

Boston Globe: "A joyous recovery"
Adrian Walker, Globe Columnist
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A joyous recovery

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Soft-spoken and polite, Kevin Davis defies any stereotype of a crack addict, active or recovering.

Yet a recovering addict is what he is, or among the things he is. Davis might also be accurately described as a survivor, a counselor, an administrator, and a hero to many at the Dimock Community Health Center, the neighborhood institution that basically saved his life.

One frigid day last week, he talked about the struggle the holidays pose for the people he works with every day, people for whom joy comes in a cocktail mixed with anxiety.

"A lot of us grew up thinking of the holidays as a time to celebrate," he said. "A lot of us, not just addicts, get carried away." At the same time, the holidays are fraught with stress, as they are for many of us. "So when it's good, it's bad, and when it's bad, it's bad."

Davis, 46, knows the syndrome like he knows the Roxbury streets around the Dimock. He grew up on Heath Street, without any hint of trouble. He didn't drink until he was 18. From there, he began to experiment with marijuana. Along the way, he got married, started a family, and established a career in information technology.

Davis says everything changed in the mid-1990s when he discovered crack cocaine.

His life unraveled with shocking speed. He and his wife separated; as he put it, "I walked away from my family."

He realized how deep the abyss had become when his children, who had moved out of state, came to Boston for a visit. "I spent more time away from them than I spent with them," he said.

He was too busy scoring crack to be bothered with children, even his own.

He'd grown up around the corner from the Dimock center, but had never been a patient there. For those only vaguely aware of its services, it operates - among many other programs - a detox program and a halfway house.

For people in the city, it is one of the prime places to get clean.

Davis got an insurance referral - he was the rare crack addict who had managed to hold onto a job - and ended up staying four months and reclaiming his life.

Davis qualifies as a success story. But he views himself as merely emblematic of the hundreds of men and women who pass through the Dimock's drug treatment program every year. Their numbers have risen as treatment beds have become a more scarce commodity.

To say that Davis stayed at the Dimock for four months is not quite accurate. Though he returned to corporate life after getting clean, he never really left Dimock, staying to work with other addicts in various counseling and administrative roles.

He has worked there full time since 2002. He currently holds two roles, as an administrator in the detox program and a case manager with the halfway house.

"I couldn't have done this on my own," he said. "They opened the door for me."

He speaks movingly about the challenge of the holidays for addicts. "Aside from celebrating, people want to escape from their families, because people have messed up those relationships."

His own family story ended much more happily. He offered to divorce his wife after he kicked drugs, telling her, "If you want to move on, I'll understand." She didn't.

They've since had another child and remain happily married.

Where the holidays once meant a desperate scramble for drugs, Davis and his family have forged new traditions. They will ring in the new year at Holy Tabernacle Church among friends and neighbors, some of whom he has counseled. There will be hugs and a big meal. But no champagne.

There will also be no nostalgia for his former life.

"Anything I lost, I've gotten back over and over," he said. "I can't tell you how much I've recovered in this process."

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