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Kate Pierce: Step-Down Housing Resident

On the day we sat down to talk in her cozy Rutland apartment, Kate was only one day away from her two-year sobriety anniversary. This seemed like a good time to catch up.

Kate has accomplished so much over the past two years.

"I've surrounded myself with sober people and did all the things I needed to do for myself. I took the time to be selfish because I knew that's what I needed to do."

Kate drank her first beer at 9 years old, and by 17, she was an alcoholic. She started selling drugs in her early 20s, and soon after that, started using pills herself.

"Biggest mistake I ever made, because it was downhill from then on. It went on for years. I was a high-functioning addict. Even though I was selling, I always made sure I had a job and I always went to work. That worked until it didn't. I started using heroin. And then I overdosed. My mom came from Vermont and picked me up. This was going to be a fresh start."

A month after moving to Barre, she met someone at a recovery meeting, and they started dating. With an unplanned pregnancy, things got serious very fast. "It was the perfect relationship, until it wasn't." The arrival of baby number two becomes imminent, and the relationship is not on steady ground: infidelity, the COVID shutdown, relapse, and verbal abuse. Kate was caught in the cycle of domestic violence, leaving and returning. He pressured Kate to start using again, they started selling, and now there was physical violence. "I did drugs because it numbed me from all the abuse that I was dealing with. And then he broke 27 bones in my body." She healed and walked away; he threatened to take the kids.

A complicated custody battle played out; she hasn't seen or spoken to her children since. "This put me in a downward spiral. I didn't care to live. I did a lot of drugs. And then I was arrested in late 2023. It was a blessing in disguise."

In March 2024, Kate was released from jail to Serenity House, a two-week program. This was followed by four months at Grace House, and then 15 months at the Women's Dismas House. By October 2025, she completed the eligibility requirements for Dismas of Vermont's Step-Down Housing Program, completed probation, and moved into her apartment. She graduated from Drug Treatment Court in April 2025. "Each of these programs gave me milestones to reach for; I have zero ambition to go back to drugs." In addition, she has only one year left in college towards a bachelor's degree in psychology, volunteers at Turning Point, and works for a local business.

Living at the Women's Dismas House was hard at times for Kate, with so many people at different stages all living together. That said, "you always have support, and you are never alone. You have five other women to lean on. You might not get along with all of them, but you can still always knock on their door for help. It's one thing to hold yourself accountable, but it's been important to have people who are going to hold you accountable, too."



Kate Pierce: Her Story Continued

Now that Kate is in her own apartment and living by herself, she still feels the support of the Women's Dismas House and her sober network. She attends dinners at the house weekly and participates in many of their group activities. When asked about her first night in her apartment, she said, "It was so nice, such a good feeling. I worked really hard to make it to this point and I know that if I hadn't put in the work, I wouldn't be here."

"I'm finally stable. I know I can always call my parents for help, but I want to do this largely on my own. My next step is to file the paperwork for my kiddos. And get a vehicle. And then I don't really know...finish my degree and see where life takes me. I used to be a behavioral health specialist with children; nine times out of ten, they were impacted by drug-related trauma. So maybe working with kids again who are working through that trauma or even in active addiction, or perhaps a youth probation officer."

Dismas volunteers have been following Kate's extraordinary journey and wanted to celebrate her achievements. One gifted her with a shopping spree at a thrift store she helps run, and another dropped off a card and a beautiful Dutch oven, which Kate showed off. "It's amazing everything that the Dismas volunteers do. They are all super nice and very sweet people. I love Dismas, everything about it. It creates a little family, it is community-based, and I have met so many amazing people through this program."



Step-Down Housing Program Overview

You can be part of the stable housing solution for a person at high risk of homelessness and bias.

Step-down leases are held by Dismas of Vermont, which sublets an apartment unit to one of its successful residents, like Kate, who is ready for more independent living. Dismas continues to provide ongoing support and bi-weekly visits from a case manager who can navigate any challenges that arise. Landlords benefit from guaranteed income from Dismas of Vermont, whether the unit is occupied or not. If you are a landlord, Dismas is currently building its portfolio of leases toward a goal of 18 units across three Vermont communities (Rutland, Burlington/Winooski, and Hartford).

To be eligible for step-down housing, tenants must complete the rental readiness program, have a reliable source of income, be in good standing with Dismas, have a working cell phone with voicemail, and have a method for savings. Sub-tenants can return to a Dismas family-style home should they be unable to meet the expectations of the Step-Down Housing Program.



Jennifer Dennis,
Step-Down Housing
Program Manager

jennifer@dismasofvt.org
802-208-2029
www.dismasofvt.org

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