

Stories about Overcoming an addiction

During the National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month dozens of people in recovery from alcohol and drug abuse celebrated their success and the success of the thousands of San Diegans who enter and complete treatment programs throughout the County each year.

"Addiction does not simply affect the individual addict. It affects children and families. Drug addiction ultimately impacts entire communities," Susan Bower, Deputy Director of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), told to more than 100 people in recovery who gathered at the County Administration Center to celebrate Recovery Happens 2009. "Drug addiction leads to financial struggles, marital problems, family violence and crime."

Forty-one-year-old Jeff Jeffery knows the negative impact addiction can have on an individual's life. He spent nearly half his life evading the law and moving from state to state so that he could continue using drugs.

"For 20 years, I was in and out of the justice system," said Jeffery who started drinking and smoking marijuana at age 12 and by age 16 was abusing "everything under the sun." After 27 years, his addiction finally caught up to him and the system he was running from ended up saving him.

"They (law enforcement) ended up being the solution. Thanks to them I was able to turn my life around," added Jeffery. He's been clean for four years, earned three college degrees and is now a substance abuse counselor.

HHSA funds a number of residential and non-residential treatment programs throughout the region that are helping people kick their addictions. However, there are millions of people across the nation and thousands right here in San Diego County who continue living a life of addiction.

In 2008, more than 13,000 people were admitted into County-funded treatment centers. Of those admitted, approximately 11,000 were adults and 2,000 were under the age of 18. Meth was the primary drug of choice for more than 40 percent of adults entering treatment, with marijuana being the primary drug of choice among adolescents.



*Susan Bower, Director,
HHSA's Alcohol and Drug Services*

"Overcoming an addiction takes perseverance and determination even when things seem to be going from bad to worse," added Bower.

"People can and do kick their addictions. Recovery is possible when willpower and determination are supported by a treatment program, family and friends."

Debbie Snyder, age 45, lived a life of addiction for 25 years. She had four children but could not raise them due to her continued drug use. However, when Child Protective Services removed her 13-

month old, she sought help for her addiction as a condition of regaining custody.

"Treatment provided a safe place and helped me to be able to build bonds," said Snyder, who started drinking and smoking marijuana when she was just 14 years old. She dropped out of high school, moved out of her parents' house, and soon was using "whatever was available."

Snyder has been clean for six years and reestablished her relationship with some of her older children.

"My treatment counselor challenged me to take a look at my life and helped me identify what were the real reasons for my addiction," added Snyder.

She is now a substance abuse counselor and hopes people trapped in the cycle of addiction can find the strength to seek help.

"I am here to tell people to give themselves a chance and let treatment be an option," said Snyder. "Anybody can change their life around. Give yourself a chance and you'll never feel that despair again."

People suffering from alcohol or drug addiction are encouraged to be strong and say: enough, I want to be happy, I want to live, and seek help to stop my addiction and stop hurting my family. Do the first step by calling the County's multilingual, 24-hour Access and Crisis Line at: (800) 479-3339 any time.