

Person in Recovery, the Interview

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For Brian Taylor (see Figure 1), the sixth time's the charm. He had visited a withdrawal management center in Kent County for its five-day detox program a half a dozen times last year in his attempt to get clean from heroin.

Figure 1. Brian Taylor



“I never came in for the right reasons,” Taylor said of his first five visits. “You know, I came in to stay on probation, or keep my kids, or whatever the problem was at that time. I was trying to put a Band-Aid on it. I never really got down to my core problems.”

Taylor only came to the detox center after an outreach effort between the Department of Family Services and Connections Community Support Programs Director of Nursing Debbie Pringle. While they managed to get Taylor’s fiancé and kids into a women and children’s sober living home, Taylor couldn’t be located until Pringle drove through the streets of Seaford to find him. In February of 2016, Pringle finally got Taylor into her agency’s detox program.

When Taylor entered the Connections Withdrawal Management Center for the sixth time that December, he wasn’t sure he would stay clean, but he was tired of the lifestyle he had been living for the last 18 years.

“I was sitting here, just thinking about all the chaos I was in,” Taylor said. “[The Department of Family Services] told me I was going to come in here and do the detox or I wasn’t going to see my kids, so that was my initiating factor in even coming here. But then I got in here and I started to take an honest look, asking myself, ‘What are you doing?’”

That's when he finally began to use the center's resources to the fullest by connecting with peers, individuals in recovery from addiction who are hired to share their advice with new clients. Their stories inspired Taylor and showed him that a fulfilling life during recovery is possible.

The 32-year-old had been using since he was 13, starting with alcohol and marijuana before progressing into cocaine, then Percocet and OxyContin, and eventually heroin. Leading up to his final time at the detox center, Brian said he was using more than 50 bags of heroin a day.

Now he has seven and a half months clean, and he hasn't looked back. After that final five-day stint at the Withdrawal Management Center in Harrington, he was referred to a residential treatment facility run by the Gateway Foundation. Then, he moved into a Connections sober living house, where he could attend a 30-day intensive outpatient treatment program at the Withdrawal Management Center.

After he successfully completed the program, Connections hired Taylor as a live-in peer at the sober living home — but he continued to visit the Withdrawal Management Center to volunteer his time there, sharing his story and eventually running group meetings for new clients.

"I got a real attachment to this place because this is where I started my journey," he said.

When he had five months clean, Taylor was hired as a peer at the center. Here, Taylor does everything from working security detail to running small groups. His main goal as a peer is to provide guidance to newcomers to the program.

Carolyn Faust started as a peer mentor at the same clinic. Now an outpatient counselor, she said Brian and other peers serve as positive examples for clients coming to the clinic to take their first step in the recovery process.

"Learning of lived experience provides [our clients] hope," Faust said. "And we can tell them literally what we individually did that worked, so we can provide them insights into success that aren't in a book."

Taylor has had a similar impact on newcomers at his sober living home, said Andrew Schmidt, house manager.

According to Schmidt, these homes allow people in recovery to live with each other and help put their lives back together, from attending therapy and 12-step meetings to finding a job. Because residents stay anywhere from eight months to a year, people just entering the house benefit from hearing about the accomplishments of those who came before them.

"Brian's success is amazing," Schmidt said. "He's come a long way in his eight months, and now there are people following in his footsteps."

Taylor's life has never been better, and he's focused on the things that matter to him. He wants to go back to school to become a certified drug and alcohol counselor to further help others who are in the same position he was once in.

"I feel like I can reach a lot of people the way people reached me," he said. "I almost feel obligated to give back."

At home, Taylor's recovery has helped his relationships with his fiancé, 6-year-old daughter, 4-year-old son, and two step-daughters.

“I can be a father,” he said. “I can be a son. I can be a fiancé. I can be a lot of things I couldn’t be before because I was locked in that mentality.”

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