

Next Step Peer Support Program Fall 2020 Newsletter



We are thrilled to welcome two more new members! Please meet Erv and Frank who came out of prison this summer. Both have been doing incredibly well despite the new circumstances they have had to adapt to in the community.

Hello from all of us at Next Step!

You will be reading about two brave men in this issue of our newsletter. Things are tough enough when being released into the community, never mind adding a pandemic to the mix. We are happy to have Erv and Frank with us!

There has been much transition and flux over these last months. Sr. Carol and I were fortunate to be able to visit some men out at the prison in September but now even virtual visits have been cancelled. Temporary passes that allowed men to come to group continue to be suspended. Please keep the men and the staff at Stony Mountain in your prayers.

In Next Step, we were meeting in person over the summer and now we have returned to meeting via Zoom. Singing happy birthday to celebrate fall birthdays has been hilarious. Truly, it sounds like we are all singing under water! Everyone has kept their good humor during these difficult times. On another happy note, two more new members came from the prison this fall so we now have 10 men participating in group! Even without the men from the prison, our Zoom 'living room' is quite full on Thursday nights. Five of those members live at Manitou House, which is a halfway house for men on day parole. We are so grateful to the staff who has been setting up the Zoom meetings over this last month.

Quixote House has particularly seen much change. In September, we had 5 residents but now only Mel and Fr. John remain. Dave has a friend who invited him to live with him and his family in the county. It was an offer he couldn't refuse! Bart moved into a home with his girlfriend and they are very busy building a life together. The third move wasn't to a better place but has turned out all right in the end. Hamilton breached his parole conditions and went back to prison. Fortunately his parole officer acknowledged the steps he was taking towards a healthier life and is giving him a second chance. He has lived at a halfway house, has a job and will return to Quixote later this month. He is very grateful for the second chance.

We express our gratitude to the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, St. Paul the Apostle Church, and St. Joseph's Parish for their donations in the months of August, September and October. We are especially appreciative that you have donated during these very difficult months. Your support has allowed us to create a stable, reliable place for our members at a time of great uncertainty,

With heartfelt gratitude, *Kathleen*

First meet Erv

I grew up in Winnipeg. My father died when I was 10 years old and at that point, my family life changed a lot. My mom got a job and I went to work with my brothers who worked for the carnivals in the summer. My brothers were supposed to take care of me but they didn't. They were 16 and 10 years older than me. I idolized them along with the carnies and bikers who became my mentors. I thought that their life was very cool at the time and lost interest in school. I failed Grade 7 three times, got into the work education program and learned mechanics. I tried taking the easy way out of everything and eventually dropped out and got a job in a garage. It wasn't until a few years ago when I was in prison that I got sober and realized that I could have done better. I should have listened to my mom and got an education.

At the time though, my goal was to be a biker and to just get by in life. With the exception of a short time of being clean, I got into harder and harder drugs. This is when I was in a collision where two people died and one was hurt badly. I was sentenced to 7 years in prison. The first few months in prison were tough. I went into withdrawals and denied what I did. 'Poor me' and all the stuff I lost was on my mind. That started to shift six months in when I saw the pictures of all the vehicles and damage. But it would take years until I truly came to terms with what happened. I went to the chapel to cope and to talk. I cut ties with my family because I didn't want their help. Jail ended up being a good place because I finished Grade 12 and started working on a new career goal of getting into power engineering. I started to apply myself and took a program that helped me see the damage I inflicted on the victims, family and my partner.

I met Kathleen at a prison resource fair and liked what she had to say. I did come on passes to group but didn't get parole so those ended. I am now out on my statutory release. I have built a support network along with Next Step which includes my school teacher and employers at the prison. A very good friend has stuck by me and offered a place for me to live.

I've been out since July. When I think of Next Step, I think of snacks and socks! Got a great pair at Christmas! Just kidding! I was able to hear the concerns of those who have been out for a while and that gave me a taste of reality. It is a good place for me. I appreciated the Christmas gathering very much where I got to visit with a friend and his daughter outside of the prison walls. It's been tough since I've been out and without Next Step and my supports, I'd be lost. Once I am on my feet, I hope to be able to give back in some way. Thank you for the opportunity for me to make changes in my life. It gives me hope for the future

With gratitude,

Erv

Next meet Frank

My growing up years included church, boy scouts sports and school. I had a really good childhood. My mom stayed at home until I was a teenager. My dad worked at a high level in the government. We butted heads sometimes. But I remember when my dad retired, I made a speech to a group of people which included the Premier at the time. It was something I felt good about because people laughed and cried.

I moved to Vancouver for a job and met my wife and had two children. I worked so hard kicking butt but eventually I lost the business, my house and my wife left. I went to prison in my 30's and met people there that I knew. Afterwards, I tried to start again back in Ontario. My wife had come back to me but left again for Winnipeg so I followed her there and that is why I am here now.

I was there for my daughter's childhood and am thankful for that. I was overprotective and angry at the world at the time. The decisions I made were not good and I got involved in some violence. My chip on my shoulder was ruling me. I eventually went on the run to get away from it all but it was like having a 900 pound gorilla in the room. It didn't work.

When went back to prison this time, it was scary. My ideas started to be challenged and I thought about what the judge said to me at my sentencing, "I should have known better." In prison, I started building some tolerance and understanding. I have a kinder spirit. Now I am trying to leave it all behind me.

It is very hard because I am used to having nice things and a good life. I have to learn to live with less and to be independent. I had a job in Kenora with a guiding company the summer before I went to prison and really loved being outdoors and fishing. Fishing is my passion! It was also good to be around positive people like my boss. I went on a road trip back there this fall for the day. It was good to feel the tranquility of being out there in nature. I saw my boss again and was happy that he was happy to see me. I was glad he stored my clothes and fishing stuff away so I wouldn't have to start from nothing. On that trip I also went for a walk and hugged a tree! My longer term goal is definitely to go back there to work.

In the meantime, I am living in a halfway house. I go to Next Step and church and am taking care of my emotional stability. Being in Next Step helps me walk the line as I see my friends succeed and deal so well with their setbacks and life's hurdles. The group helps me gain insight into my own progress. Once I am granted full parole, I am looking forward to moving to Quixote House, the next level and another new beginning. There, I hope to further develop the foundation for my future with the supportive people there.

Thanks for your support,

Frank