



Keith's Story

Looking at Keith in high school, you would never have guessed that his life would soon lead to living on the streets and time in jail. With a scholarship to Western Washington, he seemed to have it together. After becoming addicted to pot, Keith lost his scholarship and the life he once knew. "My mom couldn't really afford for me to have a roof over my head at that time. She was really struggling," Keith says. From there he began to couch surf and, still, "using and abusing."

When a teacher at school saw what was going on, she tried to keep Keith focused on school, homework, and football. She became the stable person in his life and things seemed like they were looking up. However, when things began to fall apart from her and she was about to lose her place she referred Keith to Youth Care.

Keith soon found himself on the Ave and being rebellious towards everything, "The fact that I was new to being out in that neighborhood, I would try new things so that I could be cool." While on the Ave he started to hear about different programs that help homeless youth and found out about Street Youth Ministries. "That was a blessing to me to just be able to get away from the street life and just sit back, relax, meet new people, and get some food in my stomach," Keith says as he describes when he first came to SYM.

While still on the streets, Keith ended up with a VUCSA charge and was arrested. "Hard lessons learned," he says as he looks back at everything that happened surrounding the charge, "It was bad, but at the same time there was good around the corner." He remembers coming back to SYM after being released and being welcomed back, "I've had my bad days, but I was still accepted."

SYM gave him the opportunity to do things out of his comfort zone, like rock climbing. He grew from all of these experiences and was able to get his life back. Now works at Sober Solutions, a program to help people become sober and better themselves. When asked what he looks forward to in the future, he expressed his desire to help people who are in the same sort of situation he was in years ago. "I really just want to see change," he says, "All I can do is try to encourage them to move forward, but that crutch of addiction is just always on their mind. They would rather hide behind a bag of weed than deal with their problems."

Seeing Keith walk down the Ave again is a powerful thing. It sends a message to the broken people living there that there is hope, there is something to reach for, and that they can make a change too. "I think it was a wakeup call for me to be where I was once at," Keith says, "What I would like to do is give them what they need and not what they want."