

My Tamarack Experience

client interview - *a life-changing opportunity*



Thinking back, what was the process like when you realized you needed help?

On reflection, I can easily liken the experience of realizing I had a problem to ending up in recovery as similar to falling down the rabbit-hole and waking up in another world completely.

Though I grew up around addiction my entire life, with most of my family members and friends living in active addiction, I still had some unrecognized prejudice that kept me from seeking help much sooner. I wanted desperately to be different from the people that caused so much hurt in my life that I had no idea how to separate the addiction from the person; nor did I want to accept that I too was now that person.

When I finally realized I needed help, those same people I judged were there to lead me through the process. I had no idea where to go or what to do; nor was I in the physical, mental, or emotional condition to navigate that myself. Fortunately, with the help of my loved ones, and community services (such as the Main Street Project, HSC, and even the staff of the post-secondary institution I was attending at the time) guided me one step at a time until I walked through the doors of Tamarack.

What were the challenges of accessing treatment?

For me personally, the challenges of accessing treatment became apparent very quickly.

Did I or my family have the money for me to go to treatment? No, not even close.
And because I didn't have the financial means of going to treatment, where would I go?
How long was the waiting list to go into a publically funded facility?
Why were the wait lists for women even longer?
And if I didn't die while waiting for placement, would 28 days realistically be enough?

The challenges seemed endless, and with this being my first try at recovery I had no reference or guide as to how to navigate through . I soon realized, had there not been a huge financial barrier in the way of my accessing help, most of these challenges could have been overcome. And thankfully they were, once I entered Tamarack.



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You were able to access treatment at Tamarack thanks to a donation specifically designated for this purpose. How did it feel to know there was a funded spot?

While in detox I spent most of my time desperately researching treatment centers so as to receive immediate help. Tamarack was among the leaders in sustainable recovery, and progressive in integrating updated programming. While it is a not-for-profit organization, there is a cost for operation and by no means did I have access to funding. Growing up quite marginalized, there was no way whatsoever that my family could financially access the resources to get me the help I needed.

That said, it's no exaggeration that having my treatment funded was literally a matter of life or death and the financial support from outside funders gave me the opportunity (with the help of a strong support network) to save my life.

What did you get from Tamarack that you might not have got elsewhere?

The first thing I got from Tamarack that I might not have received elsewhere was an extra 50 days of treatment. As I understand, currently, most Canadian treatment centers operate on a 28 day basis. In my experience, 28 days is just barely enough to allow you to scratch the surface. We have spent many years living with this illness and require long-term treatment if we ever expect a chance at a sustainable recovery. Those additional 50 days gave me a safe and supportive atmosphere to delve deeper into my root issues and begin to develop the coping strategies required to live a healthy life.

The second thing I received from Tamarack that I find so beneficial, was the opportunity to immediately practice the skills I began to develop. Unlike many other programs where clients are inundated with information in a short amount of time, Tamarack provided a healthy balance of programming and self-care/free time. That type of balanced routine gave me the chance to be exposed to reality early in my recovery and begin practicing coping strategies, while having support and accountability to my Tamarack family.

I could go on to list a plethora of reasons as to why Tamarack is unique, from offering progressive therapeutic programs (such as Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) to unlimited access to resources like aftercare, but the essence of what makes Tamarack so special is the genuine desire to save lives. Where else can you find an executive director that doubles as a counselor because they want to be in the weeds empowering their clients? The Tamarack community, both staff and clients, share their experience, hope, and strength with one another, without any expectation of return. I can't safely say that I would have had that same experience if I went somewhere else.

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What is life like now? How much do you credit that to the opportunity of treatment?

It's been 10 months since I went into detox; and I can firmly say that the life I live now is not even close to the life I was living before, or wasn't living. Today, I have a job that allows me to build and create, while empowering other women. With many of the women struggling with addiction themselves, I can now relate to them in a way I would have never been able to before. I can share my hope and strength, and in turn watch them grow. In the place of fair-weather friends are genuine people that only want the best for me. I am financially self-supporting and now know the joy of being responsible by paying my bills.

As wonderful as all of these other things are, it's my internal world that has changed the most. After 15 years struggling with depression, amazingly enough since entering recovery, any thoughts of suicide or self-harm are completely erased. Where I once lied strung out and angry while the sun came up, I now wake up meditating and grateful to be here for another day. Instead of judging others, I am now able to approach them with compassion. I am able to forgive, be patient, and take responsibility for my part in my relationships with others. That isn't to say that every day is perfect, that I don't struggle or don't have urges to give in; but they are manageable now. I have tools and support to aid in my thriving during these moments, and I am able to say "no" to the things or people that are unhealthy for me.

None of these things, internal or external could be possible without going through treatment. Accessing treatment has taught me how to heal myself and live a quality life; things that we often aren't taught growing up. Going to Tamarack gave me a chance to pause, reflect, release, and rebuild a life that I wanted to participate in.

What's next for you?

When I was at Tamarack I was fortunate enough to utilize my ability to express myself through creative means, drawing, photography, writing, etc. It gave me a platform to release in a cathartic way and process my experiences. Additionally, it gave me the opportunity to create discussion around the topic of addiction, in hopes that the stigma could be challenged. Soon after leaving I had the idea that all people brave enough to go through treatment should have access to these tools as well, allowing their voices to be heard. It was this thought that inspired me to develop a program that could give the same thing to the clients coming after me. With Tamarack's help I was able to secure the needed funding to run the program; and we are now able to launch it. My hope is that this is only the beginning of what we can do.

Having experienced so many obstacles in accessing treatment, as a woman, as lower class, as living with guilt and shame, I have been able to identify the gaps in services, and where there is need. It is my hope to continue developing programs and social initiatives that can bridge these gaps. In AA they say that "to keep it you have to give it away, and give it away freely, as it was given to you". It's said that the newcomer is the most important person and that by giving to them you will receive much more. This is probably the truest thing I have found in recovery. Though it's not quite a year since I graduated Tamarack, I have already had the opportunity to mentor addicts that have come after me. When I help others I am able to turn my struggle into one of meaning; and if I am able to do that for even one person, it will have been worth it.



Are you ready to take **your** first step toward recovery? [Connect with our Intake Specialist today.](#)

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