says. "It got to the point where I couldn't stay sober out there. As much as I tried to tell myself I was ready, I'd find myself getting so sick of where I got myself again. And it's fast. It happens fast." She returned to Massachusetts and found New Joelyn's in March. And this time, things are different.

"When I got here, that's all I did. I gave myself a chance. I didn't do anything that I wanted to do. I took every suggestion, followed every rule they told me to do, I put the footwork in, and I tried my hardest. It can be a whole 360 and it can definitely change your life."



"Alyssa really sets goals for herself and not just follows through on them, but also recognizes when she has a challenge or when she needs support and carries that over," Christine Kelly, Senior Counselor at New Joelyn's, a residential treatment program for women diagnosed with substance use disorders.

"I just want to give myself the most time possible to focus on what I need to focus on. Myself and my recovery. And what I have to do here, that's most important," says Alyssa, noting that she had never given herself a chance to stay in a program long enough to know "what could really happen."

"She really struggled when she first got here," says Christine Kelly, Senior Counselor at New Joelyn's. "It took her some time to adjust and find her place. But now, she is one of the biggest role models. I always tell Alyssa that you can see that change in her."

In the last six months at New Joelyn's, Alyssa has grown to become a leading force in her Victory Programs community, someone others look to for support. It's not surprising. She's outgoing and has a lot of energy. She's funny and she laughs a lot. But she gets serious when it comes to discussing recovery for herself and others and how she approaches it. She knows from experience that a strong support system will help people cope and get them where they want to be.

Today, Alyssa is working towards finding a union apprenticeship and becoming a recovery coach. She hopes sharing her experiences with others will help people realize that recovery is possible. "There are possibilities [for me] now and options," says Alyssa, "and that's amazing, you know? Because that was never the case before. There are a lot of things that can work, but you need to work them if you want them to work."

ReVision Urban Farm by the Pound



After a challenging 2020 season for ReVision Urban Farm, we came back swinging! Thanks to the help of our dedicated staff and **263 volunteers**, our Farm has continued to address food insecurity and provide the Greater Boston community with fresh and affordable food. In fact, the numbers speak for themselves. From July 2020 through June 2021, ReVision Urban Farm

- Sold and donated 4,250 lbs. of produce at local farmers markets
- Sold 10,520 lbs. of produce in our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Subscriptions
- Sold 32,000 individual seedlings
- Donated 5,250 individual seedlings

That's a total 16,250 lbs. of produce and 37,250 individual seedlings! We are incredibly grateful to each and every person who played a part in producing a successful year for our Farm and we are looking forward to an even better season next year.

To learn more about how you can keep our ReVision Urban Farm growing, email volunteer@vpi.org or visit www.vpi.org.

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The Doorway: Your access to Victory Programs news & information