

REWRITING HIS STORY

How Robert Became a Force for Healing

THE PATH WAS NOT ALWAYS EASY

Robert's early life was marked by extreme poverty and abuse. As a teenager, he sold drugs to survive and things worsened when he began using himself. As an adult, he fell into a cycle of trouble, incarceration, release and more trouble.

In his early fifties, Robert was incarcerated again. During that sentence, he began therapy and was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. The diagnosis was something of a revelation for Robert. It helped him understand the patterns that had shaped his life.

In 2017, shortly after his release, Robert joined Catholic Charities' Partial Care Program, which provides intensive outpatient services including addiction treatment and mental health counseling. He devoted himself fully to recovery.

"I set four goals when I started Partial Care," he said. "I wanted to publish my book, 'Psychology of a Thug: Demystify,' move into a place of my own, get a car and go back to school." Within nine months, he had accomplished all four. That's when his counselors told him he was ready to graduate.

A NEW ROLE HELPING OTHERS

Even though he was already running peer groups and supporting others in their recovery, Robert didn't feel ready to leave. "I didn't want to graduate," he admitted. But his counselors insisted. When he finally agreed, his counselor immediately encouraged him to apply for a part-time mental health peer advocate position with the Early Intervention Support Services (EISS) program, which provides screening and counseling in a comfortable outpatient setting. "She had plans for me," he said.

Robert joined Catholic Charities in 2018 while also attending Camden County Community College full time. In 2021, he earned his associate's degree in Addictions Counseling and became a Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor. Recovery brought a new rhythm to his life: set goals, achieve them, set new ones.



▲ Robert has always been generous sharing about his journey. In 2023, he addressed a meeting of the SAMHSA GAINS Center's Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) Mapping Strategic Planning Exercise for Mercer County and shared valuable insights.

He continued his education at Rowan University, earning his bachelor's degree in Human Services Direct Care in 2024. Now, the master's program at TCNJ is the next step. He's building on the skills he first developed at EISS.

"Right now, I'm taking a class in Multicultural Counseling and thinking back to some of the people I served at EISS during COVID," Robert said. "If I had this knowledge then, my responses would have been so different."

When he completes the program, Robert will be eligible to take the exam to become a Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about about the Partial Care program, call 609-267-9339.

To learn more about Project Free, call 609-396-4557.

To explore all programs offered by our Integrated Behavioral Health Services team, visit www.CatholicCharitiesTrenton.org.