

why your donations matter

bonnie's story

Bonnie first attempted suicide at age 10.

She was born into a family with addiction issues; physically, emotionally, and sexually abused; bullied at school; and taught to steal — by her grandmother— at the age of 13 to help provide clothing and food for her younger sisters.

The first time she felt loved was at age 13 when her parents allowed her to get drunk with them. There was dancing and even laughter instead of the usual beatings and neglect that made up her daily life. Thirteen was also when her mom taught her to flirt with men at bars to get favors, and when she first smoked marijuana.

By age 16, Bonnie was homeless and living under a bridge. She tried to get help from social services, but they determined her parents were responsible for her. Her parents claimed she was living with them, but they would not allow her into the house. She started sleeping with men for food and the occasional place to stay for the night.

Diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and bi-polar disorder, Bonnie spent the next 20 years consumed by addiction and was in and out of rehab and jail many times. She tried every drug that was available including pain pills, cocaine, crack, crystal meth, and heroin. Hoping to escape this cycle, each time she shot up, she said she wished that would be the time she would die.

A turning point came when recently, at 37, homeless and about to be released from jail, a judge ordered her to stay at the YWCA.

When she arrived at our emergency shelter and saw that she had toiletries, a pillow, blankets, and food, she became overwhelmed and began to cry at the thought that there are people out there who actually care. She had always felt invisible and unworthy of these things that most of us take for granted.

“The YWCA staff went above and beyond to get me to the next step,” she said. “It was a welcoming, safe environment with staff that is waiting to help you. **I was excited to have the opportunity to live and feel human, and worth something. For the first time, I have a home.**”

The structure and accountability made a huge difference in her ability to stay on track to recovery. “Your counselor can see that you’re not okay, even when you cannot,” she said. “It is so important to have people who follow through with you. Feeling like you matter is a huge part of hope.”

She is still waiting for a bed to become available at a rehabilitation center. Meanwhile, she has become active in the community: starting an addiction recovery program through her church; joining the board of I’m Dope without Dope; and filming a first person perspective video about addiction and recovery for a local news station. Bonnie hopes to go back to school to become a counselor or social worker.

“YWCA gave me a sense of hope and of what life could be—this is a start. It’s not about where I’ve been. It’s about where I am now, and where I’m going.”



Bonnie, left, is now on the board of I'm Dope Without Dope.