



Running for Victory: A Volunteer's Story of Strength and Determination

When we arrived at the McManus home for this interview, Ruth Anne greeted us at the door with a beaming smile. She showed off her running medals, her extensive vinyl collection, and the family “fundraising station” – half of their dining table dedicated to Ruth Anne’s “Run for Victory” fundraiser.

Last spring, Ruth Anne, alongside her father Tom, ran the Providence Half Marathon in support of Victory Programs and raised \$8,000. After months of intensive training and tenacious fundraising, all of her hard work paid off. But that was just the beginning.

The summer of 2022 brought on record heat. “It was literally killing people,” recalled Ruth Anne. “I got an email from Victory Programs about this heat, asking the community to help with supplies for people who are unhoused. That’s when I realized I had to do something. I saw the direct impact of my fundraising last year, so right then and there, I decided to run three half marathons and to do it within a year.” After the initial shock wore off, Ruth Anne’s parents were on board.

An important fact to know about Ruth Anne is that she suffered for years with an undiagnosed case of PANDAS/PANS, an autoimmune condition that causes Neuropsychiatric symptoms. After wrapping up her final semester of college, Ruth Anne started to struggle with hallucinations and rapidly lost control over her faculties. Ruth Anne told us, “I just didn’t know what was going on. It was awful. It really wasn’t safe for my family to be with me, so I was actually unhoused for a few months.”



ReVision Urban Farm’s Senior Grower Carrick has nothing but praise for Ruth Anne: “Working with Ruth Anne has been such a joy. She brings curiosity and determined energy to volunteering and is always so kind. I’ve been especially touched by the impact she has made off the Farm; her half marathon and all the fundraising she and her family are doing for us is inspiring and incredibly generous.”

“It was devastating,” recalled Tom, “seeing her like that. It was hard.” He and her mother Mary did everything they could to be there for Ruth Anne. There was no explanation for her sudden change until Mary found out about PANDAS/PANS in 2019 and sprang into action. She was soon diagnosed and has since been able to manage her symptoms and get back to doing the activities she always loved, like volunteering.

Ruth Anne has been a regular volunteer at our ReVision Urban Farm since 2019. You can find her planting in our fields, handing out CSA shares, helping our staff at the weekend Farmers markets – whatever the shift calls for that day. “The fact that it’s a place that provides farm-fresh food for those that don’t normally have access to it is just amazing. The cause is



You can help Ruth Anne reach her goal by donating to her fundraiser today! Scan the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/ruthannevictory>.

A Message from Sarah Porter, Executive Director

I recently learned of the death of a client. Victory Programs works with individuals who live lives deep in the margins of society, often with behaviors labeled high-risk. That combination, along with complicated systems of care, limited resources, isolation, and hopelessness, means we will occasionally lose a client.

When deaths happen, I try to remind coworkers that the individual's life ended in a different place than it most likely had been before. They lived inside. They were warm. They were not hungry. They had partnerships, supporters, and others who were cheering them on. While always incredibly sad, we find solace in honoring and celebrating what we can despite the circumstances.

Learning of this man's passing added something new to that story.



I walked into a staff member's office to say hello, and that's when I saw his picture alongside a large canvas of his name written in gold glitter glue and a piece of art he had created; a touching

memorial for a wonderful person. While the details of his passing are desperately sad, this man died as part of a community. A wide range of individuals are mourning his loss. His absence is felt.

I hold this quote from Johann Hari close, "The opposite of addiction is connection." That concept is a cornerstone of our work at Victory Programs; creating access to community. Opening doors to places where no matter the circumstances, you are welcome, supported, invited to belong, and, if necessary, missed when you are gone.

The privilege of this work is not lost on us.

With great fondness and in memory of those we have lost, including our beloved Johnny,

Sarah



Please consider making a gift to Victory Programs to ensure that families and individuals in crisis can continue to turn to us for housing, health, recovery, and hope. Scan the QR code or visit our website at www.vpi.org to make a cash donation and to view our full in-kind wish list.



When Ruth Anne isn't training or volunteering, she enjoys spending time with her parents, playing games, solving puzzles, and reading about medical miracles.

Running for Victory ...continued from page 1

just incredible. That's why I wanted to keep going back," Ruth Anne told us. "Once I learned about all the other programs, I knew I had to fundraise."

By the time you read this, Ruth Anne and Tom will be gearing up for the second race in their trilogy, the 2023 Providence Half Marathon, this May. Thanks to her amazing Facebook gift giveaways – like donated Red Sox tickets and a signed playbill from Lin-Manuel Miranda – and her extraordinary network of supporters, she is moving closer to her fundraising goal of \$10,000!

Every morning, Ruth Anne reminds herself of everything she is grateful for like her health and, most importantly, her family. Without the support of her loving parents, she would not be here today. That is what motivates her to keep running for Victory: "I want more people to understand that everyone deserves a second chance at life. I am grateful that I got that chance. This organization keeps people alive and gives people who really need it that second chance."

Follow That Yellow Brick Road

Every morning at 5 a.m., you will find Roger, a resident of our recovery program Victory House, making coffee for all the residents and staff. He started this routine shortly after moving into the program in July 2022 as a way to create structure in his life. “I don’t want to fall back into old, nasty habits,” explained Roger. “Doing this every day is good for my self-esteem, and that alone has helped me keep to my schedule and make appointments, something I didn’t do for a long time.”

Roger has been on his own since he was 16 years old. “My childhood was rough, so naturally I was an irresponsible teenager,” he recalled. “I left home, got myself a girlfriend, and then got married really young.” His wife soon became pregnant, and Roger did what he could to take care of his budding family - but his struggle with alcohol had already begun. Roger told us, “I worked a lot of hours to the point where I was never home. But yet, when I was capable of going home, I hit the local bars. The best thing I knew to do was drink more. Not feel the pain I felt inside, not think about it.”

Roger’s marriage eventually ended and he struggled to cope. He said, “That’s when I went off the deep end and, soon enough, found myself homeless.” Roger went on to spend a decade living unsheltered, surviving multiple near-death experiences, and doing what he could to survive. He told us, “Every damn time something bad happened, even after almost dying in a fire, I would get so scared, but not to the point where it made me want to stop drinking.”

It wasn’t until last year that he realized he was ready. He explains it as “finally understanding what everybody talks about - you get sick and tired of being sick and tired.” Roger had gone through recovery programs before, but with no real intention to stop drinking. After moving into Victory House, he told himself this time would be different.

When we spoke with Roger, he completed five job-readiness certificates and training programs and recently secured permanent housing. “I’m putting my life back together,” he told us. “I’m working on taking care of the wreckage of my past to



Roger spends his free time enjoying the little things in life he missed out on all these years: “I’m experimenting with going to the Charles to ride my bike. I try to stop to say hi to someone, stop to pet that dog, or feed the ducks. Maybe this summer, I can go to a Sox game or even just go to an old-fashioned movie theater, see how that makes me feel.”

move forward. Otherwise, all this work won’t mean a damn thing.”

Looking back at his time at Victory House so far, Roger commends his counselors, therapist, and fellow residents for helping him turn his life around. “I can’t even name everything they did for me,” he explained. “It was just a lot of little things that helped me not give up on myself. These guys here helped me so much and they don’t even realize it. Just them being there for me made all the difference.”

Roger is set to graduate in July and is optimistic about his future. “I want to follow that yellow brick road,” he said. “I don’t want the dirt path anymore. My road is going to be bright. It’s no longer ‘okay, let’s take this left or just take this right.’ It’s ‘just keep marching forward,’ and that’s exactly what I am going to do.”



Staff from Rockland Trust spent the day volunteering as part of their Let’s Do Lunch! Sponsorship.

Let’s Do Lunch!

At the Boston Living Center, we believe that food is medicine. Through a Let’s Do Lunch! Sponsorship, your company or community group can underwrite nutritious, free breakfasts and lunches for BLC members, the vast majority of whom depend on the BLC as their primary food source.

Many thanks to our current Let’s Do Lunch! Sponsors:
Cabot Risk Strategies | Club Café | Eastern Bank | Enanta Pharmaceuticals
Gilead Sciences | Rockland Trust | State Street | Tito’s Handmade Vodka
United Parish of Auburndale

For more information about Let’s Do Lunch!, please contact Deputy Director of Development Eve Rabinowitz at ERabinowitz@vpi.org.

Volunteer With Us!

One of the best ways to make a difference for Victory Programs' clients is to volunteer. Here are just some of the opportunities we offer across our programs for both individuals and groups to help out:



Build harm reduction kits:
Help our Mobile Prevention Team assemble kits filled with essential hygienic supplies that lower the risk of disease and prevent overdoses.



ReVision Urban Farm:
Lend a helping hand to our Farm staff. Volunteers typically assist with planting, harvesting, and field prepping. Don't worry, no green thumb required!



Serving meals at the Boston Living Center:
Serve nutritious congregate breakfasts and lunches to our BLC members, the vast majority of whom depend on the BLC as their primary food source.



Teach a class or workshop:
Do you have a skill or hobby that you are passionate about? Our residential clients would love to learn from you! Art, fitness, wellness, and job readiness classes are always useful. If you have an idea for a class, get in touch.

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

DONATE

Visit www.vpi.org to make a gift today. Questions?
Email development@vpi.org

VOLUNTEER

Visit www.vpi.org to learn more or email volunteer@vpi.org

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