

# Kelly

“From a young age, I faced the challenges of alcoholism, beginning in late middle school and stretching into my early high school years. I began to shift my priorities, making sure I looked good on paper while I continued to mask my drinking problem. My journey hit a low point in college in 2011 when I was expelled for drinking on campus, despite achieving Dean's List honors. It was during my first rehab experience that I admitted my identity as an alcoholic, although I didn't fully grasp how deeply it would impact my life.



After rehab, I secured a job as a gas station attendant on the night shift, where I met Brandon, who would lead me into a turbulent chapter. A year later, he violently attacked me in my parents' home, causing deep trauma and confusion after his arrest. Unable to find peace in my childhood home, I turned to alcohol as a means of escape. During Brandon's incarceration, I met another alcoholic who became a crucial support. Tragically, he lost his life in a hit-and-run, and soon after, Brandon was released. Overwhelmed by sadness and uncertainty, I returned to the abusive relationship until my probation officer intervened to help me find safety.

During my time living outside, I sought shelter in places like dumpsters, stairwells, and on rooftops, always trying to find a moment of safety. Each day, I panhandled or searched through dumpsters for cans just to afford my alcohol. I ended up in the hospital more times than I can remember, becoming a "frequent flyer" in that world. Throughout this challenging experience, I encountered a diverse array of individuals, some of whom showed kindness and others who did not, each leaving a mark on my journey. However, I am truly grateful to have met the Bacon brothers, who took me in with open arms. I entered a loving seven-year relationship with Paul, who, despite his own struggles, offered me safety and companionship. With encouragement from Kirk, one of the brothers, we applied for housing and found the stability we needed.

Even with our new apartments—Paul in Hamden, Kirk in New Haven, and myself in West Haven—I continued to struggle with addiction, which led to arrests and unstable employment. These brothers may no longer be with us, having succumbed to addiction, but I remain forever grateful to them for the crucial lessons they imparted: that our challenges do not justify how we treat others, and that Paul specifically emphasized the significance of God and His unwavering support.

It was during this transformative period that I met Marie Paulemon, who has witnessed incredible changes in my life, thanks to her and BHcare's housing program. However, I understand that housing alone cannot resolve all my challenges.

As my relationship with Paul neared its end, I violated probation and entered another rehab program shortly after I found myself involved with another homeless man. It wasn't long till he began showing his violent tendencies and began to confine me in a

closet. This was when I had an awakening. I realized that if I didn't end the cycle of abuse and dependency, no one would do it for me. Determined to turn my life around, I completed the IOP program while simultaneously pursuing my Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification. I began working steady shifts but continued to battle alcohol.

I had engaged in numerous programs, therapy sessions, and support groups, but it was Marie Paulemon at BHcare who created a safe space for me to be open about my struggles. As my goals shifted, I felt comfortable sharing them with her. During one particular check-in, I knew I had to confide in her about a new relationship that had become controlling and violent, understanding how critical it was to take steps to ensure I could preserve my housing. I still don't know how, but I chose to stop drinking in July 2020. I quit smoking cigarettes the following year. In 2022 I was able to relocate preserving my housing voucher.

This is when I began to accomplish some life-long goals. I obtained my driver's license, I re-enrolled in college to complete my bachelor's degree. I secured an internship at ACES Interdistrict Magnet School as a Speech-Language Pathologist Assistant, before being hired as a paraprofessional at the same school. Once I completed my degree, I was hired by Adelbrook Transitional Academy. I work as a Speech-Language Pathologist Assistant to young adults with behavioral and developmental disabilities. I have applied to the master's program at SCSU, where I was wait-listed so I decided to obtain my certification through the state to become a Certified Speech-Language Pathology Assistant.

My journey has been filled with struggles, but every step I take reaffirms my commitment to a brighter, healthier future. I embrace the possibilities ahead with hope and determination. If my presence here, employed and 4 years and 3 months sober, doesn't inspire, I'm not sure what will. I owe my success to BHcare, who provided me with shelter, stability and the hope for a better life. I will forever be grateful for this program and the transformation it has enabled in my life. I am dedicated to giving back to some of our most vulnerable populations and I feel privileged to help others find their voice, just as BHcare gave me a home to discover my own." ~ Kelly