



## Finding Home in Unexpected Places: Rashawn's Story

For Rashawn, home wasn't always a place—it was a person. Growing up, his grandmother was his world. She was his protector, his mentor, and the one person who always saw his potential. Their bond ran deep, stronger than words could explain. “My grandmother and I’s relationship was more like mother and son,” Rashawn shares. “She could read me without me saying a word.”

But when she moved across the country to California, the absence was gut-wrenching. Rashawn, still young and trying to find his way, felt abandoned. “For months, I couldn’t even talk to her on the phone,” he admits. “I would just break down at the sound of her voice.”

Without her grounding presence, Rashawn drifted. His grades slipped, his frustration grew, and tensions with his mother escalated—a relationship already strained by tough love and expectations he wasn’t ready to meet. By the time he reached adulthood, he found himself moving from place to place, always searching for stability but resisting the help that came with it.



*Rashawn carries this laminated photo of his grandmother with him everywhere he goes. “It’s hands down my favorite picture of her,” he smiles. Though she’s no longer with him, the photo serves as a daily reminder of her unwavering love and strength—and the commitment Rashawn made to honor her memory.*



The first time Rashawn became homeless in his early 20s, he didn’t think much of it. “I could do what I wanted, when I wanted. No responsibilities, no one to answer to,” he says with a smirk. He picked up odd jobs, spent what he earned however he pleased, and continued drifting through life without fully grasping the weight of his circumstances.

But the second time was different. After living in his own apartment for seven years, losing everything hit hard. “One day, you’re paying your taxes, and the next, you’re outside of McDonald’s asking for a nickel. That does something to a person,” Rashawn says, his powerful voice fading. That was when reality set in—this wasn’t freedom. It was survival, and he didn’t want to live like that anymore.

His first step toward stability came unexpectedly—through food. “A friend told me the Boston Living Center (BLC) had great meals, and at the time, that was enough to get me through the door.” The first few visits to the BLC, Rashawn kept his walls up. “When I’d come in, I was ice cold,” he admits, chuckling at his own honesty. “I assumed this place would be like the shelter, where you’re just another number. But here? You’re treated like a person.” Slowly, the walls he had built around himself began to break down.

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# A Message from Sarah Porter, President and CEO

When Jonathan Scott, the former CEO of Victory Programs, retired, we took the time to celebrate his accomplishments during his long tenure. I remember a moment from that celebration when I found myself in the elevator with Jonathan, along with John DiMiranda and Ted Cantone, Victory Programs' founders from the early 1970s. At the time, I was Interim Executive Director, and the Board had not yet finalized a plan for ongoing leadership.

As we stood together, we reflected on the privilege of being in each other's company, even if only for a brief moment. However, I felt nervous. I couldn't shake the feeling that I had nothing in common with these men and I was unprepared to step into their roles. In fact, I wasn't even sure if I wanted to.

But I did, and even more so, I recognized the advantage of standing on their shoulders. They built a strong agency with a clear mission: "When you have nowhere to go, find the red door; they take everyone." 50 years later, we still strive to take everyone, even as circumstances change around us.

In the 50 years we've been doing this, the faces of those we serve have evolved and

expanded. We have welcomed veterans returning from Vietnam, individuals living with HIV/AIDS, people for whom traditional addiction treatment wasn't practical, women in jail, mothers working to reunite with their children, those who want to be sober but need psychotropic medication, individuals unable to escape the streets in a traditional homeless shelter.

Our adaptability and resilience have allowed us to meet these new challenges head-on. Some solutions were unconventional, and we were uncertain about their effectiveness. Many required adjustments along the way. However, our adaptability and commitment to



*"When you have nowhere to go, find the red door; they take everyone."*

our mission have always guided us. Over the past 50 years, all of them addressed critical needs, strengthened our society's safety net, provided dignity, healing, and hope, and ultimately saved lives while creating opportunities for transformation.



I am grateful to Ted, John, and Jonathan for writing the first 45 years of this organization's story. Their legacy is a testament to their dedication and hard work. I am incredibly honored to work with the current team, who continue to uphold these values and are dedicated to writing the ongoing chapters of Victory Programs. There is still much work to be done, and Victory Programs is here, ready to step in and step up.



## Hope Starts Here: 50 Years of Building Pathways to Victory

Victory Programs is marking 50 years of resilience, renewal, and hope—and we're celebrating this Fall! Join us as we honor our legacy and look ahead to the future. Visit [vpi.org/50-year-celebration](http://vpi.org/50-year-celebration) or scan the QR code for event details and ways to get involved.

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Rashawn, always one to take charge and keep himself busy, started helping around the BLC. First, he took on a leadership role in the George Johnson Conference Room, making sure events ran smoothly and members respected the space. Then, he started volunteering in the dining room, working the serving line and helping out in the kitchen. He was connecting with staff, volunteers, and most importantly, the other members. Rashawn had found something he hadn't had in a long time—community.

Now, Rashawn is not just a member of the BLC; he's a leader in a space he never expected to find himself in, and a friend to many. "I wouldn't talk to no one, but now, if I think you're having a bad day, I'll ask you if you need a hug! Do you know how crazy that is for me?" he laughs. "This place saved me... They helped me find my own place. They reminded me that I matter. The least I can do is help other people here feel the same."

More than anything, Rashawn wants to be someone his grandmother could be proud of. "She always believed in me," he says. "I want to prove her right."

# A Year of Growth and Impact

As we step into our 50th year, we celebrate not just how far we've come, but how much more we can do—together. Over the past year, we launched new programs and expanded services, bringing our total to 29 programs citywide! With each opened door, we remain committed to breaking down barriers and offering new opportunities for healing, stability, and hope. **Check out our newest programs from this past year:**



## Jamaica Plain Recovery Center:

A peer-led community space where people in recovery can find connection, support, and a renewed sense of purpose.

## Emergency Family Shelter

**Expansion:** Our third emergency shelter welcomes families experiencing homelessness in search of safety, stability, and a chance to build a better life.

**Arborway:** A new home for ten resilient women, each stepping into a fresh chapter of healing after facing homelessness, substance use, and complex trauma.

**Visions of Victory:** We officially purchased the Envision Hotel after over three years of successfully operating as a transitional shelter. While remaining a shelter for the next few years, the process has begun to convert the space into 41 permanent, supportive housing units.

**Codman Hill:** We welcomed eight young adults into a safe, LGBTQ+ affirming space where they can find stability, community, and the support they need to step into the next stage of their lives.

## Community-Based Housing

**Division:** As our housing efforts have grown, we have launched the community-facing housing services into their own division. Rental Assistance, Keys to Home, and Paths to Victory together work with individuals and families impacted by multiple, complex issues to address housing stability. These top-notch teams support people in tenancy preservation, housing search, advocacy, and stability.



Each new program represents more than just a service—it's a promise. A promise that no matter how difficult the road has been, there is always a place where healing is possible, where support is waiting, and where a new beginning is within reach.



## Supporting Stability with Community: A Conversation with Brenda Allerdt

At Victory Housing at Walnut St., one of Victory Programs' permanent supportive housing programs, Brenda Allerdt is a pillar of stability with an infectious laugh and a no-nonsense attitude. As a Supportive Case Manager, she approaches her work with equal parts compassion and tough love, meeting clients where they are while encouraging them forward. Easy to talk to and endlessly dedicated, Brenda shares insights into her work, her journey, and the moments that make it all worthwhile.

### Q: Can you tell us about your role?

As a Supportive Case Manager, I work with residents who have experienced homelessness and often struggle with addiction or mental health challenges. My job is to help them navigate things like appointments, housing recertifications, and accessing services. It's a lot of chasing down paperwork, but I love it. It's about keeping people connected and making sure they're not falling through the cracks.

### Q: What's the most rewarding part of your work?

Seeing people rebuild their lives. I had a resident who was homeless for nearly a decade. When she moved in, she was real anxious, but you could see the hope in her eyes. After living here for a while, she and her partner secured an apartment together. I still check in on her—she's doing great! Seeing that kind of progress makes everything worth it.

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**Q: What do you wish more people understood about the individuals you work with?**

No one grows up wanting to be homeless or in active addiction. People think, “Why don’t they just stop?” But addiction is powerful. And once it takes hold, getting out isn’t just about willpower—it’s about support, stability, resources, and community.

**Q: How does stable housing impact recovery?**

It changes everything. Without housing, people are focused on survival. But once they have a safe place to live, they can start thinking about their health, their future. It’s not always a straight path, but that stability gives them a chance.

**Q: Even on tough days, what keeps you going?**

Knowing I can make a difference. My phone is always ringing—residents calling with questions, needing help, sometimes just wanting to talk. I never expected to be so ingrained in people’s lives, but here I am. And I wouldn’t trade it for anything.



*“I love being part of such a strong, supportive community. We’re like a family. I even hosted Thanksgiving dinner for the residents this year—it was great to just sit together, share a meal, and make sure everyone felt at home.”*

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