



At Victory Programs, Dreams are Essential

A Message from Sarah Porter, Executive Director



"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."

These are powerful words from Tammy Dixon, Victory Programs' Director of Housing for nearly 17 years. She shared them in our spring newsletter while speaking about our new permanent low-threshold housing for people coming directly from the streets. They've stayed with me ever since.

In our work, dreams are essential.

When I was a Case Manager, I'd spend hours with clients – homeless, struggling with substance use disorders, mental health issues, and chronic illnesses – painting detailed pictures for them of what life could look like if they would dream a little bit bigger. I worked to convince them that they deserved a place to live and a brighter future, and that, despite desperate, challenging, and overwhelming circumstances, there just might be a tiny light at the end of the tunnel if we can make it over this or that hurdle.

In 1975, when Victory Programs first opened, the term and the concept of "Housing First" did not exist. It wasn't coined or defined until the 1990s. But we knew from our start that without a roof over their heads, the people we

work with are being set up for failure. No one can stabilize their lives and move forward without housing first. Today, the challenges of the past few years have forced service providers like Victory Programs to back up our theories with practical solutions. We're proud to partner with the Commonwealth and the City of Boston in providing new, true low-threshold, no-barrier transitional and permanent housing for those in the most desperate situations. It's in these safe spaces that we can truly begin the hard work of stabilization and moving forward.

Recognizing and embracing Housing First as the model is not the only change we've seen. Not long ago, we were often scorned for our harm-reduction practices. Now harm reduction is required in most of our government contracts. It was also a big deal when we decided years ago that people could and should participate in our programs while taking psychotropic medication or medication that assisted their substance use treatment. Today, it is problematic for funders when that does *not* happen.

What was once questionable is now proven and even expected.



That's my dream come true. And it makes us want to dream bigger. What comes next? How do we push the envelope and keep innovating all in pursuit of helping our communities' most vulnerable? Because if I stop to think about it, that's what we need to do. That is what people need – unique, creative, compassionate solutions to their genuine struggles – and to be able to "focus on their dreams" with the confidence that they can come true.

Victory Programs has created an excellent, strong safety net for those that need it. Thinking about and designing unique paths out and up from that net is exciting, motivating, and challenging. As we begin the New Year, let us dream of what comes next – for Victory Programs and those who turn to us – and let's realize those dreams together.

An Evening of Gratitude



Just like at the Oscars, our Gratitude attendees had a photo op moment in front of our step and repeat banner.

On November 3rd, after a three-year hiatus, Victory Programs held its Gratitude event for residents and graduates of our recovery programs. Two hundred people gathered together on this night to share a meal and to hear from each other about what "Gratitude" means to them.

Rafael from our Living and Recovery Community was the first to speak, and he gave everyone a philosophical grounding centered on gratitude and the works of The Stoic, Marcus Aurelius. Here's how he closed his comments, bringing everyone in the room to their feet:

"Let me say that my heart goes out to the addict still sick and suffering. To all those on the street. To all those suffering out there. For all of my beautiful family who didn't make it. Let's take a moment of silence in remembrance, but also in humble thanks for the memories, for the good times, and the lessons learned. We are grateful.

To everyone here tonight I want to thank you sincerely in sharing this moment. As a precursor to the holiday season, these types of get-togethers are important. Connectivity is key and I am immensely thankful to be connected to who I am, how I am. So thank you and I love you."

Another highlight was Molly from Women's Hope who went back to her very first encounters with addiction – taking her mom's car without permission (repeatedly and without a license!) and young love. Her story unfolds beautifully and she leaves us with her strong sense of hope. "After 18 years of substance use and war stories, I'm proud to say I make much better decisions today. It started the day I decided to ask for help, and Women's Hope heard my cry."

All of our guest speakers were incredible, and all took time to extend their gratitude to the staff at their respective programs.

Sarah Porter, Victory Programs' Executive Director, closed the evening with this call to action: "We need courage. We need empathy. With those two things, we experience each other. We hear each other. And we're better."

A Gap Year of Giving Back

Adam Beiner is 19 years old, and, like many recent high school graduates, he decided to take a gap year before he begins his classes at UMass Amherst in microbiology. While searching for ways to spend his free time, he came across a volunteer opportunity to build harm reduction kits for Victory Programs' Mobile Prevention Team.

Soon Adam was sitting in a room with fellow volunteers, learning how to wrap safe injection kits inside tourniquets. "I'd sort of heard about harm reduction before, but I didn't really know what it meant before this experience," explains Adam. "I appreciated getting to see what actually goes into the kits. It really helped me understand how important harm reduction tools like clean syringes and Narcan are for people living on the street."

A few weeks into his volunteering, our Boston Living Center needed some volunteer help, so Adam stepped up. Now, three months later, he is a "regular," serving up healthy meals in the dining room almost every weekday. "Right away, I could tell this place was pretty great," Adam told us. "I always get to meet interesting people and they're so friendly." Originally from Israel, one member noticed Adam's accent. "I explained that I am actually from Israel," Adam recalled, "and now he greets me every day by saying, 'Shalom!' and I think it's really nice that he remembered that small fact about me."

Adam is clearly wise beyond his years. "I've moved around a lot in my life. So, I always try to go into new experiences without any preconceived notions," he shared. "I know there is a lot of stigma around people with HIV and people suffering from addiction, so places like the BLC show you that we are all humans who basically just want connection."

Although Adam's time as a regular volunteer will soon end, he hopes to help out at the BLC whenever possible. He urges everyone he knows to try a shift: "A lot of people I meet during my shifts come to volunteer with the intention of only doing it once, and then I see them again and again and again! It only takes spending one day here to learn that all the members are great people with such incredible stories. You won't want to stop."



Adam says his experience volunteering with the MPT and the BLC has taught him a lot about what it's like to work and the responsibility that comes with it.



If you're interested in learning more about volunteer opportunities across our programs, visit www.vpi.org/volunteer or email volunteer@vpi.org.

(July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022)

Victory Programs realized tremendous growth in the numbers of people served in Fiscal Year 2022. As the health and humanitarian crisis continued to unfold throughout the Boston area and particularly in the neighborhood known as Mass. and Cass, we were determined to meet the increasing need for supported, low-threshold transitional and permanent housing with new programs that are continually at capacity. Our Mobile Prevention Team worked tirelessly to connect individuals to services and distribute life-saving harm reduction supplies. We also began the work to expand the population served at our Boston Living Center to include food insecure individuals and those living with chronic diseases other than HIV.

The outcomes below demonstrate this growth and impact. It's your support that allows Victory Programs to meet the needs of our communities' most vulnerable from a place of increased stability. It helps us attain and sustain growth. And it gives us the flexibility to respond to the unpredictable and unprecedented (with COVID-19 being the perfect example).

Total number of people served: 4,775 – up 20% over FY21 and 31% over FY20.*

Direct street outreach contacts increased by 16% over FY21.



3,500 unique clients served by our Mobile Prevention Team – up 13% over FY21 and 40% over FY20.



199 clients graduated from our recovery programs, reflecting a rate that is stable when compared to recent non-pandemic years and which also indicates the decline in the numbers of women accessing recovery during COVID due to limited financial means, lack of logistical support, and the historical expectation that women take a more active role in child-rearing than men.



118 formerly homeless families moved into permanent housing including 45 children – up 52% over FY21.



HIV, Hepatitis C, and STD testing volume/clients increased nearly 30% over FY21.

At the Boston Living Center:



Individual Peer Support hours were up 27% over last year and the number of unique clients receiving this support was up 24% over FY21.



The numbers of new “traditional members” living with HIV/AIDS increased by 40% over FY21.



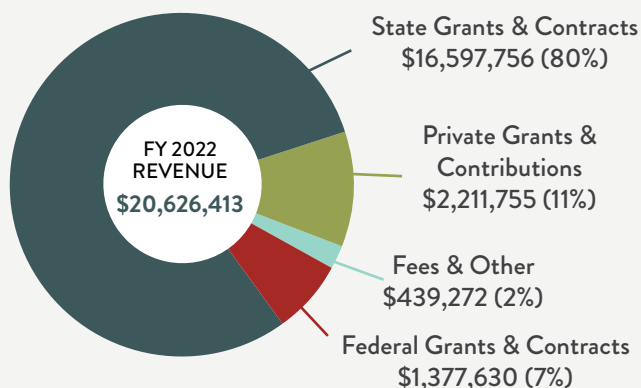
Combined new membership growth (“traditional” and meal program members) was 2.5X greater than in FY21.



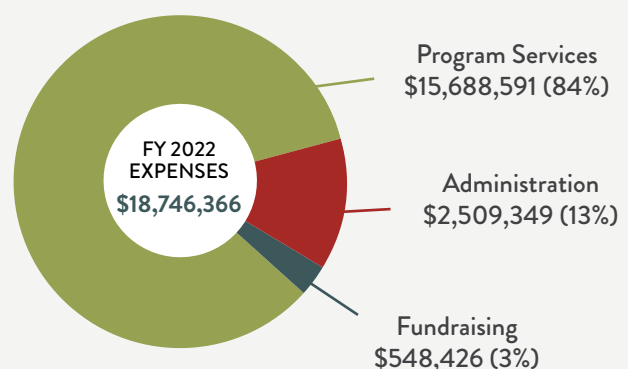
22,206 meals were served with an 8% increase in the volume of food over FY21.

Financial Summary FY 2022

REVENUE



EXPENSES



Note: These numbers are pre-audit. We will be posting our FY22 and 990 on our website soon.

www.vpi.org

“A Real Eye-Opener”: Kimberly’s Story

Kimberly’s story might be difficult to read, with chapters of her life that are overwhelming and heartbreaking. But we promise it will leave you with hope – for Kimberly and others who have had similar journeys.

We recently spoke with Kimberly a few days shy of her graduation from Women’s Hope, our recovery program for women with substance use disorder and moderate to severe mental health issues. A year ago, she never would have thought she’d be sober now, let alone alive, to tell her story.

She first came to Women’s Hope in January 2022 after two months in a hospital mental health unit. “I was so fed up with my life, with using drugs, drinking, being homeless, and having

nothing,” she recalls. “I took 180 pills. Then I woke up in a hospital bed on a breathing tube with my dad praying by my side.”

Kimberly spent most of her life surrounded by substance use -- whether it was her neighbors, friends, or even her siblings, it was all she knew. “I thought it was normal,” Kimberly explained. “That’s what I have always seen, so I thought, you know, this is just what life is.” When she tried cocaine for the first time at 15-years old, she had no idea this would send her into “a terrible, destructive whirlwind.”

“I was doing a lot of very bad things, dangerous things. Ever since then, I’ve been in and out of rehab. But this time is

different. This time has been a real eye-opener,” says Kimberly.



Read the rest of Kimberly’s story: Scan the QR or visit our homepage at www.vpi.org.

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Boston, MA 02130

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