

Name: Katie O'Leary
Drug of Addiction: Heroin
Hometown: Charlestown
Recovery Date: January, 25th 2011
Age: 37

OL: How would you say your addiction began?

KO: It was mostly alcohol when I was a teenager. I went to college at UMASS Amherst. At the beginning it was tough and I'd always come back on the weekends. Then the more I drank the more I wanted to stay there and drink and party because that way no one would know. In college the alcoholism progressed and they kindly asked me to leave. After I came home and pretty much all of my friends were into OCs (Oxycontin) and heroin. My sister is also an addict. At that time I was really really judgmental and hypocritical and I frowned upon it. I didn't know what I didn't know.

I started shooting heroin at 26, which was very late. Especially since I watched it in my own family, to see what it does to the family dynamic and then pick up and use. In my family it was just my sister and myself who used, my parents are very upstanding citizens.

OL: How did you addiction progress once you started using heroin?

KO: After I started using heroin I started going to treatment fairly quickly, probably within five months of picking up heroin. Detoxes and court cases and all of the consequences and mitigating factors followed. I ended up getting pregnant and staying clean for a little while and then I relapsed at the end of my pregnancy. That was 2007 so my family took my son and I ran. The guilt and the shame was overwhelming and I couldn't handle it and I thought I was a really bad person.

I checked into treatment maybe 15 months later and I went to the Meridian House because Shannon went there and I saw how well she had done and my sister had been there previously. I got pregnant and was discharged for something after eight months. I stayed clean for awhile, almost 2 years, and I got my son back and then I had my daughter and things were good for a little while but then I stopped going to meetings and reaching out to my network and then when I relapsed I couldn't take care of my son anymore so I gave him back and I took my daughter on a run with me when she was eight months old that lasted for about 7 months when I checked back into treatment. At that point I just had warrants and I was tired and in a lot of pain emotionally.

I had this really eye opening experience. Where I was staying got broken in on by the cops and it was really really cold out and I ran outside with my daughter. I had her on my lap and after a half hour she said "Mommy I'm cold." I hadn't even put her jacket on and I realized how selfish I had become. I checked into treatment and that was over six years ago. I went to the HART House and then McLaughlin House for a year and a half because I had my daughter with me. When I left the McLaughlin House I went back and got custody of my son.

OL: Can you describe some of your experiences over the last 6 years in recovery?

KO: In recovery I became homeless because I divorced my ex-husband because he decided to pick up and use and I couldn't be around that.



Shannon and Katie have been friends since grade school

I've been working for North Suffolk Mental Health for four years and am currently the Recovery Coach Manager. Shannon referred me initially and from there it progressed. Shannon and my boss, Kim Hanton, have been my mentors. Without their love, support, and guidance I would not be where I am now. I was just a Recovery Coach, and then Supervisor, and now I have my own department and budget. I also do a lot of work with Shannon in the drug court system. I love my job.



From left to right: Shannon, Kim and Katie

OL: How has your addiction, and subsequent recovery, affected your relationships?

KO: Through this job I've been allowed to go to Chelsea Drug Court. This is kind of ironic because my dad is the clerk there, which means I get to see him every Tuesday. He's really quiet and reserved. All of the people in the court house know my story because he's been there for 45 years and now they get to see the other side of it and it's been very eye opening. My mom is my best friend and my sister has been sober for a little over a month now.

I had another baby last year and am in a very healthy relationship. My recovery has really allowed me to be assertive, responsible, and advocate for myself—it has truly been a blessing.

OL: Do you have any next steps in mind, either personally or professionally?

KO: I'm back in school at UMASS Boston and hoping within the next couple of years to finally get my Bachelors' degree in criminal justice. I'll also be LADC eligible in June and will take the test then and then start taking classes for my Bachelors. I have a lot of support.

I hope to either stay in this field or work directly in the courts. I get to spend a lot of time in court in my current position.

OL: Are there any words of advice that you would like to give to individuals struggling with addiction currently?

KO: Give yourself a chance. I think people are really fearful of the unknown and addiction is so predictable and you kind of know what's going to happen. The pain is always going to progress. We're just so fearful of what's going to happen that we just don't give ourselves a chance in recovery.