

Anderson House Proudly Shares Great Successes and Potential

Whether a resident has been at Anderson House for a few days or a few months, it is clear that their lives quickly begin transforming from the variety of support they receive.

I have had the terrific opportunity to see first hand how the home environment – from the nicely decorated bedrooms to the unmistakable sense of family during dinner and a group session – enable the Anderson House residents to recover from addictions and turn their lives around in so many ways.

Anderson House is a halfway house serving women from all over New Jersey. In addition to meeting fundamental needs and providing group and individual counseling, the staff supports residents with transportation to look for work, to attend medical appointments and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and wherever else they need to go. Regarding employment, the staff helps residents identify their job interests, and the residents are required to search for jobs primarily on their own. The staff also attends court hearings and advocates for the residents; provides case management, which includes scheduling court and medical appointments; and provides guidance for eligible residents to apply for medical coverage and state and federal funding.

“As a first step, we get residents to a local doctor for a complete physical. Most have been neglecting their health and abusing their bodies for a long time. Learning how to take care of themselves and that they’re worthy of feeling good and being healthy is a huge step. It goes a long way toward building their self-esteem and laying the foundation for successful recovery,” said Jan Holmstrup, Co-Executive Director, Finance and Administration.

After spending an average of six months in this structured, supervised environment, the residents can transition to a three-quarter house, which Anderson House also operates. “This next step allows them to have more time to save money, continue their recovery in a safe, supportive environment, and prepare to live a fully self-sufficient, sober life,” Holmstrup explained.

Every resident has a job long before she graduates (within one month of joining Anderson House) and, in fact, some graduates are now employed at Anderson House after having been on their own, working in other places and achieving several years of sobriety. For example, Monique, a 2001 graduate, is currently a resident aide and is attending school to obtain a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor license. “When I got here, I had no hope, life was fearful and I was desperate. I realized something had to change and if that didn’t happen, I would go to prison or die. What gave me hope is learning that I can live my life without alcohol or drugs,” Monique said. “Now, I have a beautiful life. I’ve sponsored women, I’ve spoken with our Board and I became involved in Anderson House events. This is my foundation. It will always be my home.”

Many Successes Achieved and Many More in Progress

“There are so many successes, I don’t know where to begin,” said Helen McIntosh, LPC, LCADC, CSWm Co-Executive Director, Programs and Facilities.

In addition to jobs and bank accounts, the graduates have mended relationships with their closest family members, support structures, and activities that help further expand their social networks. Several graduates also continue to work at the same places and have been promoted, and they also give back to Anderson House. "We have a good group of graduates. They come to speak to residents, they volunteer and sponsor, and they take residents out and help them get jobs," McIntosh said.

During dinner at Anderson House shortly after Thanksgiving, I gained inspiring insights into the successes that residents have achieved – some in an incredibly short amount of time – and their tremendous potential for accomplishing more during their time at Anderson House and beyond. Following are highlights of what the residents shared:

In nearly five months at Anderson House, Arlene went through many emotions and found herself. "I recognize what led to my drug and alcohol use. I realized that I have the ability to change my defects and to be a happier person without drugs and alcohol. I work continuously and I feel like a better person. I have my family back, thanks to Helen. She brought my husband and children in for sessions. My daughter said that Helen was the first one to talk to us," Arlene said.

In less than two months, Bonnie has learned to deal with feelings that she has had for a long time. "I'm learning to recognize the way that I didn't deal with them before and now, I work through them. I recognize what brought me to use drugs and I'm learning coping skills. Before, I couldn't see having a normal life. Now, I can see that in my future," she said.

Carol had been at Anderson House for two and a half weeks when we met. In that time, she said she has realized the emotions she has, including "grieving that's been building up inside me," she said. "Everyone here is wonderful and I fit in pretty well," she added.

In just under four months, Rachel has gained a lot from Anderson House, "especially foundations," she said. "In the past, when I tried to get clean, I didn't get far. Anderson House instilled in me the foundation of what we need in recovery and to build a new life. The greatest thing is the ability to find myself again. I forgot what I enjoyed doing. I'm enjoying the sense of family and getting my real family back, and I'm learning to be a member of society again."

Brittany came to Anderson House three months before we met, after having been in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous for several years. "The one thing here that helps me most is building a foundation and a network without any distractions. Having rules in place to keep different distractions away helps me the most," she said.

Since Lindsay arrived in mid August, she has experienced "a sense of relief. I can stop fighting. I can finally surrender and follow suggestions. I'm willing to do what I have to do. Anderson House shows you there's another way out there," she said.

At Anderson House just under two months at the time, Amanda expressed appreciation for "having a certain time to wake up and go to bed. It makes me feel structured. I always ran on my

own self will. Things are brought to us, not to throw them in our faces, but so we can work on them and become better people,” she said.

Lisa, who came to Anderson House in mid October, feels the same way. “I was in and out of rehab for five years. I wanted to come here because I couldn’t do it on my own. I know I need the structure and push,” she said.

In one and a half months, Jessica has been able to start working and spend time with her family. “My daughter’s coming to see me now. My family talks to me. I’m working the steps,” she said.

Leah was in and out of treatment more than 40 times before coming to Anderson House in mid August. “I thought this was similar to other places, but it’s a completely different experience. I thought I could cut corners or lie like I used to, but I don’t have that opportunity here because the staff is always readily available. I have the most amazing sponsor and network. I get advice and actually take it. Before, I didn’t want to be a better person. Now, I know a lot about who I am and I’m still learning. I feel I advanced so much in three and a half months and I have so far to go,” Leah said.

Melissa claimed that she was “lost and stubborn and didn’t know how to face change” when she came to Anderson House in July. “Now, I’m much more open minded and willing to not do the same things and expect different results. I was completely unemployable when I got here, and now, I have a job I love and good relationships with coworkers and people in our house,” she said. “I realize I can’t do it alone. The phone doesn’t weigh 25,000 pounds anymore. Now, I can’t get enough quarters.”

After just three days, Olivia felt very comfortable at Anderson House. “This is the first time in a long time that I feel safe. And it’s the first time that I say when I have 90 days of being sober, not if. I know I’ll do better,” she said.

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