



Time to Hit the Books!

Nicky and Brandon are residents in Victory Programs recovery homes who made the decision to go back to school. Just like recovery, success in school requires commitment, patience, hard work, and persistence. And, also like recovery, educational pursuits can pave the way for new possibilities and bright futures. As September is recognized as “Back-to-School” month, we thought you’d appreciate hearing from two people for whom “hitting the books” is a very welcome and life-changing opportunity.

Nicky: “I’m a Tufts student!”



Seven years ago, Nicky found herself living on the streets and struggling with substance use. During this time, she was in and out of recovery programs, trying her best to begin her recovery journey. Finally, in 2022, she knew it was time to find a program and make it stick. “My goal was to get a safe place to live and focus on getting educated so I can earn a living for myself and not be stuck in the system. I knew I had to get off the street,” says Nicky.

Nicky always knew she wanted to be a nurse. She loved taking care of others and knew she could manage the demands of the job. “I want to be a good contributor to somebody’s life. I’ve been in challenging situations too. So I know I can handle it,” she explains. While working as a nurse’s aide after getting her GED, her dreams became more focused: She wanted to be a geriatric psychiatric nurse practitioner. Nicky was on track to achieving that goal, “and then... you know... addiction... just BOOM!”

Now, Nicky is living at Victory House. She’s also taking civics courses at Tufts University through the Tufts Education Reentry Network (MyTERN) program which serves as a pathway to

continued higher education for people whose lives have been impacted by the criminal justice system. “Victory House and this program have enabled me to focus on getting into the swing of learning again,” says Nicky. “These classes are going to open the door to go to Bunker Hill Community College. And eventually I can work my way up to getting my N.P. license.” Nicky hopes more people who were in her position can find their own meaningful and productive pathways. She says, “I know that although education is not necessary to make it through life, it helps. I really feel like if more people like me would be given educational opportunities, they’d have a much better chance of a brighter future.”

While Nicky knows there’s a lot of studying and hard work ahead, right now she’s just excited to say, “I’m a Tufts student!”



Brandon: “I can’t stop smiling now.”

Brandon lived most of his life in a storm of adversity, suffering through great difficulties with his family, his friends, and in his relationships. “Come to find out,” Brandon tells us, “it really did affect me in a crazy way.” As a result, says Brandon, “I was

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A Message from Sarah Porter, Executive Director

VPI Announces Two New Programs for Women

"A name pronounced is the recognition of the individual to whom it belongs."

– Henry David Thoreau

I spent my early 20s working with homeless youth in various cities and countries. Those relationships, experiences, and the tiny yet monumental transformations continue to inform my perspective and philosophy of care today.

I vividly remember one night on the streets of La Paz, Bolivia, meeting a young woman, not quite 18, who had recently given birth to her first child. While a doctor on our team tended to her health needs, I asked her the baby's name. The new mother said she was still deciding. After several hours together, she proudly announced she had chosen "Melissa." There was joy, laughter. She had a name.

That night has lived with me now for 20 plus years. Names matter. Hope lives in places where we are known.

There isn't always a lot of hope for people experiencing homelessness. For women, that can be even more true. When COVID first impacted services in early 2020, the number of individuals seeking addiction treatment decreased. For women particularly, the numbers drastically plummeted. Many of us regularly asked one another, "Where are the women? What is going on?" As time passed, some answers started to emerge. Women were staying where they were – a sheltering in place of sorts; working to survive in terrible circumstances. They were holding it together as best as possible, with their needs often coming last – a familiar experience for many women not just during COVID, and not just those living in the margins.

By the time you read this newsletter, Victory Programs will have launched two new programs for women, including those who are trans and/or non-binary. The Victory Connector, a navigation center located in Boston's Mass. and Cass neighborhood, is designed as a safe and compassionate space for individuals



to access help, rest, build connections, and where their needs matter. Willows at Woods is a barrier-free transitional housing program for women launched by St. Francis House earlier this year and coming under Victory Programs' leadership this fall. There, women will have the opportunity to come inside, experience safety, receive support, and be known by name.

In both projects, may hope emerge.

A New Home for Admin



We moved! Our administrative office has relocated to Jamaica Plain to make way for the Victory Connector, a new navigation center for women, trans, and non-binary individuals in the Mass. and Cass area. We are very grateful to be able to continue our work in a neighborhood that has always had compassion for those in crisis.

Please make sure any donations you make to Victory Programs are sent to our new address:
404 S. Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02130
or visit www.vpi.org to make a secure gift online or to purchase gifts from our Amazon Registry.

New Partnership Alert!

Victory Programs is excited to announce a new partnership with the Urban Farming Institute (www.urbanfarminginstitute.org).

Until the end of the year, UFI will provide their expertise in preserving and protecting urban farms to ensure that our ReVision Urban Farm is prepped and ready to go for our next growing season. ReVision Urban Farm's CSA subscriptions and volunteer opportunities will continue without change or interruption.



Supporter Spotlight: Donald Vaughan

As a young lawyer and activist in the 1990s, Donald Vaughan became deeply involved with Victory Programs' Boston Living Center (BLC). He learned of the program from his roommate who had just become a member. "One day my roommate came home talking about this great place and mentioned that they were moving and in need of a real estate lawyer, so I volunteered to help with the lease on the move to Stanhope Street," Donald told us.

During that time, he learned a lot about the BLC. He said, "Back then, the concept of living with AIDS was almost a political statement because the presumption was that anyone who got it was going to die. It was clear to me that the BLC was a place of emotional support to deal with the disease, but also a great resource for anyone who needed help finding care." Soon after, he started to donate regularly to the BLC and has remained a steadfast supporter.

This year for Donald's birthday, in lieu of gifts, he asked his friends and family to also donate to the BLC. And it didn't take long for his fundraiser to reach over \$2,600!

When asked why he chose to give back for his birthday, Donald had this to say:

"Both my husband and I are frankly a little amazed that we are still here and healthy. We were in that generation where so many of the early victims of AIDS came from and because we are still here, we feel a certain sense of gratitude. And supporting the BLC is a key way of expressing that. The idea of living with AIDS is pretty much accepted as life for so many people, but I still think a place like the BLC is necessary. That's why I continue to support the program in any way I can!"

Thank you, Donald, for your constant support of our Boston Living Center through the years!



Donald Vaughan has been giving to Victory Programs' Boston Living Center for close to 30 years! Here he is in 2016 at Dinnerfest.

Scan the QR code or visit www.vpi.org to make a gift in support of Victory Programs' Boston Living Center. If you'd like to create a fundraiser for Victory Programs, contact development@vpi.org.



Time to Hit the Books!

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always too scared to open up. I always thought that I would have to put on the 'mean mug' so I don't seem bothered when really I'm just hurting inside."

Brandon's life took a turn after two of his childhood best friends passed away. He says, "I just didn't know how to cope with everything. I spiraled out and, one thing after another, found myself arrested and in a program for people struggling with drug use."

But Brandon calls this time in his life "a blessing in disguise." He had a major lightbulb moment: "Once I was actually learning how to open up, how to talk about certain things, I wanted to stay with it. I was learning so much about myself and this disease. It was giving me answers that I never had before." He then moved into New Victories and decided that the time had come to focus on his future.

Brandon knew he wanted to go back to school, but couldn't figure out his passion until a fellow resident offered him an old HVAC textbook.

"I just started reading it chapter by chapter. From there, it didn't take long for me to sign up for my HVAC certificate," he says. Now, Brandon is enrolled in classes at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology and is set to graduate in October. "It's going to change my life and I love it. I can't stop smiling," he told us, adding, "Now I just ask myself, 'Why didn't I do this years ago?'"

While his goal is to work in HVAC, Brandon doesn't want to stop there. His long term goal is to save up enough money to buy a triple-decker near Boston to run a recovery program, the same type of program that helped him get back on his feet.



Healing Through Poetry

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."

– Maya Angelou

Research has shown that for people who experience trauma, substance use disorders, and mental health issues, telling one's story can help them heal, grow, and transform. Writing poetry can be the first step to start sharing their "untold stories." That's what the Transformative Action Project (TAP) aims to do through its creative engagement intervention workshops. In July, TAP led a poetry workshop at Victory Programs' Living and Recovery Community (LARC), our recovery program for people living with chronic health conditions and recovering from substance use disorders, who have a history of chronic relapse, and are actively homeless.

Below is a collection of poems written by LARC residents. Each poem is true and raw, and gives you a glimpse into each poet's "untold story."



*Today is another day and
Tonight, is another night
All I want to do
Is get things right.*
– Eladio P.

*I Dream of my past life
The last time I used
The last time I hurt my family
The last time I OD'ed
The last time I almost died
It's the last time I have to dream of my past
I won't shut the door on it
The past is the past
The last drug I used will be my last*
– Anonymous



Mother's Day 2022

*Like a drift of sand, I'll drift away
Though my memories of you will always stay.
I'll carry you with me in a gentle place.
Where no one can touch them, not even time or space
Though I'd like to tell it all, there is so much left unsaid.
But these verses in my heart can easily be read
I'll be missing you...*

– Sarah H.

Thank you to TAP for giving the residents of LARC an outlet for self-expression during a time in their lives when it is needed the most.

TAP is an initiative of Violence Transformed and the Public Health Advocacy Institute at Northeastern University School of Law for groups and communities impacted by violence. To learn more, visit www.tap.violencetransformed.org.

JOIN US VIRTUALLY ON
OCTOBER 4TH AT 5 PM FOR

From the Streets to Stability: How Victory Programs is Addressing Homelessness at Mass. and Cass

Victory Programs has been a first responder to the public health and humanitarian crisis at Mass. and Cass. We've been working hard to add more to our portfolio of programs for people coming directly off the streets with the help of our Mobile Prevention Team and Rapid Re-Housing team.

On Tuesday, October 4, at 5:00 pm, you'll learn from staff how all of our new programs play a crucial role in decentralizing services at Mass. and Cass by meeting people where they are, earning their trust, and getting them into stable living situations where they can embrace the idea that there is a path forward.

Victory Programs is grateful to our partner Life Science Cares Boston for hosting this free virtual event.

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

**OCT.
4**

Scan the QR code
to RSVP for this
free event or email
rsvp@vpi.org.



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