Two Dayton Men Win Battle against Addiction

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Two Dayton men turned their lives around by winning their battle against addiction. One was a high school dropout and one was an inmate: Gary Gonnella and William Roberts II fought hard against their addiction and managed to maintain their sobriety afterward.

Gonnella weighed 130 pounds the first time he entered treatment for drug and alcohol addiction. ?My sister likes to tell me that my liver weighed more than I did. It was a very touch-and-go kind of situation,? he said.

That was in 1981. Gonnella now serves as an outreach coordinator for Public Health Dayton and Montgomery County. He has been in recovery for 24 years, and now he goes into the community to find those in need of intervention for their own addictions. He now helps these addicted individuals get connected with the right treatment.

Gonnella has even taken his recovery a step further. From former high school dropout to a Master?s degree?Gonnella has worked very hard to turn his life around. ?I?ve gone from a high school dropout, so now I have my Master?s degree,? he said. ?I?ve become a part of my family. I?ve become part of my community.?

Gonnella is often involved with local police departments and courts through his job, ?and not from the side where they?re putting me in jail.?

His experience shows that people struggling with substance use disorder now can reintegrate themselves into society?even if it feels overwhelming and impossible right now. ?I have just found a way to be a part of life now and learn how to live instead of just survive,? he said.

It wasn?t always easy. Gonnella acknowledged that it was a long journey that had a lot of starts and stops. He definitely struggled before reaching his goals?an experience that many recovering individuals will certainly go through.

?I went through a few crying spells that I thought I was going insane because I didn?t know what was going on and it was explained, ?Well, your emotions are coming out. One no longer can cover them up with a shot or with a snort.??

This first treatment attempt did not work for Gonnella. But then he maintained recovery for nine years following the second attempt at treatment in 1983. Click the link to see Omaha's top rehab placement programs.

?I decided I was OK and it would be OK to take a drink,? he said. But after that, it would take two more years before he got back into treatment and recovery. Now he hasn?t used drugs or had a drink since 1995.

?This is a very aggressive and complicated illness. It sometimes takes several tries to get a treatment plan that works. I don?t think my recovery is a miracle. I think my recovery is a matter of following directions and doing the laid out treatment plan.?

William Roberts II is 29 years in recovery from drug addiction. He serves as a supervisor of addiction services at Public Health, as well as a pastor of Bethel AME Church in Middletown. Roberts, like Gonnella, has struggled with substance abuse in the past. Thirty years ago, he was coming out of the Montgomery County Jail for drug-related offenses. He says that his offenses probably wouldn?t land a person in jail today.

Roberts was able to get treatment for his addiction but also had a felony on his record for years. ?A lot of people were incarcerated and got a lot of strikes,? he said. ?I?m glad that at some point the community became educated and began to look at addiction like the disease that it is.?

Both of these men have seen the change in how drug addiction is handled within the community. Over the years, addiction treatment has shifted for the better. ?It is amazing the difference of how we look at recovery today as opposed to how we looked at it 30 years ago,? Roberts said.

These two men only prove that addicted individuals should not lose hope when it comes to recovery?even if it takes them a few tries. It is possible to become sober again, maintain this sobriety, and even help others who are going through the same struggles.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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