

Story of Hope #5

Story of Emily



Although Emily grew up with a family who cared about her, she struggled to fit in at school and elsewhere. She was bored, looking for a group to belong to and something fun to do, which is how she found herself befriending kids who were using pot, cocaine, and meth. By age 14 she was addicted to meth and stealing from her family to support her growing habit. By 14 ½ she had been kicked out of her home, and soon found herself sleeping outside with her "new family" of homeless kids in the University District. This new sense of belonging kept her tethered to a life of homelessness. "I felt like the queen of street kids," she says. "I was very accepted, very wanted - I had never felt that way in high school."

Although Emily liked her friends and the newfound sense of freedom, the dangers of her lifestyle began to surface. "Sometimes we'd be high for 8-9 days straight - I don't know how I even survived that," she says. "And when I had trouble waking my friend up after a night of heavy drug use, it really freaked me out." Danger reached an all-time high when she got on the wrong side of another group of street kids. "They came after me with knives - I escaped, but they hurt some of my friends so badly that they had to be hospitalized. I thought, hey...maybe it's time to get sober."

Getting clean was no easy task, but Emily credits Street Youth Ministries (SYM) for providing her with a lot of support along the way. She had used the drop-in center at SYM many times over the years, always grateful for a snack, a shower, and a change of clothes. But then she realized there was more to the program. She remembers SYM staffer Tyler asking her, "Don't you want to get a job? Don't you want to live inside?"

And so began her difficult journey to leave the streets - but Emily didn't have to do it alone. SYM helped Emily find transitional housing, create a resume, and get a job - and when she lost her job, SYM staffers stuck by her, encouraging her to stay clean and find new employment. "People at SYM helped me find my first apartment, and they provided me with practical things like furniture, clothes, and shampoo. When I wanted to give up, SYM provided incentives for me, like giving me a bus card so I could get to work."

At one point, even though she was sober and had a job, she was in danger of losing her apartment due to financial struggles. "SYM loaned me the money to pay my rent, trusting me to pay it back (which I did). I was shocked; that was huge for me."

These days, Emily has her own apartment and is happily employed in a job she loves. She's been clean for 6 years, and is proud of herself and grateful to SYM. "I couldn't have gotten clean without you guys," she says. "I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for you."