

Testimony of  
**Susan \***

March 22, 2010

Testimony  
"Susan"  
Barre, Vermont  
Monday, March 22, 2010

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Susan. I'm 42 and a single mom. I come from a family with no criminal history, no family background of substance abuse. But I have served time in prison because of having abused alcohol. I started drinking alcohol and using other drugs when I was seventeen. I started bartending around this same time. My use became a normal and expected part of my work and social life and I regularly drove under the influence and had my first DUI at the age of 19.

I stopped using all substances when I discovered I was pregnant with my son. I sought treatment from UVM and stayed with them for 4 years. I then left treatment and went back to bartending full time, believing I had my use under control and because I needed the income.

My son's father and I separated when Mark was six months old. His father was a huge presence in his life throughout his early childhood. Things changed when his father remarried and essentially abandoned his son for his new wife. Mark started getting in trouble after this, and I was left to deal with his behavior on my own. This emotional and financial stress led to relapse. Things improved over the years with my son, but my use did not subside. I was charged with DUI twice in a year and eventually found myself incarcerated.

It was when I was incarcerated in St. Albans that I found Vermont Works for Women and Building Homes, Building Lives, a trades training program that gave me a purpose and made me feel like a person again and not left out or forgotten. We built modular homes that are sold as affordable housing. Being on the crew helped me learn new skills and brush up on some old skills I hadn't used in a long time. I was given the chance to learn and teach, as well as get certified in areas that I would later find out would help me in finding work when I left. The program gave me structure and goals, which I needed. I worked hard, learned to trust the other women on the crew, and built something I could view every day and know what I'd accomplished.

The program also included help with resumes and developing portfolios of the work we were doing and the skills we had learned. I was so well supported and prepared by this program that I made a decision to start my own painting business with my sister when I got out. I was released on Oct 15th 2009. My son was then, and is still, in the Army and serving our country in Afghanistan. Returning home without him to care for was hard. I had a tendency to isolate and knew that would be bad for me. Well, I never had that chance because Vermont

Works for Women supported me from the moment I got out to this very day. If I needed stamps or a ride or a phone call for support, information on some of the supports in the community -- they were very helpful, to say the least. It is really important that we reduce the isolation of people who return home from prison, especially those who have battled addiction. A lot of the people with whom we come into contact upon release are state employees who have authority over our actions. It was really important to have the support of a community organization that could be an ally and connect me to the resources I needed to move forward.

Because of my experience I recently started a group for women who are returning to the community and are looking for peer support, a group that Vermont Works for Women has helped to support. This makes me proud and helps me with my feelings of self worth, and enables me to give back to the community.

I will close by saying that thanks to the help of all the staff at Vermont Works for Women. I have launched my own business with my sister. We are fully licensed and insured and working so much that we are looking to hire more help. I am making healthy choices, work out daily, and have changed my diet to reflect my focus on health. I continue individual counseling and am active in the community, working with the United Way to do repairs for the elderly, and facilitating the drop-in support group.

I feel like a reborn person with a life worth living.

Thank you.