

# Homeless woman on road to recovery

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HAMILTON — Michele Gray had it all: diamond jewelry, a sports car, new clothes and a home. All that didn't matter when her parents died 10 years ago.

"My dad was my best friend," she said. "Instead of grieving (when my parents died), I just stuffed it. When you get overwhelmed, most people turn to drugs and that's not the answer."

Gray's downward spiral — which included alcoholism, working various jobs, homelessness and being addicted to crack cocaine — led her to thoughts of suicide. Fortunately, she reached out for help and got it. Her journey to recovery — which included being diagnosed as bipolar — has been up hill but worth it, she said.

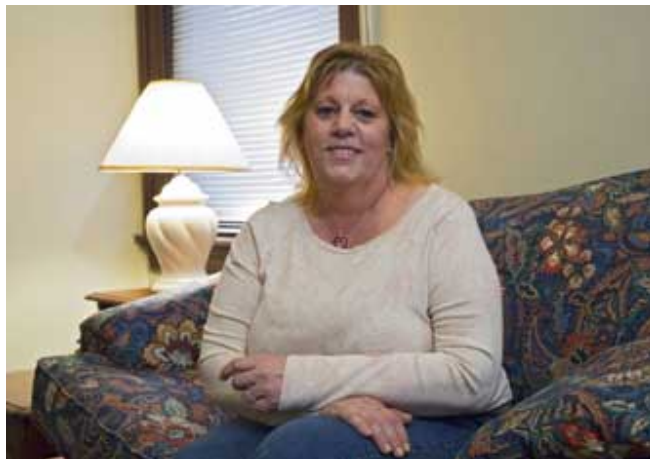
Next month, Gray will celebrate one year of sobriety. She has managed to stay clean with the help of services at Church Hospitality Emergency Shelter Network, or CHOSEN, and Transitional Living, Inc.

"To me, there's more to life than just drugs and alcohol," the 51-year-old woman said. "When I first showed up at CHOSEN in a taxi, I was scared. I can't believe I'm homeless."

As Gray went through various assessments of health check-ups, and emotional and mental evaluations, Transitional Living workers diagnosed her mental health.

According to the National Resource and Training Center on Homeless and Mental Illness, homeless people who have mental illness have greater difficulty getting off the streets because they haven't been diagnosed and are not able to care for themselves.

While it's undetermined how many clients of CHOSEN suffer from mental illness, Director Kay Waldo said she stays mindful of people who might suffer depression.



"Michele came to us with an addiction," said Linda Kimble, executive director of Serve City on East Avenue in Hamilton, where CHOSEN is located. "She was pretty far down, severely depressed ... kind of at a breaking point."

While Gray accepts responsibility for her downward spiral, she credits her support to her boyfriend and Kathy Becker, who was helped enroll Gray in programs at Transitional Living in Fairfield Twp. Becker is the vice mayor of Hamilton, and coordinator of homeless outreach and criminal justice services for Transitional Living.

Gray currently lives in temporary housing provided by Transitional Living — a mental health treatment facility. Her goals now are to live life, have her own apartment, and qualify for disability and Social Security benefits.

Gray insists the faces of the homeless aren't all drug abusers.

"There's a girl who got divorced and lost everything she had," she said. "When people think of (the) homeless, they think of people being in the gutter. I had (many) nice things but I wasn't happy."

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