Hallie House Graduate Shares Story of Addiction, Recovery, and Hope

"What I learned during the time I was at Hallie House is that what I put out is often what I get. If I'm a caring, loyal, compassionate person, then I attract caring, compassionate, loyal people. I get what I give."

—Jennifer



Jennifer, a 2011 graduate of The Connection's Hallie House Program for Women and Children in Middletown, is sitting on the living room sofa in her comfortable two-bedroom house in Middletown and sharing her story of addiction, recovery, and hope.

Now 31, Jennifer grew up thoroughly middle class in Wethersfield and her present life seems the natural outcome of her upbringing. She works in accounting at a Middletown construction company, is well liked and respected by her supervisor and colleagues, and is in a committed relationship.

In spite of growing up with two parents who loved her and made certain she had everything she needed, getting to this point has not been easy.

Jennifer has struggled with addictions for over 10 years and in 2013 spent six months at York Correctional Institute for Women for charges related to active addiction. "I've been in 12 to 15 treatment centers and more detoxes than I can count. The only thing that has kept me clean is a commitment to a 12-step fellowship. I would not be clean today if not for that fellowship and the God I found there."

Jennifer's story of addiction, recovery, and relapse is not uncommon. We are learning as a society, and especially with the rise of the opioid epidemic, that addictions know no boundaries, striking the best families, the brightest individuals, the people who seem to have everything.

Although Jennifer's parents loved her dearly, they fought a lot. And that had consequences.

"I learned to be comfortable with chaos from a very young age," she says. "If it was too quiet I'd go nuts. Because of that, I sought out people who gave me that chaos, and it was a domino effect. I also had a weight problem and based a lot of my value on what other people thought of me. It was hard to let that go. I let myself be judged based upon something that was very difficult for me to control, and as a result felt hopeless . . . no . . . useless."

Jennifer began using drugs in high school. "I started with alcohol and marijuana and then moved on to opiates. But my drug of choice was heroin.

“I was a functioning addict for a long time. I got good grades in high school, and always maintained jobs. Along the way I was able to get college educated, which continues to be something I’m very proud of,” she adds with a smile.

Jennifer went to Hallie House when her daughter was three months old. “After I had Sabrina (not her real name) I began using again. I had used while I was pregnant, but I got clean toward the end of my pregnancy because I didn’t want to lose my daughter.”

“But after she was born, I was feeling very overwhelmed by many things, including being a new mom and then my mom was diagnosed with Stage Four breast cancer.”

“When I first started using again, I rationalized by thinking that my daughter would always be okay, because my mom would be there to take care of her and my actions wouldn’t affect her because of that. But then reality sank in and I realized that if my mom wasn’t around, I needed to get clean. And to do that, I needed to be in a long-term program. But my daughter was three months old and with this new thought process, I wasn't willing to leave her. I was very lucky Hallie House had an opening.”

“The program was a huge support surrounding my mom's cancer as well. Staff was very welcoming, compassionate and understanding. I never felt alone there.”

Then she adds, “I also learned to be a mom in that program,” Jennifer says. “My daughter was just a few months old at that point—she was there with me.”

While learning to be a good mom was great for Jennifer, it had its downsides. “I focused so much on being a mom that I forgot the disease I had, so I didn’t really utilize the program the way I should have.”

That lack of focus led to Jennifer relapsing within six months of graduating from Hallie House.

“I thought I was going to get out of the program, find a place, and live happily ever after,” she says. “But even though I had a cute apartment with my daughter, a great job and supportive family, I started using again because it just wasn’t enough. I ended up placing my daughter in the care of my mom, who at that time had just had a double mastectomy and was cancer free. I used for another couple of years while Sabrina remained in her care, until my bad decisions caught up with me and I got arrested”

“I stopped using while I was incarcerated at York. I didn't have a choice. They mandated me to a program in conjunction with 12-step fellowship as a condition of my release. I went kicking and screaming, but I went. When I did, I saw that a lot of people had used like I did—but they had happy lives. I can honestly say that I’m very involved with a 12-step fellowship today. I owe everything I have today—every ounce of sanity—to working a program in this fellowship”

Jennifer’s mother had guardianship of Sabrina for three years. Jennifer and Sabrina were reunited in 2015.

“The reunification process was long and frustrating. I think as addicts we want what we want when we want it, and patience was never my strong suit. I didn’t realize at the time, but God was only going to give me my daughter back when he believed I was ready for her. After a year and a half of drug testing, therapy appointments, court dates, and parenting classes, while still attending meetings and working full time, we were reunified.

“It took a while for Sabrina to start seeing me as a mother figure instead of just someone who visited a few times a week, but we got there. We have a great relationship today. A normal one. And my daughter has been resilient and hasn’t skipped a beat. My relationship with my mother is beautiful today as well. She sees Sabrina at least once a week, but always on the weekend for a “slumber party”.

“I’ve been clean more than three years now, but I still don't work a perfect program,” Jennifer notes. “We make mistakes. It’s freedom to know that we just do better the next day.”

Hallie House was my first experience with a 12-step fellowship. They allowed and encouraged us to go to meetings. I’ll never forget that. When I go to meetings in Middletown -- I see some of the girls at Hallie House and it makes me happy. I made some friendships there that I still have today.

“I love how my life is now. I just want to continue growing. I’m in a relationship with a man who loves me because he wants to, not because he needs to. And he's stepped up to raise a child that's not biologically his. He’s in recovery too, and we relate in that regard. I want to keep staying involved in the fellowship and keep being a mother and friend. I want to continue moving forward. As I write more step work in the fellowship, I get more insightful and find a solution with my sponsor . . . I want to take what I have now and keep growing with it because I like who I am today . . . and that's unheard of for me.”