



## A Place to Begin Again: Vanessa's Story

When Vanessa speaks about her past, she does so with a calm and steady resolve. She has lived through more in three decades than many do in a lifetime: childhood neglect, early substance use, homelessness, devastating loss, and the unrelenting weight of trauma. Yet, sitting at the child-sized table in the Portis Family Home playroom with her young son, Sully, drifting off in her arms, what shines through most is her quiet determination to give her children a life better than her own.

"I'm one of eleven kids," she said. "My siblings basically raised me because my mom left on my seventh birthday and my dad wasn't around much." Growing up, stability was scarce. Her older siblings used substances openly in the house, and so by nine years old, Vanessa was rolling joints and drinking beers hidden beneath her bed. "I thought it was normal," she admits.

In a home defined by chaos, substances became her coping mechanism long before she understood what coping meant. She was declared an alcoholic by age 11, expelled from school after school, and closed off to the world around her. "I can't even say I was sad or hurt," she reflects. "I spent my time doing what I could to numb myself, to just survive."

Amidst the instability, one sister became her lifeline. "She was more of a mother to me than my own mother. Every time life took a turn, she took me in." Vanessa lived with her until graduating from high school, a rare stretch of stability that helped her enter adulthood.

Motherhood strengthened that spark. After suffering from a miscarriage, the pregnancy of her oldest son shifted something in her. "I was like, I'm keeping this baby. I lost one already, and that broke me." She stayed sober for six years. She gave birth to a second child, a daughter. She built a career at the YMCA, rising from childcare staff to camp director. And she worked tirelessly to create a good life for her children.

“It’s worth it. Worth it for your kids. Worth it for you. Because if you don’t take care of yourself, there’s no way you can take care of them.”



*"What's kept me sober? My kids," she said. "My kids and my pride... I've lost 30 friends and family members to addiction. I'm the last one still fighting."*

But addiction is rarely linear. A car accident, prescription opioids, loss, and unsafe relationships pulled her into cycles of relapse. Vanessa survived suicide attempts, domestic instability, and four grueling years living on Mass Ave. She told us, "That relapse led me down a really dark path. It was four years of hell being out there. So much trauma. So much death. I was scared every day."

Despite it all, Vanessa held on to hope and a determination to rebuild for her children, especially when she learned she was pregnant once again. "I had to do right by my kids. I had to get myself somewhere stable so I could raise my son and be there for my older kids," she said. "That's how I found Portis, and it saved my life. It gave me a safe place to raise my son... To figure out my next steps."

Today, Vanessa is a gentle, devoted mother to her youngest, Sully. Throughout the interview, he curled into her lap, slept in her arms, and ran to her for reassurance. At one point, he tugged

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



**Our hearts are full.** On November 6th, more than 250 friends, long-time supporters, partners, and champions came together to celebrate a half-century of Victory Programs' impact. For 50 years, you have helped us open doors to safety, stability, recovery, and hope. This anniversary isn't just a marker of time; it's a testament to what compassion can build.

Between all of our guests, the live music from Woza Moya, and an exciting auction led by Andy Saks, the energy in the room was something we'll carry with us for years to come. What began as one red door has become dozens more, each one offering a pathway to stability and a chance to begin again.

**Thanks to your incredible generosity, we have raised nearly \$400,000!**

That's over a quarter of a million dollars going to housing those who would otherwise freeze, feeding those who would otherwise starve, and caring for those who are too often looked over. Most vitally, at this time, it's going to provide us with extra funding at a time when our work is facing unprecedented challenges.

To everyone who joined us, sponsored the event, volunteered their time, or gave from the heart: thank you. Your support ensures that hope doesn't just start here. It grows here, today, and for generations to come.



**THERE'S STILL TIME TO HELP US REACH OUR GOAL!**

We're aiming to raise \$500,000 for 50 Years by the end of 2025, and we can't do it without you. Scan the QR code or visit [www.vpi.org](http://www.vpi.org) to make your gift today.

## Vanessa's Story ...continued from page 1

her arm and asked, "Momma, are you happy?" She smiled, kissed his hand, and said, "Yes, Momma's happy. Are you happy?" He nodded, "I'm happy with Momma."

Vanessa has now been sober for two and a half years. She volunteers at a local recovery center, runs recovery meetings at Portis Family Home, and is working toward becoming a recovery coach. She travels daily from Jamaica Plain to South Boston so Sully can attend preschool. And though she made the painful decision to keep her older children living with their father to preserve their routines, she sees them every weekend. "Seamus loves that he finally has a younger brother," she laughs. "I love watching the three of them hang out together. There's nothing better than that."

Vanessa and Sully recently secured housing in South Boston: a place that feels like a fresh start and brings her closer to her children and her hope.

To other mothers navigating recovery, her message is clear: "It's worth it. Worth it for your kids. Worth it for you. Because if you don't take care of yourself, there's no way you can take care of them."

Today, Vanessa is not just surviving, she's building a life rooted in safety, love, and possibility. For the first time, she is learning what it means to feel happy. And Sully sees it, too.



(July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025)

This year brought challenges unlike any we've faced before, but through it all, Victory Programs endured. When times were uncertain, we leaned in. We showed up for those pushed to the margins, standing as a steadfast safety net when it mattered most.

We launched a new division, expanded our portfolio of programs, and deepened our reach across the community. More people than ever before accessed two or more of our programs, proof that when care is connected, lives change.

Every milestone we've reached is a reflection of the strength and resilience of those we serve and the compassion of those who stand beside us. Because of you, we're able to be that steady hand and open door for thousands of people finding their way forward. Together, we are proving that even in the toughest of times, hope always finds a way.

## Total number of adults and children served: 5,368



**974** touchpoints with street-based individuals by our Street Outreach Team.



**446** individuals sought refuge at the Victory Connector.



**108** individuals transitioned from shelter into safe, stable, and permanent supportive housing.



**342** adults and children were served at our emergency family shelters.



**617** individuals received critical services and support at one of our six residential recovery homes – an increase of 10% from last year.



**159** HIV+ heads of household and their 141 household members received support to maintain housing and access to utilities through our new Rental Assistance Program.



**1,046** turned to the BLC for nourishment, connection, and guidance – an increase of 14% from last year.



**39,693** meals were served at the Boston Living Center – an increase of 587 meals over the last year.



**104** new hires stepped into roles across Victory Programs.



**345** hard-working individuals made up the Victory Programs workforce.

Note: We will be sharing our FY25 financial summary and 990 on our website soon

[www.vpi.org](http://www.vpi.org)

At New Joelyn's Home, one of Victory Programs' recovery homes, residents find a place to rediscover their strength, self-worth, and purpose. Below is a poem written by Kayla, a current resident. Her words beautifully capture the courage it takes to face oneself, the hope found in recovery, and the transformative power of community.

## New Joelyn's Home

by Kayla

In this home of recovery, I can see myself thriving,  
No one else to blame, and no more running and hiding.

So hard to do right,  
But so easy to sin,  
Being honest with oneself  
Is the way to solve problems within.

Facing myself in the mirror a little more each day,  
At New Joelyn's,  
I have found that recovery is a better way.

The mirror that I faced myself in at first,  
New Joelyn's helped me see that I can safely face the worst,

Of my character defects and strained morals, and striving to  
Change a little each day. New Joelyn's help me find value,

And self-worth for myself and getting closer to my goals,  
slowly I get understanding and healing  
For my soul.

To combat my addiction and heal from my past,  
Is the main objective of Joelyn's, and that remains a fact.

Although I'm thrown curveballs as I go through my life,  
With recovery in the forefront and betterment of self on my mind.

So come be a part of recovery; you will find a place here.  
At New Joelyn's Home, you'll find  
Nothing to fear.

With an open mind, walking in through that beautiful red door,  
Once done, walking out with a new purpose for sure.

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The Doorway: Your access to Victory Programs news & information