



JOHN GRAHAM HOUSING & SERVICES

Food, Shelter, Hope Winter 2017
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Destined for Something Bigger

My daughter and I just moved to our new home in Middlebury after four months at the John Graham Shelter. It was a roller coaster of feelings and learning.

Here's where we're at and what I've learned. Being homeless, being a single mother, having a mental health condition, overcoming addictions, overcoming major obstacles and still trying: I'm highly convinced I'm in the place I'm supposed to be. Every single aspect of suffering and adversity that has seemed like it was never going to end has brought me to the place I'm supposed to be.

I'm meeting people and making relationships. The community is very involved with John Graham. Every single person - the staff at John Graham and the people in this community that pitch in - have all triggered in me the different ways to become a better person. Be thankful, be gracious, give back if I can. When you give, it becomes a cycle of giving. The number one thing is my ability to learn to be more mindful and kind. I see that others have an unlimited amount of kindness and love to give to me and my daughter, without any conditions and discouragement. That is the number one thing I've learned: how to be kind. Sometimes that's not easy for me.

(Continued on page 6)



Families Move Home Thanks to Sleep-Out

Middlebury, VT.....On Sunday morning, December 4, 2017 dozens of people woke up to the sounds of Otter Creek Falls rushing under Battell Bridge in Middlebury.

These devoted campers braved temperatures in the mid-20's to participate in John Graham Housing and Services' third Sleep Out to End Homelessness. They brushed the frost off their tents, dismantled their campsites, and headed back to their respective homes to get warm and rest up after the long night in the cold. For too many Vermonter's, sleeping out in the cold -- in tents, campers, cars, or barns -- is a matter of survival. There is no return to a heated home with a lock on the door.

But thanks to all who slept out, and more than 400 people who donated to support their efforts, many homeless Vermont families will get permanent housing this winter. Every dollar raised by the Sleep Out goes to pay for housing for individuals and families.

In fact, five families with children moved to new homes in time for the holidays with help from funds raised at the Sleep Out!



“Five families with children moved to new homes for the holidays.”



Monkton Brownies lend a hand with a food and diaper drive!

Victoria's Story

Life has been hard for me. I grew up with an alcoholic father. My mom was always working. She had up to four jobs raising two kids on her own. I am now twenty-four years old and have been homeless, mostly, since age fifteen: living in cars, tents and hotels. I have been in and out of jail for nearly three years. In between I have been couch surfing. I am now living here at the John Graham Shelter and this has been a good place for me to build my life.

These pictures are about places that I enjoy: nature and fairs. I chose five photographs because they seem to have more meaning to me and I just want to share that beauty with others.



I am using this exhibit as a demonstration of my proficiency in art for my diploma at Community of High School of Vermont. This show is truly a new experience for me. Putting my work out so publicly is not anything I have ever done before. I am coming out of my comfort zone to do this in a way I never expected. I hope you enjoy looking at my work and reading the poems.



An early sixties Ford
Modified
I'm a country girl at heart
Anything to do with trucks
I'm there.

Addison County Fair
In the stands
My camera in my hands
Taking pictures of each truck that
Pulls a massive weight.
A metaphor for my life.

The sound of engines revving
Rubber tires spinning
Gravel flying dirt clouds
Diesel exhaust mixed with the
Smell of blooming onions

Marie's Story

Hi my name is Marie Townsend and I would like to share my story with you. It all started in 2013. I was helping dad to take care of my mother who was diagnosed with dementia. At times it was difficult for my dad to deal with. I would pick her up from the bus and play cards with her. Then came February 2014 when dad was diagnosed with stage 4 esophageal cancer. So I was taking him for treatments every two weeks.

Then comes May 2015 when my significant other was diagnosed with a skin cancer stage 4 but it was very aggressive. So the next year and a half were quite hectic to say the least. And then everything started falling apart. Mom passed in December 2014, then dad passed in March of 2015, and then in May 2015 my significant other passed away. So in five and a half months I lost everything that ever meant anything to me.

I continued to live in the house but the bills started snowballing and my brother in law took over the payment. And then along came March when I was told I had to move out. I had nowhere to go and all I was left with was the clothes on my back and one suitcase.

I ended up at the Charter House in Middlebury for a month and a half. The people there were very nice but it didn't help me to feel less scared. I had never been in this situation before and I was scared to death.

“I find myself thinking occasionally that it really doesn't take that much to get into a situation like this.”

After the Charter House closed I met This Fantastic Gentleman named Alan Townsend he came into my life when I was at my lowest. And he helped me to see that everything was not falling apart its just god testing me.

I went to the John Graham Shelter that day and let me tell you the staff at the John Graham Shelter was so kind and made a very difficult time a little easier.



I met some very nice people there. In June Alan and I got married and we are very happy. In June of this year we moved to transitional housing through the Shelter. We had been looking for apartments throughout this whole time.

In October we finally found an apartment Yeah!!!! I will always remember the Staff at John Graham Shelter for all their help and support throughout this process.

I find myself thinking occasionally that it really doesn't take that much to get into a situation like this. But realize, if you do, there are places out there like the John Graham Shelter and the Charter House to help. We can't thank the Charter House and the John Graham Shelter enough. They made a very difficult time a lot easier.

John Graham Housing and Services



Thanks all who slept out, donated, and came to the vigil.

Special thanks to:

- Addison Advisors
- The Marbleworks
- Middlebury Bagel
- Shelburne Meat Market
- Malabar
- Gaines Insurance
- Strong House Inn
- Vergennes Animal Hospital
- Vergennes Laundry
- Smith and McClain
- Attorneys at Sheehy Furlong and Behm
- Blue Ledge Farm
- William Benton Appraisors
- Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- The Middlebury Coop
- Vermont Gas
- Wildflower Ironworks

People moving home, one family at a time!
To help: www.johngrahamshelter.org



If you didn't get the chance to participate and would still like to, please visit our Sleep Out Page: www.classy.org/sleepoutbyfalls or our website: www.johngrahamshelter.org

(DESTINED FOR SOMETHING BIGGER, continued) The second thing is to learn how to be patient. Take it one step at a time. Find a job. Find daycare. Its not easy when you are just thinking of the outcome. Instead, you have to take steps; it's not going to happen overnight.

The journey is learning new skills, learning how to cope with emotions. Maybe you have to juggle 20 things: drop off your daughter, run to the bus stop to get to your job. But once you get that first taste of accomplishment, it starts making more sense. It's not all about suffering and not having enough time. It's like that for a little bit, and then you see results.

“I have a strong desire to help others, to help them heal and learn”

Another thing I've learned is not to focus on the problem or barrier that you are confronting. The door is not wide open for you to enter, but the door is the opportunity. Perhaps you've got the wrong key or you've got a baby gate on it. You can't spend so much time being angry about who put up this friggin' gate or barbed wire. You can't be afraid to ask for help. Work on the solutions. You're like, hey, what solutions can I come up with this time. Don't wallow in anger or despair or poor little me. Learn how to become a strategist of you own future, and most importantly of your own present. Overcoming adversities ends up becoming a new challenge and you can't wait to surprise yourself with a solution.

My goals are to keep growing emotionally and spiritually, to become a little guru for myself. I want to become a better mom and provide my daughter with more stability. I want to grow into a community as opposed to what my childhood was like, which is not stable. My daughter can grow and feel she belongs somewhere. I want to manifest abundance in my life, in every sense of the word: knowledge, joy and happiness, in having a loving family and loving people around me. I have a strong desire to help others, to help them heal and learn. I can't just shut up when I feel strongly. I know at the end I'm destined for something much bigger.

