

# Moilanen from front

She will graduate from the nine-month program in March.

Moilanen had been using drugs to cope with trauma, stemming from repeated abuse, since age 15. When other substances were not enough to mask the pain, she turned to heroin in her early 20s. Eventually, she lost custody of her young daughter and ended up on the streets. Cold, hungry and powerless over the highly-addictive drug and caught up in a swirling vortex of emotions, her mental health crashed alongside her finances.

"Things really got bad with the heroin," Moilanen said. "That drug will eat your soul. It's so hard to get away from."

She spent years in abusive and co-dependent relationships, where her drug use originated. She wanted to leave, but with no other place to go, she fell deeper into the dangerous lifestyle of opioid dependency.

"It's vicious out there," Moilanen said.

Determined to be reunited with her daughter and give her a better life, Moilanen finally called for help. Admitted to a recovery program specializing in opioid addiction, she spent 90 days in a womens residential treatment facility in Wyoming, Minnesota.

When Moilanen came to St. Cloud for outpatient treatment, she said it saved her life.

"If I would have went back to that environment I was in, I probably wouldn't have stood a chance," she said of the likelihood of running into negative influences back home. "It was the best decision I ever made, coming to St. Cloud. There's a great recovery community here."

Abstaining from drugs was just the beginning. The move provided not only a continuum of addiction treatment, but a safe place for Moilanen to lay her head at night.

Life in a sober-living home for women has helped her focus on recovery as a way of life. She has found a sense of purpose, renewed hope, wholeness and healing.

"You get nine months to set your whole life up," Moilanen said. "There is no program like that anywhere."

Every day, Moilanen works to better her life and hopes to be with her daughter again.

"Being separated from her so long broke

my heart, and it's damn near killed me," she said.

Addiction recovery has become a cause close to Moilanen's heart. In an effort to raise awareness and combat the social stigma attached to addiction, she frequently uses social media to reach out to people who are struggling.

"Even if my story can get through to one person, then all that pain and suffering I've caused myself and other people wasn't in vain," she said.

Moilanen has taken her advocacy work a step further as a volunteer for Recovery Community Network, a St. Cloud-based organization that works to broaden and strengthen recovery services for people with substance abuse disorders.

"They've just been a huge inspiration to me," she said.

She attends recovery meetings and leads one for women. After completing a 46-hour training course, she became a peer recovery specialist and will use her personal experiences to help others.

"That was one of the happiest days since I got here," she said of receiving a scholarship to the training academy and then her certification. "I was so proud."

One day, Moilanen wants to work as an addiction counselor or technician.

"It's obvious to me now, what I'm supposed to do is help other people through their struggle," she said.

Now, she hopes to find a place to live. In a few weeks, her time at the sober-living home will end when she completes treatment.

"The pressure's on," Moilanen said.

Moilanen has not been convicted of a felony, but a low credit score, resulting from the financial fallout of her heroin dependency, is hindering her search for rental housing that is safe and free of the toxic environment that once swallowed her whole.

"Lately, I've just been having these nightmares about what it was like to be in that lifestyle again," Moilanen said. "It's a nightmare. I'm running around in the middle of the night. I'm cold. I don't have any food. ... Clearly, these are anxieties of what I don't ever want to have again."

Moilanen has maintained steady employment and is working toward a general education diploma. She has a driver's license and a

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car and savings in the bank. Still, it will take time for her credit score to improve enough to meet most rental housing thresholds.

"It's those barriers that I'm afraid of," she said.

A program called Beyond Backgrounds, offered by Recovery Community Network, aims to help people like Moilanen who struggle to find housing because of credit, criminal or rental history barriers. Recovery Community Network is seeking additional landlords to participate in the program.

Beyond Backgrounds offers landlords access to up to \$2,000 of insurance if there is property damage or liabilities that are not covered by the security deposit, or if rent is not paid or eviction is pursued. The program exists so both landlords and renters move beyond background issues such as bad credit, drug crimes or former evictions, which often prevent people in recovery from finding stable and affordable housing.

Recovering addicts have made bad choices, Moilanen acknowledged, but the mistakes of their past do not mean they are bad people.

"Everybody deserves a second chance," she said.

Recovery does not end with treatment; addicts must learn to em-

brace it as a way of life. Having a safe place to life is a critical part of ongoing recovery, according to Moilanen. Beyond Backgrounds helps to foster healthy lifestyles and new beginnings while giving landlords peace of mind, Moilanen said.

"People are going to graduate from treatment, and they're going to need a safe place to go," she said. "Otherwise, you're basically just throwing people back out to the wolves. That's the key to rehabilitation; you're trying to help people succeed."

People who are eligible for Beyond Backgrounds pay rent themselves. They truly want to better themselves, and many have not committed an offense for years, Moilanen said.

"That shows a serious amount of commitment, of self-discipline," she said.

As they start anew, putting a tumultuous past behind them, Moilanen and many others in the recovery community have more to think about than themselves. Landlords who support Beyond Backgrounds are giving people like Moilanen's daughter a wholesome place to grow up, reducing the risk of the cycle of addiction repeating itself.

"People need a safe place to bring their children," Moilanen said.

- What's Happening
- Saturday, Feb. 20, 9 a.m. – **Overeaters Anonymous.** Call Joyce at 320-761-2275 or Donna at 320-291-7251 for meeting place. Visit oa.org for more information.
  - Monday, Feb. 22, 6 p.m. – **Sauk Rapids City Council Meeting.** Sauk Rapids City Hall, 251 Summit Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.
  - Monday, Feb. 22, 6:30 p.m. – **Sauk Rapids-Rice School Board Meeting.** Sauk Rapids-Rice High School, 1835 Osauka Road N.E., Sauk Rapids.
  - Tuesday, Feb. 23, 11 a.m. to noon – **Living Waters Food Shelf Dispersal.** Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1911 Fourth Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.
  - Tuesday, Feb. 23, 1-3 p.m. – **Catholic Charities Senior Dining Frozen Meal Distribution.** For people age 60 or older. All clients must complete an annual registration form. There is no cost to participate, and meals are distributed through a contactless, drive-thru format. Catholic Charities Emergency Services, 157 Roosevelt Road, St. Cloud.
  - Tuesday, Feb. 23, 6 p.m. – **Overeaters Anonymous.** Call Joyce at 320-761-2275 or Donna at 320-291-7251 for meeting place. Visit oa.org for more information.
  - Wednesday, Feb. 24, 5 p.m. – **Meat Raffle Supporting Linda Palmer.** Hosted by the Sauk Rapids VFW Auxiliary Post 6992. Sauk Rapids VFW Post 6992, 901 N. Benton Drive, Sauk Rapids.
  - Wednesday, Feb. 24, 6-7 p.m. – **Living Waters Food Shelf Dispersal.** Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1911 Fourth Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.
  - Friday, Feb. 26, 11 a.m. to noon – **Living Waters Food Shelf Dispersal.** Living Waters Lutheran Church, 1911 Fourth Ave. N., Sauk Rapids.
  - Saturday, Feb. 27, 9 a.m. – **Overeaters Anonymous.** Call Joyce at 320-761-2275 or Donna at 320-291-7251 for meeting place. Visit oa.org for more information.
  - Saturday, Feb. 27, 9 a.m. – **Senate District 13 GOP Virtual Convention.** Election of the board will be at this meeting. For questions, call 320-267-6677 or email sd13republicans@gmail.com.

**ROYALTON PUBLIC SCHOOL**

Royalton Kindergarten registration forms can be turned in in-person on **Monday, Feb. 22 from 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. at the Early Childhood Center/District Office entrance.**

Forms, handouts and the Zoom recording from Information Night can be found at [www.royaltonpublicschools.org/kindergarten](http://www.royaltonpublicschools.org/kindergarten).

**Call Down at 320-584-4160** if you have any questions or did not receive a registration packet. R6-2B-RB

**Sauk Rapids LIQUOR** Sale Starts Monday, Feb. 15th - Sunday, Feb 28th

Monday-Thursday 9am-10pm • Friday-Saturday 8am-10pm • Sunday 11am-6pm

<b>Heineken</b> 12 pack bottles & cans <b>\$12<sup>99</sup></b>	<b>Coors Light</b> 24 pack, 16 oz. cans <b>\$21<sup>99</sup></b>
<b>Miller High Life &amp; Miller High Life Light</b> 24 pack bottles & cans <b>\$14<sup>99</sup></b>	<b>Natural Light &amp; Natural Ice</b> 24 pack cans <b>\$13<sup>99</sup></b>
<b>Captain Morgan Rum</b> 1.75L <b>\$21<sup>99</sup></b>	<b>E&amp;J Brandy</b> 1.75L <b>\$16<sup>99</sup></b>
<b>Black Velvet Whisky</b> 1.75L <b>\$13<sup>99</sup></b>	<b>Dark Horse Wine</b> 750 ml <b>\$5<sup>99</sup></b>

**FEBRUARY DEALS OF THE MONTH**

**Minnesota Crafts**  
All Varieties 12 pk. bottles & cans  
**15% OFF**

**Gallo Wine**  
All Varieties  
1.5L  
**\$5<sup>99</sup>**

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