

## Dean's Story

Self-described “functional addict” Dean was never homeless, didn't face poverty or lose his job. But, like so many of those we serve at Our Place, the trauma in his past, including coming from a broken home and a stint in foster care, played a big part in how his life unfolded as an adult.

“I was a functioning addict,” he says. “I carried a lot of shame and guilt with my addiction, but I hid it, and I hid it well.”

Like so many people, Dean's journey into addiction started out by taking prescription drugs to cope with an injury.

“In 1996, I fell and put myself into a wheelchair,” Dean says. “It took a year and a half to learn how to walk again.” Left with a lifelong back and leg injury, “I was put on pain killers. And the rest is history.”

During that time, everything in Dean's life was “fine and normal.” He'd met and fallen in love with the love of his life and they had a baby girl. He went to work every day and raised his young family, and “tried to be the best man I could be.”

Then the doctor who managed his prescriptions and knew his medical history retired. The doctors he went to next questioned Dean's use of medication. “I had to start lying to get what I needed,” he says. “I started to use over the counter medication to compensate for what they wouldn't give me. It had to become a story for them to believe me. It was humiliating to deal with them, they just made me feel small.”

All he wanted to do was avoid doctors all together. And the pain continued.

He met a few people through friends that introduced him to what ultimately ended up being Dean's drug of choice. Heroin.

“They said, ‘well here's this great pain killer, you should try it,’” he says. “Naïve, or call it what you will, I didn't know the effect it would have on me, to the point where I could not live without it. And then I realized I didn't have to go to the doctor anymore and feel the shame, and that made me feel better. It became such a vicious circle.” Dean soon found himself catapulted headfirst into heroin addiction.

“I discovered that [by taking heroin] I could still continue to do the work that I loved, and just thought, ‘OK whatever works,’” Dean says. “And then the next thing you know, I was having to work seven days a week so I could pay for my drug habit. I would sit in my truck, use [the heroin], and just think, ‘what the hell are you doing to yourself?’”

One Sunday morning, Dean woke up and had enough. “I'll never forget it. I got up to go to work and looked in the mirror and I finally saw myself for what I had become for the first time. That's when I reached out for help.”

Ironically, it was a doctor's recommendation that brought Dean to the doors of Our Place's New Roads therapeutic recovery community. He finally found a safe place to land where he could begin to unravel the secrets of his past that led to his addiction.

Shortly after arriving, the medical staff at New Roads discovered that Dean needed an emergency surgery. “They took me from here to the hospital, and the surgeon told me he had about 4 to 6 hours before I had to be on his table if I was going to survive this,” Dean remembers.

He spent six weeks in the hospital recovering. “Coming out of there was like the parting of the red seas, the AHA moment.”

To Dean, being at New Roads was the awakening he needed. “It was like the icing on the cake. When I got back here from the hospital, I've never experienced such comradery. I had people coming up to me seeing if I needed anything, and I could see that genuine care in their eyes and hear it in their voices. You can't help but be moved by that.”

He adds, “By being here, my whole outlook on what I perceived the world to be has completely changed. I'm not angry anymore. I have compassion for people I never would have felt compassion for before. I have the knowledge now of what makes me tick and what makes me react to things. It's just a wonderful feeling.”

Dean's journey is far from over as he continues his recovery at New Roads. It wasn't basic needs, like daily meals, or hygiene services, or clean clothing, that Dean needed from the Our Place community. It was just love. The kind of unconditional love, and acceptance, that Our Place staff can provide that's making the biggest difference in this next chapter of Dean's life.

“This place has really opened my eyes. I've let a big weight off my heart and my shoulders, and I am really grateful for that.”

***The change we see in people, the re-ignition of that inner spark, is palpable. Please help us nourish change with your gift today.***



*Like the other residents at New Roads, Dean takes part in Work as Therapy as part of his recovery. As the unofficial “fish whisperer”, Dean's favourite thing to do is care for the fish in the pond.*