

Success Stories

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

– Marcel Proust

The Community Transition Unit
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept.

Message From The CTU

Time after time at the Los Angeles County Jail, we have seen that anyone can change. Everyone has hope. It does not matter if you have been drug addicted for 30 years, in and out of jail 50 times or have tried and failed to change over and over again. If you believe you will change and are motivated to do it, anything is possible.

The key ingredient to success is not a specific program, coming to or leaving jail, finding an apartment in a new neighborhood, or any superficial change in scenery. Instead, lasting change must start with a shift in attitudes, beliefs or motivation. It must come from the inside. As the author stated in the quote above, the person must see the same old world with "new eyes."

This key to success is backed up by our years of experience, common sense, as well as years of research. Others with lives just as tough, unlucky, violent or filled with drugs have said enough is enough. That is not me any more. You can do the same.

The following are some stories written by former inmates, in their own words. We hope they inspire you. They certainly have inspired us and re-energized us in our mission to give a helping hand to those who are ready to accept it.

– *The men and women of the Community Transition Unit,
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.*

Story 1

Dear Sir,

I spent many years doing criminal activity, mostly theft. I come from a large dysfunctional, alcoholic family and I have been doing my own thing pretty much since I was 12 or 13. My Father was a thief for as long as I've known him and I set out to be just like him since I was the most like him anyway. I started getting arrested in my mid 20's but it was always misdemeanor/summary probation stuff and I guess I just got a slap on the wrist and went on my way. Of course I started doing bigger crimes and by the fall of 2000 I was looking at my first prison term. I was shocked that I was going to prison, but off I went to Chowchilla, and by the next summer I was back home doing what I do best. I gave back my prison number in 13 months, but I had a very hard time trying to fit back into society with my felony convictions. I couldn't get a permanent job because of my background, so I worked temp jobs until the company I was working for wanted to do a background check and off I went to find a new temp job. Because I couldn't get stable, I relied upon my old skills to ease the financial tension, sometimes just to survive.

So, by the spring of 2004 I had done a county year, was on felony probation, and within a month found myself looking at another prison term. While I was going through the court process as a guest of LA County Jail, I started a process of my own. I knew it was time for me to change now or just give up and keep going to prison. I had lost everything, my home, my family, most of the good friends I ever had, and I had no self respect. I knew I couldn't get out of going back to the penitentiary, but I started to work on a plan for myself that would help me stay free and hopefully get back some of the things I had lost along the way, mostly my self respect.

That's when I saw the inmate box for the Community Transition Unit. For a few weeks I just tried to process what that meant and then it came to me. So I put in a request and a tall, soft spoken, gentleman named Officer F came and pulled me out of the pod to ask me what he could do for me. I told him I was going to prison, but when I came back, I really wanted to change my life, change everything. We talked and he told me about a parolee program he could help me get into and from there I would be able to utilize other community resources to start my life over, be stable, and do something good for myself. I asked him to sign me up! He told me to keep in touch with him while I was gone and let him know when I would be getting back in town. He came to see me one more time before I caught the chain to reassure me that he meant what he said and to make sure I had his address and telephone number to take with me.

Story 1 Cont.

I have to say I left LA with the hope of being able to start my life over and make the changes I knew I needed to make when I returned. I started working on the inside (my inside) while I was in prison. I was mindful of how I handled myself and how I spoke to people. I talked with a lot of women who also wanted what I did, a new life. I was one of the first group of women at Live Oak to get a chance to study for and take the test for the GED. I passed, at the age of 50. I never thought a high school diploma was important, but now I had one and I was very proud.

So a few months to the gate (Jan 2005) I wrote to Officer F and he wrote me right back. He assured me he was still there and to call him the moment I got back. And that's just what I did. I paroled in April 2005. I called Officer F and immediately he arranged for me to get into the Stairs Program at the Weingart. I have to admit I was a little skeptical, you know Skid Row and all! I was a Westside girl for heaven's sake. But I knew I had to start some where so I sucked it up and went inside. It wasn't bad at all. They provided me with my own room and three meals a day, and that was jut the beginning. I was in a place with others like me who I could relate to and be myself. A lot of people thought I was staff, it took a minute for everyone to believe I was on parole. But we shouldn't let appearances fool us, cause I was every bit just like them. I started going to meetings, life skills classes, relapse prevention, stuff I never knew existed and I certainly didn't think I needed.

But it was so good for me to finally start talking about my life, where I had been and what I had done. And from there I was able to put together a plan to start over. I joined Vocational Rehab, where I am still a client today. I got help from a lovely lady named Betty who worked at the Levy Center, putting together a wardrobe, some hygiene, etc. And through it all Officer F kept calling to check on me. If he didn't reach me he spoke to my mother in law.

The most important thing Officer F gave me was what I needed most, hope and stability, to be able to get it all together without feeling desperate. To have the luxury of time to work on myself. To not have to worry about the roof over my head or my next meal, or even paying bills, while I was putting together a life I could be proud of. The rest as they say is history. I started school in September of 2005 after being out just five months. I was still living at the Weingart, in fact I stayed there until the spring of 2006. I had decided I wanted to work with parolees, it just seemed to be natural for me. I think it was because I understood our special needs and I knew there were others out there who wanted to change everything and have a real life.

Story 1 Cont.

So today I am a straight A student, made the Dean's list the last three semesters, and I am planning on going to higher education to get a couple more degrees, bachelors and masters. I have the full support of my professors and counselors at school who believe I will one day be their colleague. And after doing an internship at Amistad, I went to the Director and told him I wanted to be involved in the mentor program.

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So now I am an apprentice working with the Eimago/Amity clients, trying to give back some of the great stuff that was given to me and open some of the doors that Officer F opened for me. I know I worked hard for what I have today, but it started with a tall cop who let me know he believed in me, that I could change my life if I wanted to, and I still thank God every day for him.

I have definitely gotten some real self respect, I feel good about myself and my life today. I am still working on getting my family back, but that is a process. I had to get some accomplishment under my belt before I try to mend that horrible tear. I don't want them to think I am coming with my hand out, or I need anything but their forgiveness and love. I trust that God will work that out for me the way he has allowed everything else to go my way. I know I am happier today than I have ever been in life, and I feel like I am finally doing something worthwhile, something I can be proud of.

Talk to you soon!!

Story 2

Hello, my name is Bradley Y and I'm a grateful recovering alcoholic and drug addict. I have been clean for some time now and after many years of constantly making very bad decisions I have found a way down a new path that has turned a hopeless man into one filled with intent and purpose beyond my wildest dreams. Today, I have an amazing life.

During my last (and final stay) at the county jail "north annex", something happened to me inside that I can only define as "spiritual". IN a matter of seconds the feeling that was taking control of my insides was diminishing all of my anxiety and fear and re-filling with joy and peace and most of all, contentment. For the first time in my life I felt like everything was going to be ok.

So with that, I immediately followed up by seeking direction and guidance. That's when I met Chaplain Mrotzek . She was put into my life I truly believe due to the patience and desire she has in her heart along with her compassion and sincerity towards God and helping lead men and woman like myself in the right direction.

So now I'm feeling this hope and so I started to feel confident enough in myself that I wanted a better life and that I could stay sober. So again I followed up with some action and was led Mrs. Davison. I sought help in the "rehab" area and within a day or so I was being seen by her. I expected a much more delayed response and I was extremely pleased with the rapid action.

Story 2 Cont.

Due to the nature of my case I was un-qualified for any type of alternative sentencing but she didn't stop helping me there. Mrs. Davison persisted with as much literature and contact numbers and so much more. But what caught my attention most about her wasn't so much the effort that was going in to me, rather the effort that was being put into every inmate that requested even the smallest service and pretty much all of the inmates were writing her for something.

Mr. Davison and Chaplain Mrotzek are very inspirational links in a place filled with despair and impending doom each with sincere qualities unmatched by any of the staff in the system. I have no doubt that without having been fortunate enough to be under the care and guidance by these two women that I would have been un-successful in gaining the knowledge that was a necessity to my life's results today. I had many fears inside and many doubts. Today I am grateful for a life worth living.

I am writing this to express my true and sincere gratitude for the aboved mention but also for who's ever in charge of keeping some hope alive for the inmates that really do want to change but don't know how to go about it by making sure that Mrs. Davison and Chaplain Mrotzek remain employed where their hearts believe they are supposed to be...

Thank you
Sincerley, Bradley Y

Story 3

My name is M. Jiran, I'm 30 years old and have been coming in and out of institutions since 1998. I've also been getting high since 1998. On Sept. 7 2007 I was arrested for G.T.A I was looking at 5 years.

Thanks to the Community Transition Unit's Officer S and my new look at life on wanting a program I was blessed. Officer S of the C.T.U. did all she could to get me here to Walden House for another chance at life and to love myself. I love it here and owe it all to Officer S and the C.T.U. The C.T.U. is a great thing for the women inside Lynwood that really want help.

Thanks Again,

M. Jiran

Story 4

My name is L. Ramello; I spent one year in county jail for a robbery that I committed trying to get money to support my 25 year drug habit.

I never thought I would say this, but I am grateful for being caught and sent to jail, even though this wasn't my first time in jail, it was the longest I have ever been in jail.

Now, I don't know why but this time it was very different from the rest, I think because this time God put the right people in my path. People like Officer L, Rev. Jim, Chaplain Gonzalo, and many others who were sincere in wanting to help me.

In the year that I spent in county jail I was lucky enough to get my GED, I also got a certificate from "Hacienda La Puente" in computer operation, but most of all I was lucky enough to have met Officer L.

I met Officer L going to class one day, he was standing in the hall way, I approached him and told him that upon my release I had no where to go, since I had lost everything to my drug addiction. He told me he would get back to me and that he would see what he could do, I thought "yea right!".

To my surprise he got back to me the very next day and told me about this place he had just gone to see called " The Eden Ministries", that help people just like me and that he thought it was the right place for me and gave me an application to fill out, I filled out the application gave it to him and waited.

A week later I received a letter from this man called Rev. James Cliffe, he was the director for the "The Eden Ministries", and told me he would come and visit me for an interview to see if I qualified for the program. Little that I knew, this man would change my life forever.

Story 4 Cont.

I met Rev. James Cliffe on a Wednesday afternoon, in what they called an attorney visit, I met with him for no longer than ten minutes, the words he told me I felt he knew me forever, and the love he had for me made me feel in a way I had never felt before. He told me that he would accept me in the program and not to worry he would be there in the court room the day of my release, again I said, "yeah right!".

On November 17, 2006, I was taken to court for my release, and when I walked into the court room, who did I see sitting in the front row with a smile on his face?, Rev. James Cliffe. He waited there from eight O'clock in the morning until five O'clock in the afternoon when they finally released me.

I walked out of that building wearing a white jump suit and nothing to live for, Rev. Jim was waiting for me, we got in his truck, he took me to eat tacos, bought me some clothes and from that day on my life has changed forever.

It's almost one year since that day. Today I have a great job that I love, I have a relationship with my kids, and I am able to help them too, but most of all I am clean and sober and have no desire to use or drink thanks to the boundaries that this program has put in my life, and most important I have God in my life today.

I am convinced that everything happens for a reason in this life, that's why I know that Officer L was standing the that hall way so I could experience everything that I am experiencing right now.

I am living a life that I never knew was possible, I am not saying that everything is perfect, because it's not, but now I can deal with anything that comes my way because I know God is with me and he will help me thru it.

I have many people to thank for my recovery today but most of all Officer L and Rev. James Cliffe.

■ Your story here.....