

A Testimony of Transformation

"I showed up here with my T-shirt, pair of jeans, and work boots," Ken told me. "That's all that I had to my name." This is the state of most of the men who arrive at Susquehanna Harbor Safe Haven (SHSH), our long-term housing program for men who are homeless and have a diagnosis of mental illness.

And what do they find at the Safe Haven? First of all, the basic necessities of life which many of us take for granted. A safe place to stay, food, and assistance in obtaining clothing and other necessities. But more than that, they find support. "Accountability was the main thing that I found here," Ken said.

Ken came to Safe Haven following a point of decision. After a lifetime of drug and alcohol addiction, he had reached a breaking point. "I was either going to get some help, or it was going to be the end," he said. Thankfully, he decided to get help, going to the ER and spending two weeks getting his medication for depression stabilized. It was there that he learned about and was referred to SHSH, and he was able to be admitted directly upon his discharge from the hospital.

It wasn't hard for Ken to find work, as he had worked many jobs in industrial maintenance and forklift driving. He had just not been able to keep a steady job because of his drug addiction. And he hadn't been able to kick his drug habit because every time he returned to the community from a drug rehab program, the only housing he could afford was in areas saturated with drug use. "You can't get sober in a rooming house," Ken commented.

But SHSH is not in the middle of a drug-infested neighborhood, and that seclusion was an important aid in Ken's recovery. He got a forklift job, and was fortunate to have a supervisor who drove by SHSH on his way to work, so he had transportation until he was able to save up to get a car of his own about six months later. Ken stayed clean and was able to move from the dormitory area of the Safe Haven up to the second floor where he had a private room and paid a portion of his income toward rent.

Since there is no specific time limit for the amount of time that men can stay at SHSH, Ken was able to remain there until he felt confident in his financial and emotional situation. He reached that point this January after a bit more than 2 years at SHSH and moved out into his own apartment.

Ken has a quick smile and deep laugh. "I'm doing better than I ever thought I would," he stated. He keeps himself busy, working overtime when he gets the chance, and staying away from anyone he thinks could drag him down.

It's for guys like Ken that need not only a place to sleep, but a safe place to rebuild their lives, that the Safe Haven was built. His is only one of many stories that can be told of men who have been able to use their time at SHSH as a place of healing and transformation. CCU values your support so that we can maintain the high quality services of SHSH and our other programs that provide hope for those dealing with homelessness.



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