

**Name:** Ellis Walker  
**Age:** 54  
**Clean Date:** April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
**Drugs of Addiction:** heroin and cocaine  
**Home:** Washington DC, has lived in Boston for 17 years

**OL: Would you mind speaking a little about how you started using?**

**EW:** Back when I was home in DC I was the age of 16 and I saw a family member use an IV needle and I wanted to be like that person coming up. From there on it progressed from smoking marijuana to drinking to IV use. I got locked up and got into the system and once I got out I kept going back and forth in the system, kept getting locked up. Last time I got locked up I was using and I overdosed and the police had to save my life.

**OL: Being from DC, What brought you to Boston?**

**EW:** In 2003 I got out of jail after about 2 years. By the grace of God my brother called me and asked me "Do I want to change my life?" I told him "yeah" and so came up here [because Ellis's brother lived in Boston].

Fortunately I did the 28 day program at Shattuck hospital and then I went from there to the men's transitional housing at Long Island Shelter for 18 months. In 2005 I got my first apartment in BHA. At that time I was clean but I eventually slipped back in. I went on a 7 year run the last time. When I went back and forth to jail in DC I realized I had a coke addiction. Once I came here to Boston I got introduced to heroin.

**OL: After relapsing how did you get to the place in recovery that you are currently at?**

**EW:** After 7 years I [was evicted from BHA] and I saw Shannon when I was high and I asked her for some help. She gave me some information and she said that if I was really serious to meet her down at the courthouse and I did. Right now, up to this date, I've been clean. I go to meetings, I have a sponsor, spiritual brothers, a network, a job, and also help newcomers through 12 Step.

I've been going to a Suboxone support group at Monument Street all my swabs have been coming up clean and basically my last use date is the date that I got evicted from Charlestown BHA.

I did not do treatment this time. [Instead] I continued to pray, did me some Step Work with my sponsor, and just used the tools that I have learned to get me sober. [These include] stay away from people, places and things [that are triggering], and watch out for my triggers. All types of things can trigger me, money, people, depression, stress. Today I just take it as it comes. I pray a lot and do a whole lot of step work and reading.



**OL: That's awesome, good for you! What else are you up to now?**

**EW:** I work at Pine Street Inn's Men's Program. When that's over, I will look for another job or another training. I'm thinking about learning about computers. They have a whole lot of stuff for finding jobs for recovering addicts like us [at Pine Street].

**OL: Do you have any advice or anything you'd like to say to those who are struggling with substance use disorders?**

**EW:** The message I'd give them is that meetings will keep you sober but you got to want it. It's like saving your life because you don't have to give up on yourself but you can get anything that you want if you put your mind to it.

I keep it simple, you just don't have to lose no matter what. Just because you lose a job, or a life, this too shall pass. They must continue to go to meetings, talk about what's on their mind, and not suppress their feelings—talk about what's really going on.