



REWRITING HIS STORY

How Robert Became a Force for Healing

Robert Brooks knows he's exactly where he's meant to be, doing the work he was born to do. As the Dual Disorder Coordinator for Project Free, a substance use treatment program, he counsels individuals and supports them on their path to recovery. He also leads a men's group at the Guidance Clinic, which provides long- and short-term outpatient counseling services. And, he teaches Life Skills classes to middle school students at the Grant School through Prevention Plus, a substance abuse prevention program for elementary and middle school students.

"It's true what they say," he laughs. "If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. I enjoy this work so much, I forget I even have vacation time."

THE NEXT CHAPTER IN ROBERT'S STORY

Last year, Robert enrolled in a new master's program in clinical mental health counseling at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ). As a proud member of the inaugural cohort, he's excited to gain the tools and knowledge that will make him an even stronger counselor. The program, designed for paraprofessionals serving underrepresented communities, aims to help address New Jersey's shortage of mental health professionals.

"We are incredibly grateful to count Robert Brooks as a member of our Clinical Mental Health Counseling program," said Dr. Sandy Gibson, Chair of the Department of Online Counselor Education at TCNJ. "He brings a profound level of character and life experience that enriches the entire department."

"Inside the classroom," Dr. Gibson continued, "Robert is a fearless learner. He steps confidently into the counselor role during our role play activities and shares personal stories that bring our discussions to life. But what we appreciate most is his spirit of service. He lifts up his classmates, helps them find their confidence, and leads the cohort with genuine support and kindness. His decision to become a Licensed Professional Counselor is a gift to the future community he will serve."

Lisa Merritt, Service Area Director for Integrated Behavioral Health Services, echoed that sentiment. "Robert is a powerful advocate and role model. His lived experience, combined with his professional training, makes him uniquely qualified to support clients facing both behavioral health and substance use disorders. Robert leads with empathy and kindness. He knows firsthand what people are dealing with."

Pictured: Once the coursework is completed in the TCNJ master's program, Robert will be eligible to become a licensed professional counselor in New Jersey.