

SAFE from A1

everybody was losing their jobs," she said. "It got really bad really fast."

Thompson herself fell into the pattern, smoking marijuana to excess and keeping her pain suppressed regularly with alcohol. It wasn't her first experience with substance abuse and its return caused a rift between Thompson and her fiancé in Tacoma. Before long the two were split.

Thompson's financial situation worsened as she invested more and more into dulling her senses with substances. With that, a deep shame set in.

"When you're spending every dime you have on drugs, there's shame that comes with that," Thompson said. "When you don't eat dinner because it's going to interfere with your drug money, there's shame there."

Desperate to extricate herself from the situation, Thompson chose the solitude of homelessness over the steady downward trajectory of her social environment. For a month, Thompson lived and detoxed in her car, sleeping in parking lots.

Though distancing herself from drugs was clearing her mind, the sharp realization that her options were dwindling was a psychological burden unto itself.

"I was freezing cold," she said. "And I also didn't have any money because I couldn't pass a drug UA (urinary analysis) to get a

job." Thompson's career focus is as a certified nursing assistant, a job which drug screens its applicants. But when she turned to fast food restaurants for a job, she could not find employment.

In a desperate bid for help, Thompson appealed to social media for support or guidance. In a turn of fortune, someone posted the phone number of Safe Haven.

A woman's voice on the other end of the line offered the respite Thompson had been seeking.

"When I called the number, she said, 'We have an opening for you tonight. You don't have to sleep in your car anymore,'" said Thompson.

Thompson was vetted over the phone and stayed in a warm bed that night.

Speechless and overwhelmed, she could only thank her benefactor through tears.

"It took days for it to sink in," Thompson said.

The calming environment of the Booher House gave Thompson the basic foundation she needed to begin piecing her life back together.

"Without it, I wouldn't have been able to stay clean," she said. "I would've had to go back to my family's house and I would've ended up using again."

Her drive for self-betterment is spurred partly by her desire to set a model of behavior. Thompson has a 17-year-old son and two daughters in their early 20s with whom a strained relationship had formed

due to Thompson's drug abuse.

"I wanted to get clean and sober and better my life and set a good example for the younger people in my family," said Thompson.

Now, she says, her children have told her that she speaks more positively about life since her sober living began.

"My kids are very proud that I got clean," said Thompson.

Thompson is currently back to work pursuing her career as a nursing assistant.

"I can see it going a lot of good places for me in the future," she said.

A few days after Thompson took up residence in the Booher House, Leah (her last name has been withheld) became the house's second resident.

Nearly a decade ago, Leah's son died of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, an incurable and progressive neurodegenerative disease that causes gradual loss of muscle control. He succumbed to the disease

within a year of his diagnosis.

By her own admission, Leah was no stranger to alcohol abuse, but the loss of her son catalyzed the habit into something more deeply pathological.

"Ever since then I've been trying to drink myself to death," she said.

Additionally, Leah's struggles with PTSD made for a compounding factor which ultimately put her on a track in which she faced a life on the streets. At 60 years old, her prospects seemed dim and she began contemplating suicide.

Leah bounced between various crisis services in Cottage Grove and Eugene, but the tumult of the process was wearing on her already thin supply of perseverance. Despite this, she found a way to remain sober and eventually learned about the Booher House.

"I found this place when I was at my wit's end," she said. "This house and AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) have given me a whole

new outlook on life. It used to be the tunnel was dark. Now I see light at the end of the tunnel."

The Booher House has been Leah's turning point. She is now celebrating three months of sober living.

"Which doesn't sound like a lot, but you are living day by day with an addiction," she said. "Everything about the house and AA is keeping me clean."

Under the house's roof,

Leah's future prospects are more promising and she has even considered becoming a counselor for people who have been through struggles similar to her own.

"Safe Haven has been a real 'safe haven' and a god-send for me," said Leah. "I feel like I'm becoming a real person again."

While each of the women has lived at the Booher

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