

Holidays present hard road for recovering drug addicts

December 30 2015, by Philip Marcelo

The holidays can be a tough time for addicts in their first year of recovery. Kylee Moriarty's family should know.

When the Massachusetts native resolved to kick her heroin addiction this summer, her relatives held out hope she could rejoin them for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

Moriarty's journey started in July, when she became one of the first to benefit from the Gloucester Police Department's novel approach to the heroin epidemic: Help addicts get treatment rather than throwing them in jail.

By the fall, the 27-year-old had tackled detox and graduated from [substance abuse treatment](#) into a halfway house in Boston. She even reconnected with her mother after years of estrangement.

But a relapse soon after that emotional reunion landed her in the hospital. A second round of detox and substance abuse counseling followed.

"You could tell she was trying to go too fast," said Joseph Titone, a close family friend who brought Moriarty to the Gloucester police station after finding her beaten, gaunt and homeless in July. "She needed to take baby steps."

Four days before Christmas, Moriarty settled into a halfway house not

far from her family in southern New Hampshire.

As a new resident, she's under strict rules that limit her phone and Internet use and visits. She wasn't allowed to spend the holiday with her family.

"You always have hope she can come home, but it's more important she focus on herself," said Titone, who brought gifts when he stopped by on Christmas Day. "She has the attitude now that this is her last Christmas, her last Thanksgiving away from the family."

The holidays can be challenging for addicts in their first year of recovery because they're still learning how to balance the joys and stresses that celebrations inevitably bring, drug and alcohol treatment counselors say.

"Going into the holidays in early recovery takes preparation and support," said Lori McCarthy, national director of clinical outreach at Gosnold on Cape Cod, a [substance abuse](#) treatment center in Falmouth. "Addiction brings up feelings of immense shame and remorse, and, around this time of the year, those feelings can really surface."

Every recovering addict's path through the holidays is different, but McCarthy said her organization—which is not connected to Moriarty's treatment—recommends simply staying the course.

"Don't skip a beat," she said. "Keep the consistency of whatever your recovery program is."

For most, that means maintaining regular contact with counselors and attending support meetings. For some, it can also mean limiting family interaction.

Family and friends play a key role by making sure unresolved conflicts

aren't broached at gatherings, alcohol isn't present and other potentially negative influences are eliminated, McCarthy said.

Michaela Maynard, a 21-year-old recovering heroin addict from Falmouth, said she was able to safely enjoy Thanksgiving and Christmas at home this year by checking in each day with her recovery coach, who helps an addict make progress on life goals once they're out of treatment, and her sponsor, a recovering addict who focuses on maintaining sobriety.

"I spent the last holiday season in treatment," she said. "So everything was new for me this year. It was like doing everything for the first time, because I was learning to do it clean and sober."

Meanwhile, Gloucester's pioneering program has placed over 300 addicts into treatment since its launch in June, according to John Rosenthal, who co-founded a nonprofit organization that's raising money to help other cities and towns launch similar efforts.

Over 40 police departments in 16 states have adopted some or all of Gloucester's ideas, helping another 300 or more addicts get into treatment, Rosenthal said.

More than 80 [treatment](#) centers have signed onto the effort and have given "well in excess" of \$5 million in support, mostly in the form of scholarships that cover recovering addicts' costs, he said.

As for Moriarty, who declined to talk to The Associated Press in order to focus on her recovery, it's not clear how long she'll be at the halfway house.

Titone said she'll need to find a job soon. Moriarty also is hoping to reconnect with her young son, who is now in the sole custody of his

biological father after living with Moriarty's mother.

"She's doing so much better," said Titone. "She's really slowed down things. She's focused on the future. I don't see her having a relapse. That's how well she's doing."

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Citation: Holidays present hard road for recovering drug addicts (2015, December 30) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-12-holidays-hard-road-recovering-drug.html>

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