

HOUSING HIGHLIGHT: SARAH'S STORY

February 2021

Housing was the first step in this young woman's journey towards healing.

"Hello?" a gentle voice answered the phone. Sarah's sensitive demeanour and grace were immediately present at the other end of the line. My call woke her up, but she kept me on the phone while politely putting on a pot of coffee and starting to share her story. "I'll never forget where I came from."

When Sarah received a housing placement through [Fresh Start](#)/YWCA's Justice Program in 2019, it gave her a place to relax and call her own. Childhood experiences of trauma and housing precarity were just two factors that presented challenges in Sarah's life. Things became a bit easier when Gordon Ferris, a local landlord with a heart for helping people, offered one of his available units in uptown Saint John to be subsidized through the YWCA Justice Program.



When Lovey and Nancy, outreach support workers from the YWCA, went to view the apartment with Sarah, they had to agree that it was a perfect fit. Sarah remembers them saying, "This is SO you!" She describes her awe of the newly renovated space that she now had to call her own. "This was a new start."

"Things moved pretty fast," says Sarah, "I didn't have anything because I was living in a bedroom before that." Sarah was excited when Fresh Start and Sophia Recovery Centre partnered to set her up with an apartment's worth of furniture. "Fresh Start gave me a love seat; I had never had a loveseat before."

Not only did Sarah now have a home of her own, but she also had wraparound support from the community. Like a warm hug, Lovey, Nancy, Mel, and Kristen from Fresh Start encircled Sarah, helping her to acknowledge her inner strength and allowing her to take small steps forward. "I'm grateful for Fresh Start; I recommend it to everyone."



Time to heal.

Now housed, Sarah could focus on healing and managing her mental health. Sarah was over-medicated due to the lack of appropriate services to meet her mental health needs. At first, she found it challenging to manage life living independently, but she still worked a volunteer position at a local pizza shop. Sarah reflects on her experience, "I did not set my priorities for work-life yet." Over time Sarah began to develop a cleaning routine and learned how to take care of her apartment. Eventually, the volunteer position at the pizzeria turned into paid work.

Life was starting to improve for Sarah, but just three months after moving into her apartment, she began struggling with her mental health more than ever. She tried to quit her medication, which resulted in a hospital stay. Knowing she needed help, she reached out to a family member in the healthcare field who advocated for her. Sarah's psychiatrist invited her into his private practice instead of admitting her to the hospital. With the right medication and ongoing support from her community connections, Sarah's health began to improve. She stayed connected with her clinician from Mental Health and continued to work with her psychiatrist.

With newfound strength, Sarah expanded her social network. "I made new sober friends; that was nice." On top of being offered full-time hours at work, Sarah shared the news with Lovey and Nancy on one of their regular check-ins that her long-term boyfriend proposed!

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Like most in 2020, the reality of the pandemic struck Sarah hard, but she was determined to stick to the goals she had set for herself. When the opportunity for a new unsubsidized apartment arose, Sarah spoke to her boyfriend about the possibility of living together.

But there were still more hurdles. Sarah was upfront with her case manager at social development and reported that she would now be living with her partner. As a result, due to provincial policy, Sarah’s health coverage was cut off. Sarah could not be without medical coverage, so, resilient as ever; she started to look for a job. She took a job before Christmas at a local call center that offers health benefits, and she now maintains both of her roles while living in her new apartment with her fiancé and their four cats.



When reflecting on the last few years, Sarah shares, “The system has not always worked in my favour; to have it work was great. I don’t know what I would have done without [Fresh Start](#) or NB Housing.”

Sophia Recovery Centre has also been a stronghold for Sarah. Giving back to the community, pre-pandemic, Sarah led meditation sessions for the women at the centre. Meeting other women and sharing inspiration with them is one of Sarah’s favourite parts of her role, “It’s been a blessing to work with everyone.”

If you have questions about Saint John’s By-Names List or homelessness resources, please email BNLupdates@gmail.com