

ADVOCATES

COURT REPORT

ADVOCATES FOR GRAFTON COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH COURT VOLUME 4, ISSUE 1 DECEMBER 2017

Never Too Young Or Too Old To Ask For Help

Growing up in a New England college town, Audrey enjoyed all the benefits of a solid middle class life. Her parents were well-known in the community as hard working, social and successful.

But early on, Audrey learned that the face a family presents to the outside world can be very different from what goes on behind closed doors. At a young age, Audrey was serving drinks at gambling parties where she observed social and ethical discrepancies “we weren’t ever supposed to talk about.”

Audrey liked school but lost a year of high school when her father died. She did return and graduated a year later. Married at 19, Audrey worked 23 years for the same company, moving from the stock



Audrey and her rescue dog, Sadie, have been working with an engineer on the mechanics of Sadie’s new and specially designed “walking wheels.”

room to sales. She and her husband bought homes and renovated them, moving forward each time. She also worked as a private home caregiver, where, she recalls, “I met the most interesting people!” Life was

good. But when Audrey was in her fifties, her marriage deteriorated due to her husband’s alcoholism and Audrey found herself alone following their divorce and his death, three months later. “I had been very sheltered,” Audrey continues. “He managed the money and made the decisions and I went along for 32 years.” It was the beginning of a negative direction for Audrey. She fell into a new and destructive relationship involving drugs and a man who held a gun to her head and one time chased her with a running chainsaw. Ultimately she found herself facing charges of drug misuse and shoplifting.

Audrey lost contact with her only son and her home was in foreclosure, “I was losing everything,” she recalls. Diagnosed with PTSD and trauma disorder and facing jail, Audrey was offered an 18-month contract with Halls of Hope — rather than jail — through the Grafton County Alternative Sentencing program. She found that the mandated individual and group therapy helped her immensely. *Continued on page 2*

From Chaos and Despair to Hope and Light



Through Halls of Hope, Cher has learned how to manage her mental health and, “that if you hold onto what you really want in life and reach out for help, you can get better.”

In a cramped household in Los Angeles, living with siblings, uncles and grandparents, Cher’s early life was full of chaos and deprivation as well as physical and psychological abuse.

When she and her immediate family moved to the northeast, life improved. Cher earned high honors throughout high school, receiving a full scholarship in electrical engineering at UNH. But Bipolar Disorder interrupted her first semester and she began to doubt herself.

Cher experienced a pattern of having trouble with relationships, losing jobs and moving place to place, making and losing friends, feeling that she’d been taken advantage of and finally hitting bottom and wanting to end her life. “Bipolar was destroying my life and I just gave up,” she recalls.

In the depths of depression, Cher hitched a ride to a nearby inn, taped off the fire alarm and the door opening, and attempted suicide by burning charcoal. When she realized her actions might harm innocent people, she extinguished the fire and called a crisis line for help. The police were involved and charges of obstructing fire apparatus were brought.

With a diagnosis of Bipolar I and a sentence to jail, Cher was recommended to Halls of Hope by Grafton County Alternative Sentencing.

“I was not educated about mental illness, and had no idea about the resources available,” Cher admits in hindsight. “I needed a big push in the right direction and when I began receiving services with HCRS I discovered that these people are *Continued on page 2*

Never Too Old continued

"I needed to get back on track, and Hilda Hyde at HCRS along with the Halls of Hope team helped me get my life back," Audrey continued.

While in the program, Audrey reversed her home foreclosure, was able to acquire a car and secure insurance. "Shelly [Golden] of Grafton County Alternative Sentencing was wonderful," she went on, "Everything you need is part of this program. You just have to ask!"

Of her courtroom experience in the program, Audrey admits, "I was nervous at first, but everyone is so supportive, I began to feel comfortable. And, it meant a lot to have the Advocates there each time." Audrey met her program requirements so consistently and completely that she graduated from Halls of Hope after just 12 months.

Today she continues to meet with her caseworker and attend group therapy. She is disabled now due to severe arthritis in her hands, fibromyalgia and other disorders, but she attends church and has adopted a disabled yellow Labrador puppy.

She has reconnected with her son and her granddaughters, "the loves of my life," she calls them and smiles when she talks about how often she sees them.

Asked about her success, Audrey reflects a moment. "You do this for yourself," she emphasizes. "And you get all the support you need to succeed."

Audrey is hopeful about the future. She is participating in a sleep clinic and getting her health back and will eventually have a knee replaced. In the meantime, she gardens, and she helps to care for a young man with Down's syndrome. She is grateful for everyone at Halls of Hope and HCRS, saying "I don't believe I'd be alive today if it weren't for them."

The ADVOCATES' mission champions the success of Grafton County Mental Health Court participants and supports and promotes the work of judicial programs in Lebanon, Littleton and Plymouth District Courts which provide an effective and meaningful alternative to the traditional criminal justice system for individuals with mental illness.

The ADVOCATES for Grafton County Mental Health Court is a 501(C)(3) corporation. Tax ID #46-3618416

Thank you to all who supported The Advocates 2016—present

Your gifts have made it possible to award incentives to the program participants, encouraging their success and independence.

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From Chaos to Hope continued

really good at what they do!" Mental Health Court was intimidating at first, she says, "but I saw I wasn't the only one and that we were all struggling to succeed. And, I realized we weren't being judged, we were being helped."

The required weekly individual and group therapy that were part of her contract with Halls of Hope, "gave me a chance to understand and take control of my Bipolar Disorder," Cher recalls. In the past when she had had a Bipolar episode, she'd lose her job, apartment – everything.

"Now, for the first time, I was handing it. I went to my boss about reducing my hours until I was stronger and I was able to keep my job." Cher did so well with the program, she also graduated before the end of her 18-month contract.

The most important way I can stay healthy now is to continue to go to HCRS for therapy and follow what I've learned there, eat healthy foods, stay away from caffeine and practice positive affirmation and mindfulness."

Looking ahead, Cher and her boyfriend are expecting their first baby in February and Cher is even thinking of returning to studying electrical engineering, "if the baby permits."

In the meantime, she continues to work in customer relations, relaxes by knitting and crocheting, dabbles with the guitar and enjoys hiking and outdoor sports with her family.

"I am really glad to have had the opportunity to be part of Halls of Hope," said Cher, "and I want you to know that you have really changed my life!"

Grafton County Attorney Lara Saffo Comments

The Office of the Grafton County Attorney commends Audrey and Cher on their hard work and successes. They reflect the importance of Grafton County Mental Health Courts – Halls of Hope in the Lebanon catchment area, ASSERT in the Littleton catchment area and the Plymouth Area Mental Health Court. These mental health courts are a vital part of our justice system in Grafton County. In many cases, without mental health courts, Grafton County prosecutors would have struggled to arrive at a just resolution. The Office of the Grafton County Attorney thanks the hard work and dedication of the Grafton County mental health court teams, and the many individuals in our community that support mental health courts, including the Advocates for Grafton County Mental Health Court.

We wish we could always identify and assist individuals with mental health needs prior to any involvement in the criminal justice system. For that reason, we support increased funding for mental health treatment programs. When individuals with mental illness are in the justice system we are grateful for a sentencing option that involves treatment and understanding.

The Council of State Government's Justice Center finds that "Individuals with mental illnesses are significantly overrepresented in corrections settings." This means that we as a society are failing to properly serve people with mental illness. We can and must do more.