VICTORY PROGRAMS: HOUSING. HEALTH. RECOVERY. HOPE.

The Doorway

Your access to Victory Programs news & information

FALL 2026

RECLAIMING THE SPARK:

How Kristina Found Her Way Back to Herself

Look at Kristina Bryant today, and you are immediately met with a radiant smile, a warm laugh, and piercing green eyes that sparkle with life. She is a woman fully reconnected with her strength, her joy, and her purpose.

Six months ago, when Kristina first walked through the red doors of Shepherd House—Victory Programs' residential recovery home for women and mothers—she was terrified. Facing a court-ordered placement during one of her life's lowest points, she was so overwhelmed she could barely speak.

Her time at Shepherd House proved life-changing. Trading fear for community, she threw herself into the deep work of reclaiming her future.

Healing Through Sisterhood and Clinical Support

At Shepherd House, healing is built on shared connection. Kristina met weekly with her counselor, Erika, to navigate recovery goals and line up vital resources.

"Erika told me on my first day that six months would fly by, and she was right," Kristina recalls. "Meeting with her every week was so important—she believed in me from the very start."

Kristina also threw herself into therapeutic clinical groups, learning how to speak her truth and set healthy boundaries with the people she loves. She discovered a peaceful sanctuary in mindful meditation—a practice she

CONT. ON PAGE 3



"When I came in those doors, I was so scared. I'm not the same person today. I have changed tremendously. I have flourished here."

Kristina Bryant stands in Shepherd House, VPI's residential recovery home for women and mothers, where supportive care helped her rebuild her life.



The Heart and Mind of Recovery

Building a Dignity-First Model in Human Services

Across Massachusetts, the human services sector faces a quiet crisis: underfunded programs, high staff turnover, and under-trained frontline teams. At Victory Programs, Clinical Director Devin Stevenson, LMHC, is proving that stabilizing clients starts with investing in the workforce. Through evidence-based training, state collaborations, and an innovative university partnership, Devin has spent four years integrating low-barrier, dignity-first principles into VPI's residential care.

"We Are the Drug Test":

Traditional recovery models relied on binary rules and punitive discharges after a relapse. Devin replaced this with Support Planning and Stabilization, where clients earn independence through evidence-based groups and receive coaching during setbacks. Unlike traditional recovery services, Victory Programs intentionally avoids drug testing. As Devin explains: "We don't drug test at Victory Programs because we are a drug test. If you're struggling with going to group, you're struggling in your recovery."

CONT. ON PAGE 2

Top: Clinical Director Devin Stevenson meets with counselor and Victory Scholar Rachel Walker-Zamora.

A Message from Sarah Porter, President & CEO

There's an exhaustion in the nonprofit sector currently that feels unprecedented. I read more and more headlines hollering words like "burnout" and "pervasive stress."

Perhaps it isn't actually unprecedented. We can look back at the HIV crisis of the late 1980s, or the deinstitutionalization of mental health facilities years before that. Those movements, for lack of a better word, occurred before my career started, but I imagine those doing the work back then felt much the same way.

Today, I can see the intentional chaos being created and acknowledge it for what it is, but we are still forced to react. I witness the continually broadening openings for purposeful cruelty, and I choose to react with intensified compassion.

But it is exhausting—especially for those of us in leadership attempting to provide dignified services for individuals needing assistance, while simultaneously trying to secure sustainable livelihoods for the team members committed to doing that work.

One of my favorite aspects of my role is that I get to focus on both: the provision of excellent services and, to the best of our ability, building an excellent agency by which to be employed.



> *"We choose to react to intentional chaos and cruelty with intensified compassion—but we are going to need a collective, deep reset."*

Paying attention to this "both-and" in this particular season of life and work highlights the sheer intensity of the situation, and the profound exhaustion my coworkers face. Our team is spending their days supporting our program clients as they navigate not just the normal barbs of poverty, but also the pending loss of their health insurance and their long-standing permanent housing.

Our case managers, counselors, coaches, and support specialists are holding this space for others while dealing with the exact same anxieties themselves. They are wondering if the Head Start programs their own children access will close. They are wondering if the food stamps that support their loved ones will be cut further, or if their profession will still qualify for student loan forgiveness.

There is no rest from the concern when you pay close attention all day at work, only to go home and attempt to solve similar, deeply systemic problems all afternoon and evening.

I wonder how our industry will survive this season. We, as human service professionals, know we must, because the need not only remains but continues to grow. But we are all going to need a collective, deep reset here soon enough—for our own sakes, and for the sake of those with whom we walk.

STEVENSON CONT. FROM PAGE 1

This approach directly saves lives by preventing the overdose spikes that follow punitive eviction.

Elevating Care Across the State

To equip counselors with advanced clinical tools, Devin developed an 18-part clinical skills and group facilitation series. Recognizing its immense value, the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) purchased the curriculum to roll out to recovery providers statewide. Devin negotiated the sale on behalf of Victory Programs, directing all proceeds straight back into VPI's recovery homes. Today, Devin trains providers across Massachusetts, while VPI's clinical supervisors facilitate the series across all VPI recovery residential programs.



Devin Stevenson, LMHC, Clinical Director at Victory Programs.

Dismantling Barriers to Care

To address educational barriers driving clinicians out of the field, Devin worked with leadership to establish the Victory Scholars program with Lesley University. The initiative offers VPI employees a partial tuition scholarship alongside fully paid clinical internships. Scholars split their 40-hour workweek between 20 hours in their primary role and 20 hours in an internship at another VPI site—maintaining full pay and benefits.

Rachel Walker-Zamora, a counselor at New Joelyn's Home and one of VPI's first Victory Scholars, embodies this approach. Starting her career in direct care, Rachel showed deep empathy and clinical capability, but graduate school tuition posed a steep financial barrier.

Through Victory Scholars, VPI supports Rachel as she earns her Master's degree and clinical licensing while continuing her recovery care work—focusing on LGBTQIA+ community members alongside all individuals seeking healing. Her journey demonstrates the power of nurturing internal talent, creating a clear pathway from counselor to licensed clinical leader.

Discover how VPI is advancing workforce development, explore Devin's story, or join our team at vpi.org/workforce-innovation.

READ MORE



Jamie and Kristina sharing a lighter moment in the house kitchen—where strong friendships fuel daily community care.

KRISTINA CONT. FROM PAGE 1

struggled with in the past, but one that finally allowed her to clear her mind and reconnect with herself. Saturdays brought creative arts, where she painted vibrant canvases that now fill her bedroom walls with color, hope, and a reminder of how far she's come.

Above all, Kristina built a lasting sisterhood with her housemates, developing a close, supportive bond with her roommate, Jamie. That connection shone through as they cooked dinner together before Kristina's graduation, adapting recipes on the fly with shared laughter. To mark the occasion, Kristina also prepared her mother's special zesty pasta salad to share with the house.

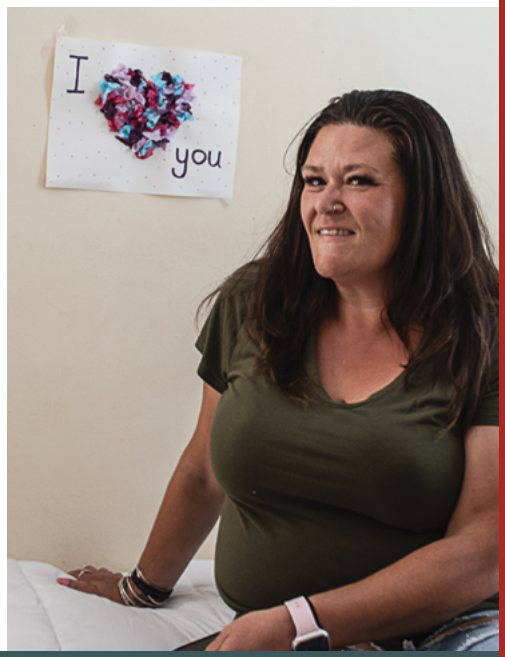
Bringing Recovery Tools Home

After graduating, Kristina returned home to Conway, New Hampshire, moving into an apartment directly below her supportive mother and sister, and reuniting with her eight-year-old daughter.

Leaving Shepherd House with her head held high, Kristina didn't simply return to her life; she stepped into it with a renewed sense of stability and purpose. Knowing that early recovery requires intention, she worked with her team to carry the daily rhythms of Shepherd House back home. Together with her daughter, she maps out their days with dedicated time for recovery meetings, schoolwork, reading, and creative projects, weaving structure directly into their family routine.

Supported by a pre-arranged network of care—including a local primary doctor, counselor, and recovery coach—Kristina stepped into her next chapter fully equipped to handle whatever comes her way.

Looking back on her journey, Kristina shares her gratitude with a bright, steady hope: "I want to thank everybody at Victory Programs. It has changed my life. Now, I am happy. I see a bright light in my future."



SUSTAIN THE "BOTH-AND" Your support keeps essential services running for clients while backing the staff who make recovery possible. Join us at www.vpi.org/give.

WARMTH, HOLIDAY CHEER, AND HOPE BEYOND



Victory Programs is built on a simple truth: everyone deserves dignity, care, and compassion, no matter their situation. This holiday season, we invite you to turn that shared belief into action. Your support helps us bring warmth, comfort, and vital resources to neighbors navigating homelessness, recovery, and chronic illness across our programs—ensuring no one faces these challenges alone.

Bring Joy: Hope for the Holidays

- **Adopt a Program:** Bring holiday light to an entire shelter or recovery site. We'll match your group with a program and personalized wish lists. Email Emily Julien at ejulien@vpi.org to get matched.
- **Shop the Registry:** Purchase winter essentials and care kit supplies directly from our Amazon Wish List at www.vpi.org/wish-list.

Sustain Hope: Year-Round Giving

- **A Red Door Evening (Oct 22):** Support our intimate autumn leadership reception Health, Hope & Housing (Sponsorships: $1,000–$10,000).
- **"Let's Do Lunch!" (BLC Meals):** Underwrite meals at the Boston Living Center starting at $1,000—includes an exclusive volunteer shift for up to 7 employees.
- **The Moving Forward Fund:** Cover relocation costs for unhoused families transitioning to permanent homes ($500–$5,000).
- **Keystone Partnerships:** Design a customized year-round corporate partnership blueprint ($15,000–$50,000) with facility naming and priority volunteer access.

Explore our Keystone Partners Guide online or contact CDO Shauna Helton at shelton@vpi.org.



Nicole Pascarelli O'Brien with her now-husband Chris, Jim Greene, and Alfredo Hernandez enjoying a BLC Prom event.



Decades of BLC community at *The Women Who Stayed* launch. L to R: Alfredo Hernandez, Nicole Pascarelli O'Brien, Kristine Grimes, Meg Hale, Tim Burgers, Pam Fradkin, Peter Grossi, Suzi Stravin Orsillo, Michael Bacon, Kevin Koerner, Bruce Silverlieb, Leah Camhi.

A LEGACY OF UNCONDITIONAL CARE

PRESERVING THE STORIES OF THE BOSTON LIVING CENTER

victory programs

In 1988, amidst the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a group of peers began meeting to share meals, offer mutual support, and lean on one another. Out of those simple gatherings, the Boston Living Center (BLC) was born—a peer-led sanctuary where people living with HIV could live fully, free from shame. To ensure those closest to the pain led their own healing, the BLC mandated that at least 51% of its Board be HIV-positive—a radical act of self-determination.

The Keepers of the Sanctuary

The heart of this history lives through three women whose paths intersected at the BLC. As the Center's first Executive Director, Leah Camhi transformed a neglected YWCA space into a 20,000-square-foot haven at 29 Stanhope Street. She insisted meals be served on glass plates with metal silverware—rejecting any clinical signal that members were "untouchable"—while securing crucial funding to keep members fed.

Where Leah built physical sanctuary, nurse Pat Daoust established its clinical moral compass. After leaving a hospice job that refused to admit an AIDS patient, Pat joined the AIDS Action Committee to pioneer low-barrier health education statewide, later serving on the BLC Board. Reflecting on her time there, Pat shared: "Helping serve meals, simply talking with clients, and realizing the impact of a welcoming place brought such peace and solidarity."

Passing that torch, Nicole Pascarelli O'Brien began at the BLC in 1993 as a 17-year-old volunteer. Staff quickly taught her a lifelong lesson: "The most important thing you can do is be present." Today, Nicole preserves these foundational stories through her podcast, *The Women Who Stayed*.

Holding the Line Today

In 2012, the BLC merged with Victory Programs, securing its future while honoring its roots. Today, 29 Stanhope Street welcomes 150 to 200 people daily. Building on the success of its peer-led model, VPI expanded services at Stanhope beyond HIV support—offering meals, harm reduction, and community to neighbors navigating food insecurity, substance use, and homelessness. This vibrant hub also houses VPI's Community-Based Housing team, connecting visitors directly to rental assistance and tenancy preservation resources under one roof.

Hear more from *The Women Who Stayed* podcast and dive deeper into the legacies of Leah, Pat, and Nicole at vpi.org/blc-legacy.

Even as federal funding squeezes low-barrier drop-in services and community meals, Victory Programs continues to hold the line. Current BLC Program Director Aron Thiim sees this daily commitment as a direct continuation of the Center's founding spirit: "Stigma remains one of the biggest challenges our members face. Reducing stigma isn't just something we talk about—it is something we practice every single day."

Nearly four decades after a small group sat together to share a meal and offer comfort, that same compassion drives 29 Stanhope Street. By carrying forward the presence, dignity, and solidarity modeled by women like Leah, Pat, and Nicole, Victory Programs ensures that everyone who walks through the door finds a place where they belong.



Pat Daoust sharing HIV nursing education on the frontlines in Uganda.



Generations of care and advocacy: Donyne Cowan, Amihan Jennifer Matias, Kristine Grimes, Cheryl Schaffer, and Pat Daoust.

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

CONNECT

@victoryprograms

victory programs

Phone: (617) 541-0222
www.vpi.org