

Next Step Peer Support Program Spring 2020 Newsletter



Bart is Next Step's newest member who lives in a halfway house until August when he plans to move to Quixote House. He resolutely says "When I am done my sentence I want to stand again without stress, debt, secrets and fears."

I grew up all over the place, moved lots. My grandparents took care of me and my sister. I had good memories while my grandma was alive, like waking up to homemade donuts. When she died, things changed dramatically. Financially, it was very hard on our family. We moved to the country and at that time, the only bright light was we got a dog. My mom was charged and incarcerated. When she got out she had to do community service work at a hospital. During it all, my grandpa took responsibility of us. He was a super loving guy.

My first year of Grade 9 was when I started acting out, drinking and hanging with older kids. That should have been a warning to the adults in my life. I ended up dropping out after trying my third year of Grade 9. Just gave up on school. But I started landscaping and really got to know people in our community. They came together and supported me. It felt good. At the time I didn't appreciate it and it wasn't enough to change the direction I was going in. My friends seemed the only people who cared. I made up a person who I wasn't at all. I got into a lot of trouble with fighting and using booze and weed. I learned to pick pocket and steal whenever I could. I'd say 90% of my day was looking for weed or making money to buy it. I knew what I was doing but couldn't stop. Plus it was my way of fitting in.

Finally in 2006, I settled down with someone. Both of us were former drug addicts and just got out of jail. My partner completely changed, started college and we got pregnant. It took me longer to get on track and so I lived at Forward House where I proved myself by having my daughter stay with me. I eventually moved back, and got two jobs but we slowly became distant and our relationship ended.

I went back to prison in 2011 and 2016, when I ended up in a federal jail. It was lonely and depressing. But when I went to the minimum, the best thing happened. I gained the trust of my PO who helped me with a release plan. For the first time ever, I had some plans lined up to help me reintegrate better into the community. I graduated (yay!) from high school, got passes to go to work every day and to Next Step. At first I was anxious about the group and what the Enneagram was all about. It took a while to warm up but got to know the people and trust that they wouldn't share what I said with others. One night I decided to let it all out and see what would happen. I'm glad I did because I feel relief and am starting to heal.

Now I am living in a halfway house, and have full time work. This is good but I am not happy that I have to work the night shift and am missing group for the next month. I miss the friendships, different conversations and being able to see that others have the same problems as me. In the past I was always scared that people would find the truth out about me, like I don't have a license, a job or my Grade 12. I'm trying hard to be honest now and look forward to living at Quixote House which will help me live modestly, to establish a credit rating, and to gain a good standing in the community. When I am done my sentence I want to stand again without stress, debt, secrets and fears.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Bart

Spring greetings from all of us at Next Step!

They say necessity is the mother of invention. This couldn't be truer for us at Next Step as we have reinvented how we have been together over these last seven weeks!

To respond to the restrictions set out to keep us all safe, we had to rethink how we could be together and yet safe. A platform named Zoom seemed to be a good fit. It allowed for everyone to meet virtually and to stay at home. The members and volunteers adapted quickly and embraced our new meeting format. Fr. John did a very special Holy Thursday service for us this way and we were all grateful we could participate together during this sacred time.

Needless to say, we have been deeply appreciative of this latest technology that has kept us connected. But for the men in prison, it has been quite different. The prison administration had made the decision to shut down all family and volunteer visits in addition to cancelling all escorted temporary passes (ETAs). We have relied on the ETAs to bring the men into the city for our group meetings. With these cancellations, what to do? Well, I have relied on an older technology called letter writing! Funny to use two extremely different forms of communication but it seems to be working. Fortunately I am now able to use both types of communication as I learned that there is teleconferencing available to 'meet' with the men. My first visit happened last week.

In our Zoom meetings, six to nine of us have met at our regular time on Thursday nights. Along with Fr. John's liturgy, Sr. Carol has been going over non-violent communication, Lenny is helping us with our financial literacy and we had a guest speaker Henriette Ivanans, author of the book In Pillness and in Health: A Memoir, met with us virtually. We do miss the presence and insight of the men from the prison. With their places so empty, we thought we'd try to make the best of a difficult situation and invited some of our alumni to join us. What a good idea that was! They have brought a lot to our meeting and we were able to get caught up on their lives. We have celebrated birthdays and have tried to carry on the best we can.

Truly we can only carry on like we are with the gracious prayers and donations that you have given us during this strange time. Our appreciation goes to Holy Rosary Parish and St. Peter's Parish who supported us through the months of February and March. With their assistance and with yours, we are continuing to support men like Bart who are trying to make real changes for a better future even in these difficult circumstances.

Spring blessings to you,

Kathleen