

Adrian's Recovery from Substance Use Disorders

How One New Yorker Ran the New York City Marathon – and the Marathon of Life

Adrian spent more than 18 years in and out of the penal system, struggling with substance use disorders and several other mental health conditions. But with help from the Health Home program at VNS Health, Adrian got back on his feet.



Adrian was always called “speedy” because he was fast at everything. But he didn’t always make the best decisions. He had a troubled childhood: he was abused, abandoned, and left

to live all alone. He had difficulty believing in himself. He turned to cocaine and alcohol, and he eventually began selling drugs to support his addictions.

Adrian was diagnosed with bipolar II disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. The combination of these conditions and his substance use disorder fueled his bad decision-making, landing him in jail several times. When he wasn't in jail, he lived in shelters or on the streets of Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Living on the streets put him in danger – he once got shot and then hit with a gun, which left him needing 18 stitches in his head.

Adrian eventually decided that it was time to change. “I didn't want to come back [from prison] being the same person I was when I went in,” he recalls.

Entering the Health Home Program

In 2017, Adrian made the life-changing decision to join the Health Home program.

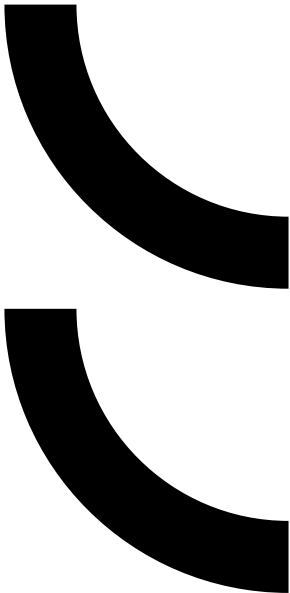
“A health home is a care coordination program,” explains Natasha, associate director of the Health Home program at VNS Health. Our program serves New Yorkers with complex medical and mental health needs and provides support so they can live independently in their communities.

If someone needs food, the program counselors help them apply

for food stamps. If they need a roof over their heads, the counselors help them find stable housing. The program coordinates transportation to doctors' appointments and to the pharmacy to pick up medicines.

When anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues interfere with your recovery at home, behavioral health support can help.

Behavioral Health Services



Rocky Road to Recovery

Adrian was in the Health Home program for several years, but at some point his counselors could not locate him. He had relapsed and was living on the streets, in the subways, on rooftops, and in parks – often protected only by cardboard, even in the dead of winter. “My mental health got really bad,” he says. “I was feeding myself with information like, ‘You know what? At your age, you’re not going to make it. This is it. This is it.’”

Relapses are not uncommon among people who struggle with substance use disorders. Akelia, a care manager with the Health Home program, explains that recovery is an ongoing process. “You could be clean for 20 years and have one slip-up moment. And then we all just go right back to the process. Here at VNS Health, we meet clients wherever they are – where they are in life, where they are in the community, where they are in treatment. If they’re in relapse, we will stay with them. That’s where you are. And you go from there.”

Adrian got back on his feet and re-enrolled in the Health Home program in 2020. He wasn’t ready to give up on himself.

Our job is primarily teaching people to love themselves again. Showing them that somebody out here cares about you, too. If one person cares about you, and you care about yourself, then we can move mountains.

– Akelia, care manager, Health Home program at VNS Health

Running the New York City Marathon

Adrian has achieved remarkable things since making his way back to the Health Home program.

One day, Adrian told his counselors that he was entering a qualifying race to run in the New York City marathon. He had started running in prison, and he was determined to keep going.

His announcement came as a surprise to his counselors. Natasha recalls incredulously asking him what he meant. “He was like, ‘No, I’m going to run the New York City marathon for real.’ And I was like, ‘For real?’” Akelia adds, “So we are very proud of him, because we provided the running shoes that gave him the ability to run in the marathon, which made him feel better about himself.”

Running inspired Adrian to complete more goals, like going back to school and becoming a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor, which will allow him to act as a peer advocate and recovery coach. He looks forward to helping young people avoid making the same mistakes that he did.

I want to give back to a community that I took so much from. That’s my goal. This is the beginning of something beautiful.

– Adrian, Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor and graduate of the Health Home program at VNS Health

The Next Lap

The Health Home program helped Adrian turn his life around. He began an internship, he now has a girlfriend, and he’s working tirelessly to repair his relationship with his son and daughters, whom he hadn’t seen for more than a decade.

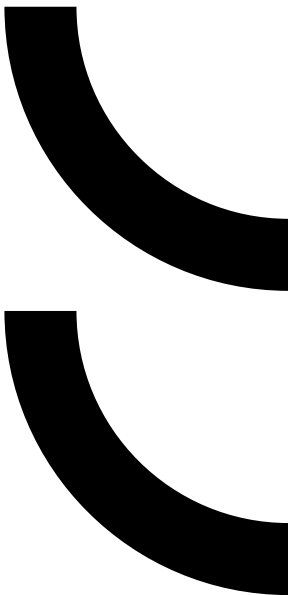
Looking back, Adrian describes his years on the streets and in the penal system as simply one lap of his life. He knows that

there are many more laps to come – it's all a part of his journey.

"The Health Home program has helped me stay clean and sober. They've helped me regain my integrity, they've helped me to learn how to trust in others. They've also shown me how to be responsible in taking my medication consistently on a daily basis," he says. "I'm not looking back, and if I do look back, it's only to remember where I came from."

Your donation can help people like Adrian as they navigate recovery from substance use disorders and other mental health conditions.

Donate Today



For more information about giving, contact our Development team at [1-212-609-1525](tel:1-212-609-1525) or development@vnshealth.org.