

Good Samaritan

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

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SOCIETY of
ST. VINCENT
de PAUL

LOUISVILLE

Optimistic Outlook *SVDP Client Looks Forward to the Future*

After more than a decade of drug and alcohol abuse, Shavonne is finally optimistic about her future.

A pretty brunette with short hair and an eye-twinkling smile, she has the youthful exuberance of the 25-year-old young woman she is—full of dreams and determination to begin her life anew.

"This place saved my life," Shavonne says, sitting in the library of the St. Jude Women's Recovery Center on a recent, cold winter morning. A resident of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's alcohol and drug-abuse treatment program since March 2007, she graduates this month.

It's been a long road to recovery.

Shavonne began getting drunk, smoking pot, and abusing prescription drugs at the tender age of 14, she says. At 18 she reached another milestone: "I started using methamphetamine," she recalls softly. "Mostly on the weekends."

Reflecting on her adolescence, Shavonne says there was no single trigger that led her to self-destruct. She shrugs, shakes her head, and chalks it up to typical teenage rebellion.

Over the years, her addictions worsened.

"When I was 22 I started

shooting dope," she says. "That was *real* scary."

As a result, Shavonne lost custody of the daughter she had given birth to in her late teens.

Attempts to get clean followed, but Shavonne either quit or got kicked out of several different short-term treatment centers. One counselor told her she needed long-term, residential drug rehabilitation and offered to put her name on the waiting lists of several places, including St. Jude.

Although Shavonne agreed at the time, she wasn't sincere about actually following through.

"Yeah, whatever," Shavonne says she told the counselor, rolling her eyes as she recalls that memory.

Out of rehab, she plunged deeper into drug abuse. "I was shooting dope -- methamphetamine, cocaine, and OxyContin," she explains.

It wasn't her out-of-control lifestyle, but the shock of an unexpected health scare that eventually shook Shavonne to the core, however.

Sobbing, crumpled on the floor, she cried out in anguish and desperation. "I fell down on my knees and prayed to the Lord," she remembers. "I said, 'I need help.'"

Shavonne had prayed in the past, but this was different. "It was total surrender," she says.

Divine intervention came in the form of a cellphone call at that very moment: St. Jude had an opening, and Shavonne's name was next on the list.

"I know that this place saved me," she says again. "If I hadn't come here, I'd be dead. I would have (overdosed) on drugs, because when you reach a point, you become so numb that you just keep using more and more to try to get high. But you can't."

Founded in 1985, St. Jude Women's Recovery Center is the only state-licensed facility of its kind in Louisville. An alcohol and drug-abuse treatment program for women, the center can house 30 residents — each for a minimum of six months.

While at St. Jude, the women are required to attend five Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous meetings a week and receive case management to help set goals and work toward self-sufficiency.

In addition to daily chores, the women cook dinner for each other during the week. They also are required to have a job or volunteer if unable to work.



St. Jude saved her life.

For Shavonne, like so many others, the program has worked. She has changed her life for the better. Working full-time as a waitress, she also is attending trade school to become a hair stylist.

Her ultimate goal is to regain custody of her daughter. Up until now, she has been allowed one visit per month.

Most importantly, Shavonne is committed to maintaining her hard-won sobriety. "I know I need to continue with the 12-step program and to talk to my sponsor daily," she says.

"St. Jude has taught me what I didn't know before. This program doesn't just teach you how to get sober. It shows you how to live your life.

"I've got all the tools," Shavonne adds brightly. "I just need to use them. And I will."

Ending homelessness, one person at a time.