

# Remembering Larry Adams, homeless man turned homeless activist

By [Adrian Walker](#) Globe Columnist, Updated December 8, 2020, 4:40 p.m.





Larry Adams at a Patriots celebration. HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS (CUSTOM CREDIT)

Larry Adams was a man who wasn't always great at following rules.

As a resident years ago at the Barbara McInnis House — a short-term facility for homeless people struggling with illness — he had a reputation as one of the patients who would slip out, slip up, bend a few rules.

He wasn't difficult — just a man who followed his own agenda.

“I would talk to him about it, because he would sneak out of the building and head on down to the corner, and I would say, ‘Come on man, that’s disruptive,’ ” said his friend Barry Bock, now the CEO of Boston Health Care for the Homeless. “But he was always really articulate about talking about needs that didn’t fit neatly in the box.”

By the time he died on Oct. 29 at the age of 70, Adams had gone from a man living on the streets to a fierce advocate for the street people he viewed as his community. For years, he served as a board member of Health Care for the Homeless, collecting honors along the way for his volunteer work.

It's slightly misleading to say that Adams had traveled from homelessness to advocacy, though. His gift was to translate the experience of life on the street to dedicated and devoted doctors and caregivers who, as a rule, have never experienced the ills they are

committed to addressing. Adams did this, in part, by never completely leaving his former life behind.

He had moved to Boston decades ago, living in the Orchard Park housing development. Back then, he had a string of jobs — short-order cook, part-time DJ, long-haul trucker. Adams was a big, charismatic personality. He had a string of admirers. He also had a drug habit, which accelerated his decline into homelessness, according to his partner of many years, Pearl Rivers.

“He was a person people followed,” Rivers said. “He followed the wrong crowd, and then he had people who followed him. But he actually turned his life around. I was very proud of him.”

He turned it around by finding that he could be of service to others. When Bock and others decided that the McInnis House needed more input about its operations from the people served there, he became a charter member of the Consumer Advisory Board.

Even as his health deteriorated, he was known to never miss a meeting, even figuring out Zoom to make meetings this summer from his bed in a nursing home.

In 2013, the New England Patriots Foundation honored Adams as “Volunteer of the Year.” He got to go on the field before a game and mingle with players, and the Patriots donated \$10,000 to Health Care for the Homeless in his honor.

One of his insights was that simply getting housing was not necessarily enough to bring stability to homeless people — that the mental and psychological issues that render people’s lives unmanageable don’t evaporate because someone hands them the keys to an apartment.

“From a clinician standpoint or a case management standpoint, you think that’s the end of the journey,” Bock said. “When from Larry’s vantage point, that was the midpoint of the journey. You still need to be able to ask for help.”