

THE FRIENDSHIP TIMES

Newsletter of Friendship House, Mount Vernon, WA



Success Update

By Friendship House: Author, Rayna Huitt

An attitude of gratitude

Meet John.

In 2017, John became homeless. During this period of his life, he slept in shelters, on couches, and in a tent. It was not always like this.

When living in Puyallup, John was someone we all would have considered traditionally successful. He had a good job roasting coffee for Keurig that he maintained for six years. He had a wife, a condo, even a dog. All things we would identify with success and happiness. Substance abuse had been a part of his life since he was a child. Between his mental health and addiction things had come to a head and he went to treatment.

In 2017, John was staying with his brother. He relapsed and fell back into the cycle again; due to this, he was asked to leave. His sister-in-law pointed him to the Friendship House.

His first stay here was early in 2018 but he struggled to maintain his sobriety. For 6 months he lived in a tent. He was unsheltered off and on; staying on couches sometimes left him at a place where he relied on others who would take advantage of his vulnerable situation. He knew he had to find a better way. Again, John came to the Friendship House.

He claims he was a mess while using and camping. Mental illness was detrimental to his state of wellness and John is very aware that he came off as incoherent to most people.

Those who were close and patient, were able to get through and connect with him, like Kristie Kaaland, the Men's House Manager of 11.5 years.



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"Kristie will absolutely do anything in her power to help if she can see you have gratitude and are genuine," said John. He credits her support as a major factor in his turnaround. He claims he would never have found employment had he not been able to have his most basic needs met at the Friendship House. Employment can feel out of reach without sleep, a shower, clean clothing and something to eat.

By spring of 2019, John moved on to an Oxford House, a clean and sober shared living space for those in recovery. Six months later, he was in a home of his own. He is roasting coffee again, this time at Fidalgo Coffee Roasters. He "Absolutely loves it" there.

When asked what he needed to succeed his quick answer was going to meetings to maintain sobriety, even if it is inconsistent at first. "A lot of people come in and out for a while, which is what I did". He said, "It opened my eyes to who I am and what my patterns are," in reference to being accountable for his habits. "I'm not here because my brother kicked me out. I am here because I was stealing from my brother and getting loaded".

Discussing what he wishes he could tell the public about unsheltered people, he shared, "A lot of people view homeless folks, as if they are 100% homeless because they can't stop using drugs, but I think a lot of folks get high because they are homeless". John hopes to volunteer his time at the friendship house to support others trying to better their lives. His advice to others going through a similar path is to work hard, be focused, be grateful, have grace, and you will succeed.

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