



# HOPE MATTERS

*community newsletter*



SERVING PEOPLE • STRENGTHENING FAMILIES • BUILDING COMMUNITIES

November 2017

In the darkness of addiction and despair there are cracks of light. All around us, we come together armed with belief, resources, grit, and compassion. Christina is a crack of light bursting through the dark. Ruben is a beam of indefatigable hope. Light is everywhere.

## A JOURNEY TOGETHER

On Christina's 23rd birthday she received a phone call from her grandmother. It wasn't an unexpected call since it was not only her birthday but Christina was also reeling from just having witnessed the passing of an elderly family member. Christina had experienced loss before. Her Dad passed away when she was eighteen years old. He was by all accounts a doting father that was present all along in the life of his little girl. He was also an alcoholic and died from cirrhosis of the liver. The close knit and loving family had been betrayed by drugs before; not only her father but also cousins and uncles. Christina's family was very much a microcosm of America's sweeping narrative of family, love, and the heartache of addiction.



On Christina's 23rd birthday she received a phone call from her grandmother to be told that her Mother died that previous night of a heroin overdose. In many ways, Christina had prepared for that phone call. When you love someone with an addiction, she learned, you do not mourn the loss at once. With addiction many losses come over time.

"When my mom died, my Grandmother was sad. She felt like she failed my mom. Losing a daughter is different though than losing a parent. I was angry." As a young teenager, she watched her Dad become sick. Then, the signs that something was wrong with her mother. "I saw things with her that weren't right. She was acting funny. Still, she protected me. She tried to keep it from me. I didn't really understand what heroin was. I knew it was bad. I didn't understand it as a disease. And I didn't know she tried to get clean so many times. She was an addict for more than twenty years. I dealt with so much. It is rare to find a child of a heroin addict."

**"When my Mom was sick, I was too. I was as sick as my Mom. I was addicted to trying to keep her alive."**

"I was addicted to her addiction. I learned that you have to separate the person you love from that person's addiction. When I gave myself the space I needed to get healthy, I did well." Christina soared. She graduated college with outstanding grades.

Upon graduation, Christina was hired as a Recovery Specialist with VOA and has since been promoted to Senior Case Manager. She wrote about her experiences and published it on a blog for families suffering with addiction. Still, she wanted to do more. Last July she created a fundraiser for addiction recovery programs.

## A JOURNEY TOGETHER

She named it Jude's Journey, in honor of her Mother. "I want to help others. I want to raise money for programs saving lives. The event did great and raised thousands of dollars." Christina learned firsthand the challenges of organizing an event. She held a field day. Families from her tightknit hometown community chipped in. They made it work. She isn't done. "Next year maybe Jude's Journey will be a walk."

Jude's journey is far from over. She may have lost her battle but a daughter's strength and hope fights on. **There are many horizons ahead.**



## We need you to **GIVE!**

*In the hardest of days we serve.*

Before opiates covered the front pages of newspapers we were in the trenches. For more than a half century we have helped men and woman climb out of the darkness of their addiction. Our biography is made up of the many thousands of lives we have touched through the years - providing seniors access to dignified residences, moving high risk youth out of harm's way, helping a veteran to stand tall again, and giving people another chance when it seemed none might be left.

This is what we did yesterday, what we did today, and what we will do tomorrow. Please join us, support our work, and donate today. Please visit our secure donation page today at [www.voamass.org](http://www.voamass.org). Thank you for your support! For more information please contact Andrew Wise, Director of Development, at [awise@voamass.org](mailto:awise@voamass.org)

## An Evening of Celebration



On October 12, 2017, Volunteers of America Massachusetts celebrated its 6th Annual Veterans Leadership Dinner at the Boston Renaissance Waterfront Hotel. The Veterans Leadership Dinner is an evening that brings together our community of veterans and those that support veterans with entertainment, dinner, and cheer. More than 140 supporters gathered to raise more than \$30,000 for our veterans programs. We are grateful to our many sponsors and guests for their support.

We also recognized two deserving leaders in our community.

Timothy Driscoll, LICSW and Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program Manager, was awarded the Local Civilian Hero Award in recognition of his relentless devotion to improving the lives of veterans and their families within our community. Calling the honor "overwhelming", Timothy shared this honor with many colleagues from the VA Bedford Medical Center.

Brian Davis, a hardware associate with Home Depot, was awarded the Capt. Thomas J. Hudner Award in recognition of his tireless dedication to assisting veterans in need. Brian, who served with United States Air Force for two decades, now uses his resources as a Home Depot Community Captain to improve the homes, landscapes, and lives of veterans within Massachusetts. VOA was pleased to host a table of guests from Home Depot in honor of Brian as he received his award.

The evening climaxed with a stirring speech from Bryan Bishop, a 20 year Air Force veteran and the Commissioner of Military and Veterans' Services for the City of Somerville. Brian told an inspiring story of his military service and how it influenced his decision to dedicate his life and work to helping fellow veterans. Ending the evening with a rousing acapella rendition of "God Bless America", Brian received a standing ovation.

**On behalf of our clients, we thank our friends, supporters, advocates, and sponsors for making this 6th Annual Veterans Leadership Dinner possible. For more information and photos from the event, please visit [www.voamass.org](http://www.voamass.org).**



## THE REAL RUBEN

Beneath the stiff lid of his baseball cap, Ruben smiled with his entire face. His mouth was wide and open. His cheekbones lifted. His eyes opened bright. Sharing a coffee at Dunkin Donuts in

Quincy near Home Depot where Ruben has worked since 2015, Ruben is the portrait of a man enjoying his life. He laughs easily. His hands are fists of positive energy moving as he talks.

**And in every sense he's moving forward.**

*"I'm not going back there. There is nothing for me. Only time."*

**Back there is the life he led.  
Back there is the time he served.  
Back there is all the loss.**

Growing up in Puerto Rico he went to school and dreamed. He played shortstop on the baseball diamond. His family moved to the city of Lawrence when he was sixteen years old. Ruben fell in with a crowd that didn't dream. The kid who never missed school began to miss plenty of it. There was a girlfriend's pregnancy. Drug use. The circle began. Using. Selling to feed his use. Arrests. Incarceration.

The consequence of Ruben's addiction: Half of his adult life high on heroin; the other half behind bars. His life could have ended in an overdose on the street or in a life sentence. Instead, he somehow held onto shreds of belief. In between prison sentences Ruben got jobs roofing. "But the roofers I knew partied," he said. "I tried to keep clean. I once made it a year. But those were jobs I could get and I couldn't get away from the drugs." The circle. Using. Selling. Arrests. Incarceration. However, in his last long incarceration, Ruben's belief became action. He earned his GED. He kept clean.

"I have six children. I am a grandfather." He stops and repeats "grandfather," smiling larger. When I went away the first time my youngest was a baby. He's now 27 years old and has children. I lost all that time. But I'm making up for it now."

Ruben began to work at Home Depot on a pre-release

program. He was released from prison a year ago. For the next eleven months his home was VOA's Hello House. "If you're not ready to change then you won't. I was ready for change and this program was the answer. The Hello House teaches you how to live. They teach you how to get a sponsor and how to go to meetings. They motivate." Motivation gave Ruben to the momentum to stay on track. "Steven, my counselor, was the best. He tells you things you don't want to hear, but then he says 'Ruben, you have all this potential.' It made all the difference. I still visit on Thursdays. I'm not losing all I have now, not for something that will only get you time."

Ruben is now a supervisor at Home Depot. He enjoys the responsibility. He likes to help people. Someday, he may even return to school to become a drug counselor. But he is happy at Home Depot. "Home Depot has been great to me. They understood my background and gave me a chance. They helped train me. I'm a hard worker. I love it. Look at me now. I have my family. My job. I own two cars!"

Ruben smiles and sits back in his chair. "Now, everyone gets to see the real Ruben."

## A Donor **HIGH FIVE!**

We are fortunate to have good friends like you who support our work. We want to make sure you know some of our other friends. Next time you're at a Home Depot you may want to thank the first person you see wearing an orange smock. Home Depot is truly committed partner of Volunteer of America.

"Home Depot is committed to serving veterans and we deliver on that promise. We are grateful for our partnership with Home Depot – for their passion to serve veterans and investments in our work," says Tom Bierbaum, VOA MA President and CEO.

Home Depot has granted hundreds of thousands of dollars locally to multiple programs, including the MA Bay Veterans Center in Somerville. Also, this November 17th, a volunteer crew from the Quincy store is heading over to our Woman's Hello House to replace an old fence and make improvements to the yard. "We at The Home Depot consider it a duty, honor and privilege to give back to our Veterans and their families. We're dedicated to giving back to those who have already given so much for our country, and with more than 35,000 veteran associates, taking care of veterans is personal to us," said Steven Radzikowski, Home Depot manager and local Community Captain. Our clients deserve not only the best care but also facilities we all can be proud of – Home Depot is making sure this to be true.



# OPERATION BACK SUCCESS!



## PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

Hello House for Men  
617.262.7142

Hello House for Woman  
617.326.6484 & 857.273.3923

The Family Center, Quincy  
617.390.0232

The Family Center, Taunton  
508.822.8257

Mass Bay Veterans Center  
617.627.9713

Vets Employment Network  
617.629.5313

Supportive Services  
for Veterans Families  
617.390.0232

Pathways for Justice Careers  
508.822.8257

Justice Mental Health  
Collaboration Program  
617.548.2700

Concord Park Assisted Living  
978.369.4728

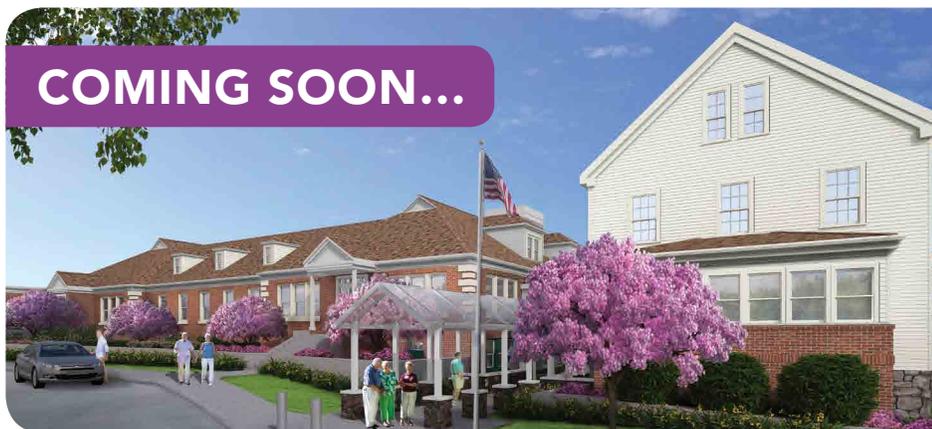
Nashoba Park Assisted Living  
978.772.0707

We all know that backpacks and school supplies can cost up to \$100 per child each year. For this reason, in the homes of low-income families, "Back to School" is an often impossible financial strain.

This year, because of our incredible volunteers, we have helped hundreds of families prepare for the school year and have made many children smile along the way. We are pleased to report that our 2017 Operation Backpack drive was a big success! Your enthusiasm and generosity purchased 365 backpacks filled with school supplies for families who needed them the most!

Through the amazing generosity of our donors, Operation Backpack ensured that each child who came through our doors walked away feeling proud of their school supplies and prepared for the year to come.

Thank you friends and supporters, who made this year's drive the most successful Operation Backpack yet. For more information on the drive and how to get involved for next year, visit [www.voamass.org](http://www.voamass.org).



## Forestdale Park Assisted Living & Memory Care Support

Forestdale Park is currently under construction in Malden, Massachusetts with plans to open this winter! Situated next to the beautiful Pine Banks Park, Forestdale Park will offer Assisted Living and Compass Memory Support as well as Independent Living Apartments. For more information about Forestdale Park, email [info@voamass.org](mailto:info@voamass.org) or visit <https://www.seniorlivingresidences.com>.

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