

## NO BOUNDARIES

### Meet Barry Pietrantonio '17G CMHC

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Young, old, wise, naive ... addiction seeps like water, shaping and shifting through regions, communities, neighborhoods, families. It knows no boundaries. Reaching epidemic proportions in the U.S., the statistics are staggering; however, they don't convey the human experience or its boundless capacity for change.

**Beginning his battle at an early age, Barry shares his story of addiction, recovery, and redemption.**



BARRY PIETRANTONIO '17G CMHC  
Co-owner and Chief Executive Officer of  
Crossroads Recovery Center in Salem,  
New Hampshire.

*“Education and rehabilitation are key to battling substance use disorder. If we stop the demand, the supply won't matter. By providing more opportunities for treatment and addressing contributory factors early in people's lives, we can make a difference.” – Barry Pietrantonio*

*“My addiction to alcohol started as a child. I was the youngest of ten. By seven or eight years old, I felt different. In my family, it was common to have a little brandy when we were sick. I can still remember the taste. Brandy was expensive, and I had to steal it from my dad, so when I got into my teens, I started drinking beer from my neighborhood friends. As I aged, my addiction progressed. I wanted to drop out of high school but my mother refused to sign the papers ... after five years, I managed to graduate with a diploma.*

*By my twenties, I knew I had some type of problem, but I never took it seriously.*

*After high school, I got into the construction field. I thought it was great; it was common in this industry to drink and drug. At the time, I could stay up until 4 a.m. and go to work at 6 or 7 a.m. I later found out that I was having experiences with mania. I could go for two or three days straight during a manic episode. I found them to be enjoyable. It was almost like doing drugs but not having to pay for them. In my late twenties, I tried to get serious. I stopped using for three years to get my bachelor's degree in accounting. As soon as I graduated and got my first job, however, my addiction exploded.*

*In 1997, I experienced a severe depression, so I went to counseling. Even though they kept telling me the substances were causing the depression, I didn't believe them. They prescribed me Wellbutrin, Paxil, and Buspirone, but I kept drinking and drugging. ‘The medications aren't working,’ I said. ‘I must not be depressed.’*

*In 1998, things started to get a little more intense. I had a herniated disc in my back from doing carpentry, and in 2002 I had a motorcycle accident which led to a herniated disc in my neck. I played the 'oh, the pain, the pain!' card. I started using Percocet and Vicodin. In 2005, when I finally had neck and back surgery, it was a free pass for opiates. All I had to do was declare I was having pain from the surgery; doctors were prescribing, and prescribing, and prescribing. 'This is the life,' I thought. 'This is great.'*

*Six or seven months after surgery, the doctor started to restrict the opiates and my addiction to other drugs exploded. I turned to crack cocaine and hard liquor.*

*In 2007, I got a DUI in Florida. The case was dismissed due to lack of evidence. I swore I would never do it again ... Over a twenty-month period, I got three DUIs. I had no conscience around what I was doing. In 2009, I finally admitted that I needed help. I came to a crossroads. 'My life is either going to end miserably,' I thought, 'or I'm going to get help.'*

*My son told me I was a lousy parent; I was no good, and I was a drunk. My wife kicked me out of the house. My entire family started to push away. So right before things started looking really bleak, I said, 'I've got to go to the hospital.' Rather than going to detox, I went to a psychiatric facility. I thought I was going crazy.*

*I was admitted to Hampstead Hospital, and, for the first time, I was honest. Within two days, I was diagnosed as bipolar. By the third day, my whole life had changed. For the first time, I could see with clarity. I stayed in the hospital for five or six days; from there, I went to Quitting Time, a 28-day outpatient program. I was still working and trying to get everything straightened out. I talked to my lawyer, and I talked to my sponsor; they assured me that if I kept doing the right thing—going to AA and staying sober—things would get better.*

*Sure enough, when I went in front of the judge for my DUIs, I had a year and a half of sobriety. The judge said, 'We're not in the position to put recovering people in jail.' I took the outcome of all my trials as a sign of God and said, 'I am sticking to this program.'*

*One year turned into two, and I decided to go back to school and get my Master's in Mental Health Counseling. Originally, I wanted to get into mental health because of my bipolar diagnosis.*

*As I grew into my master's program at Rivier, I started to realize that I would be very capable of helping the dually diagnosed population."*

These are excerpts from Barry's autobiography, edited for clarity and brevity. To read the full text, visit [www.crossroadsrecoverycenter.com](http://www.crossroadsrecoverycenter.com).



Thomas Donovan '13G and Barry Pietrantonio '17G

Barry graduated from Rivier in May 2017. With his graduate degree, counselor training, and seven years sobriety, he began working at an established recovery center. Counseling people in the first few weeks and months of their sobriety drew on all his resources. In this setting, his trials proved to be a source of strength; years of substance misuse and his bipolar disorder provided an incomparable level of insight and empathy, which complement his education. Though Barry was able to point to several successes, he saw many of the recovery center clients relapse shortly after release from their programs. This drove him to do more.

Barry enlisted longtime friend and Rivier alumnus Thomas Donovan '13G to open a new recovery center. Tom was also in long-term recovery and had graduated from Rivier's Mental Health Counseling program.

He had served as a Massachusetts police officer for more than 20 years before changing careers in 2013. He brought a different skill set to the team. “Tom was the one who encouraged me to get my degree and make the move into behavioral health counseling,” says Barry.

They made the conscious decision to locate the center in Salem, New Hampshire, where Barry had grown up and Tom had raised his family. They set goals for their center to provide a higher level of care through a series of continuous, coordinated supports and agreed to serve clients regardless of their individual means or insurance status.

By the end of 2017, they had rented and renovated a space for Crossroads Recovery Center and began taking on clients. Today, Crossroads provides individual and group counseling, intensive outpatient counseling, aftercare, and will expand services to include sober living in 2018. Barry’s accounting and business background plays an important role in running the center, as well; client numbers are climbing and the milestones set for the center are being met.

Based on his own experience and data supporting the early onset of substance misuse, Barry’s personal goal is to work with local youth and their families. In addition to counseling services, Barry speaks on addiction and recovery to a wide range of audiences and is especially invested in reaching out to elementary, middle, and high school students and their parents. He’s devoted to raising awareness and facilitating supports for children at higher risk for mental illness and substance use disorder diagnoses. “Education and rehabilitation are key to battling substance use disorder. If we stop the demand, the supply won’t matter,” says Barry. “By providing more opportunities for treatment and addressing contributory factors early in people’s lives, we can make a difference.”

Barry admits, “It’s been a long road.” In the past eight years, he’s become sober, restored relationships with his family and friends—he and his wife celebrated their 28<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary this year—and started a new career and business in service to others. When he came to his crossroads, he was blessed to receive the treatment and support he needed to build a new life. “In my sobriety, I’ve learned so much about myself and what I can accomplish. I’m not proud of the things I did, but I share my story to give others hope and motivation for their recovery.” ■